



Chapter Two
The Aleph of Los Angeles:
Arcangel and Magical/Real Thirdspace

Now, it was Monday, and he awoke. He awoke to all the metaphors that come from the land. He had followed a path across the continent that was crooked, but always heading north. Now he was in Mazatlán. He could hear the waves lapping at the edges of the sand, feel the already heating breezes flowing from the sea of Cortés.

He had had a dream. And when he awoke he could still see the dream like a miniature Aleph reflected from his mind to an indefinable point in his visual horizon.

Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (51)

I. Literary Review

The current criticism of *Tropic of Orange* is diverse, ranging from issues concerning globalization, border-crossing, gender, environmental justice, and temporal/spatial ruptures. In her article, “The Magical Imagination of the Apocalyptic City of Angel: Los Angeles, Immigration, and Border-Crossing in *Tropic of Orange*,” Shi-wen Liao pinpoints that Arcangel, as a carrier who brings the orange from South America to the North, is in accord with the role of archangel in Christianity, who is the Messenger of God. Besides, Arcangel’s migration dramatically drags the Tropic of Cancer north across the Mexican-U.S. border and thus creates a geographical metamorphosis. By doing so, Yamashita destabilizes the traditional boundaries of nation, as well as cartography, and results in a transformation of

spatial boundaries and national identities. Arcangel, in Liao's words, is a spatial intermediary, a messenger who travels in space and deconstructs national boundaries (2004: 56-76). Categorizing Yamashita in the area of Asian American literature, Hsiao-ching Li focuses on the relation of Rafeala and the trope of mother as motherland in her paper, "Imaging the Mother/Motherland: Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*." Li aims to explore the politics of maternity narratives in relation to nationalism in an international arena. Her discussion of Arcangel dwells on the scene of the wrestling match between El Gran Mojado and SUPERNAFTA. Li considers El Gran Mojado, the wrestler that Arcangel transforms into, to be the incarnation of Mesoamerican nativism, and the opponent, SUPERNAFTA (the personification of the economical treaty of NAFTA), is an epitome of transnational capitalism. Li interprets the result of the fight as an implication that the opposition or binary rhetoric will fall into a deadlock if it becomes an either-or dilemma. Li indicates that the solution to the opposition between nativism and transnationalism is the transethnic affiliation embodied in the final reunion of Bobby, Rafeala, and Sol (2004: 149-67). In "Performing Tricksters: Karen Tei Yamashita and Guillermo Gomez-Peña," Alvina E. Quintana points out the connection between *Tropic of Orange* and Guillermo Gomez-Peña's theatrical production of *Border Brujo*. First, both authors are regarded as being multicultural because of the content and approach of their writings. Second, the trickster tradition is drawn upon in both works as a means to resist and challenge dominant social conventions and to demonstrate cultural diversity. Quintana assumes that Yamashita characterizes Arcangel under the disguise of a conjurer, who is more than a literary persona, but also as a cultural critic and performer. He embodies the voice of the author and speaks up her commentary concerning the controversial issues of border and economy that have haunted Mexico and the U.S. for a long time (2002: 217-225).

Different from the aforementioned studies, my reading will focus on the intersection of

Arcangel and Soja's concept of Thirdspace through the lens of magical realism. In the following, I will examine how the practice of magical realism is inscribed in Arcangel's Aleph vision and how the magical realistic identity will achieve a form of Thirdspace, a real-and-imagined space of justice and multiplicity. To be more specific, I argue that the representations of spaces in Arcangel's Aleph vision and the spaces enclosed in his transformative migration are those of magical realism which enables a creation of a Thirdspace and metamorphosis.

II. Arcangel's Aleph Vision and Borges's "The Aleph"

Among the seven characters in this novel, Arcangel is the only mythic and "unreal" figure, existing in mythical spaces of metamorphosis. The narrative provides no background of the old man: "no one knew where he came from, /or how long he had lived, /how many years, /decades, /and yet he seemed a child,/yet not such a child to be without season/nor such an old man to be without reason" (1997, 46). Nevertheless, his first appearance in Mazatlán suggests his close connection with Mexico. According to Rafaela Perez-Torres, Mazatlán is a metonymy of Aztlán: "Aztlán names the Mexico homeland- - - the land of seven caves (Chiomostoc), the place of the Twisted Hill (Colhuacan), the place of whiteness (Aztlán)--from which the Mexican [people] migrated south toward the central plateau in A.D. 820" (1995: 229). Luis Leál, too, points out that it is a representative of men

and women's origins and, as a myth, it "symbolizes the existence of a paradisiacal region where injustice, evil, sickness, old age, poverty, and misery do not exist" (1981: 17). Here, Mazatlán, as the starting-point of Arcangel's pilgrimage, defines Arcangel to be the spirit of Mexican nativism with a postcolonial prospect.

Arcangel's Aleph vision is first mentioned in the novel at this juncture: "[Arcangel] awoke to all the metaphors, symbols that come from the land of Mexico" (Yamashita 1996: 51). As aforementioned, "the miniature Aleph," the ball-like object, also appears in Borges's short story named "The Aleph" (1971), in which Borges accentuates Aleph bonding with space, describing it as a concentration of all spaces.⁴

III. Borges's "Aleph" as Thirdspace

In *Postmodern Geographies*, Soja uses Borges' evocation of the Aleph as the place "where all places" merge to provoke a new way of perceiving and understanding the city of Los Angeles. Particularly in the chapter named "Taking Los Angeles Apart," Soja elaborates,

it is an inquisitive reading of a decidedly postmodern landscape [of Los Angeles's urban spaces], a search for revealing 'other spaces' and hidden geographical texts. The essay feeds from Jorge Luis Borges's brilliant

⁴ For the summary of Borges's "The Aleph," please refer to Chapter One, pp. 9-10.

sighting/siting of 'The Aleph'--the only place on earth where all places are, a limitless space of simultaneity and paradox, impossible to describe in less than extraordinary language. (*Postmodern Geography*, 1989:2)

The connection between Soja's proposition of Thirdspace and the Aleph is made more explicitly in *Thirdspace*. In the section entitled "Envisioning Thirdspace through 'The Aleph,'" Soja takes "The Aleph" as "an allegory on the infinite complexities of space and time" (1996, 56), and identifies the shared scope of spatial knowledge as radical openness in "The Aleph" with Lefebvre's conceptualization of the production of space. Soja, in the opening of the chapter, "The Trialectics of Spatiality," asserts the correlation between his concept of Thirdspace with Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality discussed in *The Production of Space*: "In this chapter, I purposefully reappropriate *The Production of Space* to pull from its expansive depths a clear understanding of the meaning and critical scope of what I have chosen to define as Thirdspace" (1996: 53). Then, in Soja's exploration of Lefebvre's trialectics of spatiality, he argues that both the concept of Thirdspace and Lefebvre's notion of social space (or, representational space) share an encompassing spatial logic, for both "are comprised of all three spatialities--perceived, conceived, and lived--with no one inherited privileged *a priori* " (1996: 68). Besides, it's important to point out that both notions are political choices: "they give special attention and particular contemporary relevance to the spaces of representation, to lived space as a strategic location from which to encompass,

understand, and potentially transform all spaces simultaneously” (1996: 68). Based on the inscribed encompassing, all-inclusive simultaneities, Soja affirms that Lefebvre’s notion of lived social space is a limitless Aleph, for it is:

the space of all inclusive simultaneities, peril as well as possibilities: the space of radical openness, the space of social struggle. . . . filled with politics and ideology, with the real and the imagined intertwined, and with capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and other material spatial practices that concretizes the social relations of production , reproduction, exploitation, domination, and subjection. (1996: 68)

Soja asserts that the radical openness, “all-inclusive simultaneity” of Thirdspace is denoted and reinforced through an “unimaginable universe” (Borges, 1971: 14) in the Aleph:

The space where all places are, capable of being seen from every angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an “unimaginable universe,” or as Lefebvre would put it, “the most general of products.” (1996: 56)

Soja’s definition of Thirdspace presents “the multifaceted inclusiveness and simultaneities of lived social space” (1996: 58), which reminds us of what Borges writes about the “Aleph” and resonates with the dizzy array of a multiplicity of spaces in the Aleph, as Borges states in

his short story:

What eternity is to time, the Aleph is to space. In eternity, all time- past, present, and future- coexists simultaneously. In the Aleph, the sum total of the spatial universe is to be found in a tiny shining sphere barely over an inch across. (1971: 189)

I would like to argue that the juxtaposition of infinite spaces, “the sum total of the spatial universe” (Borges, 1971: 189) in the Aleph, could be likened to Soja’s Thirdspace, the place “where all places are” (Soja, 1996: 56), characterized by openness and simultaneity of spaces and times. As Soja states:

Everything comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconsciousness, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.

(Soja, 1996: 56)

Meanwhile, through such a radically open perspective that Thirdspace is operated in, Soja asserts the critical strategy of “Thirthing-as-Othering,” which illustrates the political intention of deconstructing binary opposition and restructuring alternatives from the margin:

ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two narratives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices. In this critical thirthing, the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process

of *restructuring* that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives. (1996: 2; *emphasis mine*)

The foregoing discussion introduces Soja's exploration of Borges's "The Aleph" as Thirdspace, which is defined as an all-inclusive space with radical openness and simultaneity that contributes to unlimited possibilities. Based on Soja's envisioning of Thirdspace through "The Aleph," I propose that Arcangel's Aleph vision in the novel serves as a site of Thirdspace due to its clairvoyant perspectives that exhibit coexisting, simultaneous times and spaces. Three scenes about Arcangel's Aleph vision will be discussed in the following section.

IV. Arcangel's Aleph Vision as Thirdspace

Both Borges's Aleph and Arcangel's Aleph visions are characterized by the integration of openness, infinitude, and simultaneous spaces imbedded in them. In the novel, Arcangel's Aleph vision deals particularly with historical narratives concerning the exploitation of labor in the so-called "Third World" countries and the quandary of immigrant labor across the border in a co-present, simultaneously condensed time and place. In his northbound journey, Arcangel comes upon a Mexican bricklayer, Rodriguez, contemplating upon the life of labor. In his mind emerges an Aleph vision, in which he sees a history of the uneven economical development between the North and the South and the accompanying labor exploitation that spans the course of five hundred years:

He could see *Haitian farmers burning and slashing cane, workers Stirring . . . a molasses into white gold. Guatemalans loading trucks with crates of bananas and corn. Indians . . . Venezuelan and Mexican drivers filling their trucks with gasoline, their cargos of crates shipped by train, by ship, and by air and sent away , far away . . . All of them crowded into his memory in a single moment.* (Yamashita, 1997: 145; *emphasis mine*)

Eduardo Galeano's⁵ explanation of the dehumanization of labor in South America behind the seeming flourishing modern industry reinforces the reality revealed by Arcangel's simultaneous Aleph vision:

This industry was like an airplane. It landed and left with everything--raw materials, exotic culture, and human brains--everything.

Everybody's labor got occupied in the industry of draining their homeland of its natural wealth. In exchange they got progress, technology, loans, and loaded guns. (Yamashita, 1997: 146)

Arcangel's another Aleph vision happens when he and Sol, along with the orange in the suitcase, are crossing the Mexican-U.S. border. What appears in this Aleph vision is the 2000 mile long border that has been increasingly militarized by the U.S. government to prevent illegal and undocumented immigrants, who thus fortify the state's safety. They claim:

Arcangel...looked out across the northern horizon. He could see

⁵ Eduardo Galeano is a native of Uruguay who was forced into exile under the country's military regime during the 1970s. He is the author of *Open Veins*. The book was originally published in Mexico in 1971, employed captivating, elegiac prose to chronicle five centuries of plunder and imperialism in Latin America. He claims in the book that Latin America had been systematically marginalized by the world economy since the colonial period. Here, in the novel, Rodriguez's conversation with Arcangel reveals the inhuman conditions and racial inequalities that discloses the mirage of the New Economy.

all 2,000 miles of the frontier stretched across from Tijuana on the Pacific, its straight edge cutting through the Rio Colorado. . . . It waited with seismic sensors and thermal imaging, with la pinche migra . . . with coyotes, pateros, cholos, steel structures, barbed wire, infrared binoculars, INS detention centers, border patrols, rape, robbery, and death It waited with its great history of migrations back and forth--in recent history, the deportation of 400,000 Mexican citizens in 1932, coaxing back of 2.2 million braceros in 1942 only to exile the same 2.2 million wetbacks in 1953. (Yamashita, 1997: 198)

Arcangel's Aleph vision mirrors the extreme supervision of U.S.-Mexican border, which is practiced as to prevent undocumented immigrants and laborers. However, the trend of moving North does not stop, and tragedy such as rape, robbery, and death keeps happening along the border. What is sarcastic here is the U.S.'s indifferent and selfish attitude towards Mexican immigrants and laborers. After the deportation of Mexican citizens in 1932, the U.S., due to its need of cheap labor forces in the 40s, beguiled 2.2 million Mexican laborers to move north. Nevertheless these "braceros"⁶ became illegal wetbacks of the 50s, and the U.S. government exiled them. Arcangel's Aleph vision reflects not only the U.S.'s exploitation of Mexican labor, but presents the absurdity of the U.S.'s egoistic dealing with Mexican immigrant laborers.

Like the Aleph in Borges's short story, Arcangel's Aleph vision, in its initial presence,

² According to Random House, the word entered the written English language in 1915-20 from Spanish, literally meaning one who swings his arms, i.e., a laborer. Its English meaning, according to the dictionary, is a Mexican laborer admitted legally into the U.S. for a short period to perform seasonal, usu. agricultural,

has been an emblem, a metaphor of the land, that of the continents of the Americas, showing all the spaces inscribed in the Americas. Therefore, what is reflected from Arcangel's Aleph vision is a panoramic view of North America. With its simultaneous presentation of and annihilation of time sequence and region compartment, Arcangel's Aleph vision builds a Thirdspace which provides not a linear or chronological, but a broader, more open, and more panoramic view of history. The clairvoyance and inclusiveness of Arcangel's Aleph vision which defies and transcends boundaries of time-space binary oppositions, presenting simultaneous, hybrid spaces of the real and the imagined, of opposition and conflict, is in accord with what Rawdon Wilson claims as the metamorphic fictional space, with its nature of hybridity as derived from magical realism (1995: 209-33).

Magical realism is embedded in the role of Arcangel's Aleph vision. It can be taken as the implementation of magical realism since its imbricated Thirdspace, where the real and the imagined merge, is identical to the metamorphic fictional space in magical realism. When discussing the fictional, textual space in the works of magical realism, Rawdon Wilson asserts in "The Metamorphoses of Fictional Space: Magical Realism" that the concept of a fictional world may be roughly subdivided into three categories:

- (1) fictional worlds in which all the deictics and descriptions operate as if they were being used in the extratextual world and which, thus, constantly beg comparison to that world;
- (2) fictional world in which all indications

of distance, capacity, or arrangement are gendered in accordance with self-contained assumptions, gamelike rules that are experienced as axioms; (3) fictional worlds in which the indications of local place are sometimes those of the extratextual world but at other times are those of another place, very different in its assumptions ... (Wilson, 1995: 217)

Wilson's categorization of fictional space, which he divides into space of the realistic, space of the fantastic, and space of magical realistic, is similar to Soja's distinction of the spatial logic in Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace. Wilson's observation of the fictional space in magical realism is closely related to Soja's conceptualization of Thirdspace. In the later part of Wilson's article, the correlation between the spaces in magical realism and those in Thirdspace is made more clear when he remarks that a third kind of space unfolds in the magical realist narrative (1995: 220). Wilson characterizes it as a "hybrid" space where opposite and conflicting properties coexist, and due to its nature of "hybridity," "eruptions occur normally and sudden folds crease the seemingly predictable, the illusive extratextual, surface" (1995: 220). The hybrid nature featuring the space in magical realist texts, I argue, conforms to the hybridity inscribed in Thirdspace. Soja explains that Thirdspace is an epistemological and theoretical critique that unsettles, disrupts, and disorders difference, centered identities, and of all forms of binary categorizations. More than accepting just the sum or combination of dualism, Thirdspace seeks instead a multiplicitous "alterity," a

transgressive “third way” (1996: 107). Thirdspace is such critical spatial thinking, Soja asserts, for it seeks to undermine “its own authority by a form of textual and political practice that privileges uncertainties, rejects authoritative and paradigmatic structures that suggest permanence or inviolability, invites contestation, and thereby keeps open the spatial debate to new and different possibilities” (1996: 107). Adapting Guillian Rose’s appreciation of the space of radical openness in bell hook’s feminism as the evolving conceptualization of Thirdspace, Soja, again, reinforces the hybridity inscribed in the Thirdspace:

It is a geography structured by the dynamic tension between such poles, and it is also a multinational geography structured by the simultaneous contradictory diversity of social relations. It is a geography which is as multiple and contradictory and different as the subjectivity imaging it...[it is] a different kind of *space through which difference is tolerated rather than erased*.

(1933: 155; *emphasis mine*)

Another magical realism implement in *Tropic of Orange* that attributes to the practice of Thirdspace is the metamorphic characteristics in the novel, such as the “mobile” Tropic of Cancer and Arcangel’s identity as a trickster and a shape-shifter. These metamorphic spaces can be categorized as instrument of magical realism for their combination of the real-and-imagined, defamiliarising our understandings and perceptions of “reality.” For instance, the northbound Tropic of Cancer is not a fixed geographical demarcation, but transformed with mobility. The landscape also changes with movement. Arcangel, as a trickster, transforms himself into multiple roles throughout the novel. That is to say, the

fictional space as constructed in magical realism is one that is mobile, ever changing, and always on the process of metamorphosis. The metamorphic space in magical realism resonates with the traits of hybridity, dynamics, and transformation inscribed in the Sojan Thirdspace. It is important to point out that both magical realist spaces and Sojan Thirdspace are characterized by metamorphosis. In other words, with the spatial presumptions in magical realism, metamorphic spaces as expressed in the mobile Tropic of Cancer and in the trickster figure of Arcangel. I argue that *Tropic of Orange* could be conceptualized as a novel constructed in magical/realist Thirdspace.

Wilson pinpoints magical realism's principal concern is the space in the text, or "fictional space." Space in magical realism exhibits copresence, duality, and mutual tolerance for two distinct geometries have been inscribed onto the same space, and the boundaries registered in these geometries fold and refold like quicksilver can superimpose themselves upon one another (Wilson, 1995: 210). The spatial model that magical realist texts suggest is one that two different geometries and world encounter, clash, and finally coexist. With its double space, dual worldhood, and plural world interpretation, the fictional spaces in magical realist texts express the all-inclusive simultaneity of the real and the imagined, the concrete and the abstract, the material and the metaphorical.

V. The Tropic of Orange as Thirdspace

In *Tropic of Orange*, with the northward Tropic of Cancer and its concomitant Mexican history and geographical expansion, the urban spaces of L.A. gradually shrinks and contracts: "Someone put [Los Angeles] in the washer/dryer. Shrunk 50% in places. Then ironed it out 200% in others" (Yamashita, 1997: 260). The mobility of Tropic of Cancer defies border with a subversive intention, calling for a transcending thought of dialectics as claimed by Thirdspace. The mobility that Yamashita exerts on the Tropic of Cancer is a treatment of

magical realism. The coexistence of worlds--past and present--Mexico and U.S. in the city of Los Angeles evoked by the northbound Tropic of Cancer is in accord with Zamora and Faris's observation of the hybridism in magical realism. The hybrid of magical realism, according to Zamora and Faris, is constituted in such a process: "This hybridism occurs within the folding of worlds when one, bearing its own distinct laws, *erupts* into the other. At such moments it seems as if two systems of possibility have enfolded each other: two kinds of cause and effect, two kinds of organism, two kinds of consequence, and two kinds of space." To conclude, the fictional space and hybrid constructions in magical realism is attained by the dual inscription of alternative geometries (qtd. Wilson, 1995: 225).

Thus, the fluidity of Tropic of Cancer, which inscribes its magical realism feature, is a commonality that the spatial logics shared by Thirdspace and magical realism. That is, by transgressing or even nullifying the solidity of border and its accompanying binary opposition, Yamashita, with the mobile Tropic of Orange, signifies more than the return of Los Angeles to Mexico, a point that is claimed in Lee's reading. More significantly, with the simultaneity of cultures and worlds brought together by the mobile Tropic of Cancer, the city of L.A. is accented with a space of multicultural interactions. The representation of the city is, not *monologic* any more, but filled with *dialogues*, *polyphony*, and *possibilities*. The city of L.A., in Yamashita's alternative cartography becomes an Aleph, which is an exemplary of "the infinite complexities of space and time" (Soja, 1996: 56), where everything merges.

VI. Trickstering of Arcangel as Thirdspace

Alvina E. Quintana investigates the intimate relationship between Gomez-Pena's *Border Brujo* and Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange*, and proposes a trickster reading of Arcangel (2002: 217-225). Taking Arcangel's trait of trickstering for instance, Quintana asserts that both writers resist and challenge social conventions by drawing upon the trickster tradition.

Characterizing the inequality and political struggle on the U.S.-Mexican border, they create an arena, an in-between geographical space for tricksters to conjure up alternative cartographies. Arcangel's role as a trickster, in Quintana's reading, is defined as a conjurer, who is not simply a literary character, but also a cultural critic, performing artist, and the voice of the creative author (2002: 218).

Extending from Quintana's trickster reading of Arcangel, I argue that by way of magical performances and a variety of shape-shifting, Arcangle's role of trickster in the novel illustrates a metamorphic space featured by in-betweenness, liminality, and border-crossing. The metamorphic spaces as shown in the character of Arcangel, with its attribute of intermediation resonates with Soja's claim of radical openness and its promising possibilities and hybridity in the concept of Thirdspace. The definition of trickster offered in Quintana's essay reveals the inscribed metamorphic space in Arcangel engendered by his faculty of in-betweenness: "Tricksters--the ubiquitous shape-shifters who dwell on borders, at crossroads, and between worlds--are the world's oldest and newest creations" (Quintana, 2002: 218). Based on this definition of trickster, Arcangel's in-betweenness, such as his god-like character in human body, his border-crossing journey from Mexico to the U.S. and the ability as a "ubiquitous shape-shifter" qualifies his bodyspace to be a field of an endless process of metamorphosis and exhibits the radical openness that primarily clarifies Thirdspace from other spaces. In the following, I will explore how Arcangel's metamorphic spaces resonate with the notion of Thirdspace by examining Arcangel's in-between borderedness, multiplicity, and hybridity presented in his metamorphic role play.

a. Arcangel's Border-Identity

The thing called the New World Border waited for him [Arcangel] with the anticipation of five centuries. Admittedly, a strange one, but conquistador

of the North he was. Ah, he [Arcangel] thought, the North of my dreams. South of his dreams, it had been a long journey. He could remember everything. Here was a mere moment of passage. As he approached, he could hear the chant of the border over and over again: *Catch'em and throw'em back. Catch'em and throw'em back. Catch'em and throwesm back.* It was the beginning of the North of his dream, but they questioned him anyway. They held the border to his throat like a great knife.

(Yamashita, 1996: 198)

The scene depicts the moment when Arcangel arrives at the U.S.-Mexican border. The U.S.-Mexican border is called the New World Border, and Arcangel turns out into a conquistador of the North continent. Here, Arcangel is described as the “conquistador,” a term used to refer to the sixteenth century Spanish conquerors, and thus plays a subversive and eruptive force from the South. However, it is worth noting that the New World Border here does not mean to build another border that causes the geopolitical inequality and generate more illegal immigrants. Seeing, from his Aleph vision, the ceaseless immigrations and conflicts along the U.S.-Mexican border, Arcangel expects a “new world border” that is not founded on the “discovery” of conqueror, but calls for a borderless future, in which the world is an unity without compartalization. Part of *The New World Border* is taken as the epigraph in *Tropic of Orange*, and is related to the vision of a borderless new world:

Standing on the map of my political desires

I toast to a borderless future

(I raise my glass of wine toward the moon)

with . . .

our Alaskan hair

our Canadian head
our U.S. torso
our Mexican genitalia
our Central American cojones
our Caribbean sperm
our South American legs
our Patagonian feet
our Antarctic nails
jumping borders at ease
jumping borders with pleasure
amen, hey man

(qtd in *Tropic of Orange* 1997: 5)

What characterizes Arcangel's in-between feature is his "borderlessness," a border identity, through his act of border-crossing. The term is designated by Gomez-Peña, by which he means,

The presence of the hybrid denounces of the faults, prejudices and fears manufactured by the self-proclaimed center, and *threatens* the very *raison d'être* of any monoculture, official or not. It reminds us that we are not the product of just one culture: that we have *multiple* and *transitional* identities: that we contain a multiplicity of voices and selves, some of which may even be contradictory. And it tells us that there is nothing wrong with contradiction.

(qtd. in *The New World Border* 1996: 12. *my emphasis*)

Borderlessness or a border identity, thus, suggests more than a combination, corporation of differences. In the hybrid conflation, contradictions are tolerated, instead of ending in

conflicts. As a result, monoculture and center are threatened while multiple, transitional perspectives and identities are valued. By leading the border-crossing act and redrawing the border, Arcangel again testifies the coexisting energy of destruction and the potency of restoration in Thirdspace.

b. Arcangel's metamorphic trickster performances

Throughout the novel, Arcangel goes through a series of metamorphosis, transforming into multiple roles. Two metamorphoses, in which Arcangel becomes the ancient prophet, Chilam Quetzal,⁷ and in a latter scene, converts into a wrestler, El Gran Mojado, who fights with SUPERNAFTA, serve as two examples to show the subversion and justice inscribed in Thirdspace.

As the prophet, Chilam Quetzal, Arcangel predicts doomsday based on the ancient belief that a doom would come in fifty-two-year circles, and he explains the cause of the doomsday as:

The great discovery (of land)! The great curse!...Every year there has been a historic discovery of our lands to make the dates of doom a certainty....The doom of discovery! The doom of conquest And worse yet, who among the discoverers did not plant their seed in this land of discovery? Now all is lost! We will pay dearly! I, Chilam Quetzal, the soothsayer, have spoken!

(Yamashita, 1996: 50-1)

Arcangel here is transformed into a prophet, who treats the honored discovery of South American as the reason for the world's doomsday. His speech provides an alternative

⁷ Here, the name of the prophet, Chilam Quetzal, that Arcangel plays actually refers to one ancient god and one significant book in Mayan civilization. In Mexico, the Chilam Balam is a book of history, astrology, medicine and prophecies written in Maya using Latin script, and it was found in the Yucatan peninsula and also saved. Quetzal is a bird in service of an ancient god known to the Mayas as Quetzalcoatl. The god is the creator God, the Feathered Serpent, The Founder of Agriculture, PRECIOUS Feather Snake, The Road Sweeper. He taught men science and the calendar and devised ceremonies. He discovered corn, and all good aspects of civilization.

perspective about the discovery of the Americas that is followed by the exploitation of local labor and draining of resources. Denouncing the occupation and deprivation of land in the name of discovery, with his metamorphosis into prophet, Arcangel speaks for the politically and economically colonized. His final transformation into El Gran Mojado, which stands for “the Big wetback” in Spanish, and his fight with SUPERNATA, is another instance which shows the subversive force and call for justice achieved by Thirdspace. In the wrestling scene, Arcangel criticizes the myth of the First World that claims development would bring wealth and technology progress to the world, while the fact is that human beings are no more than labor, that the land is only property, and that people cannot even afford the products they own labor produce (Yamashita, 1996: 259).

These two scenes of Arcangel erupts hegemonic viewpoints, and even fights back as the wrestle scene between El Gran Mojado and SUPERNAFTA. Arcangel’s transformation into multiple figures, and the destructive voice and viewpoints deriving from this magical realism treatment is in accord with the discussion of magical realism by Zamora and Faris, which underlines the subversion that magical realism begets:

Magical realism also functions ideologically...less hegemonically, for its program is not centralizing but eccentric: it creates space for interactions of diversity. In magical realist texts, ontological disruption serves the purpose of political and cultural disruption: magic is given as a cultural corrective, requiring readers to scrutinize accepted realistic conventions of causality, materiality, motivation. (Zamora and Faris, 1995:3)

As the foregoing quotation claims, Arcangel and his metamorphic role play creates spaces for interaction and disrupts political and cultural hegemony. As a soothsayer, Arcangel, as a counter-voice, condemns the North’s invasion and deprivation of the land and its people in the name of “great discovery” and challenges the historical narrative which always puts the

North in the center by proposing an alternative in the South. Similarly, the disruption derived from Arcangel's metamorphosis is shown particularly in the wrestler, El Gran Mojado. Contrary to the economic conquest from the North, El Gran Mojado is heading North to meet SUPERNAFTA. The northward journey led by Arcangel and his metamorphosis of El Gran Mojado not only deconstructs the First World myth of progression, but also carries with it a disruptive power, which calls for political and cultural justice and change.

VII. Arcangel's Creation of Thirdspace in *Tropic of Orange*

In Arcangel's first presence in the novel, "7: To Wake – The Marketplace," his role as trickster with the ability of performing magic and metamorphosis is presented by his intermixed language and multiple role-play. Arcangel talks in a way that manifests his border identity: "And yet his voice was often a jumble of unknown dialects, guttural and whining, Latin mixed with every aboriginal, colonial, slave, or immigrant tongue, a great confusion discernible to all and to none at all. Yo say el Frito Bandio, he said. Bebes Coca Cola? Stuff like that" (Yamashita, 1996: 47). Instead of speaking the Queen's English, Arcangel's speech, by mingling various dialects or tongues, engenders a confusing and exotic mimicry of English. Arcangel's performances which incorporates diverse genres exemplifies the hybridity where contradictions coexist:

He was actor and prankster, mimic and comic, freak, a one man circus act....He did big epics and short poetry...romantic musicals, political scandal, and as they say, comical tragedy and tragic comedy . . . Across the border, they had a name for such *multiple types*: they would call him a *performance artist*. This designation would entitle him to local state, federal, and private funding. Well, he didn't know it yet, but that's where he was going North.

(Yamashita, 1996: 47; *emphasis mine*)

In this chapter, Arcangel's undergoes a series of metamorphoses: he is once the old man in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's short story, "An Old Man with Enormous Wings"; the ancient prophet, Chilam Quetzal predicting doomsdays caused by "the great discovery" of the Americas; and the wetback wrestler, which we will discuss in the conclusion of the thesis. With his multiple metamorphoses, Arcangel creates a space where the real intertwines with the imagined, and where the present interweaves with the past. Through the reinvestigation of the discovery of the Americas and the prophecy of doomsday announced by Chilam Quetzal, Arcangel expresses the underlying disorder and subversive attempt that is inherent in Soja's conceptualization of Thirdspace.

Besides, Arcangel is likened to the creator of cosmos, when he has a performance on the street corners in Mexico City: "juggling balls representing the planets of the solar system while spinning a replica of the sun on his nose. He keeps Pluto on the outer ring, juggling everything--Saturn, Uranus, Venus, Jupiter, etc., even the moon around the Earth--in great ellipses" (Yamashita, 1997: 51). The circuit of balls is a miniature of the solar system. In other words, the universe is contained in these little balls. To quote from Borges's depiction of the Aleph, "The Aleph's diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished. Each thing (a mirror's face, let's say) was infinite things" (1971: 12). Like the Aleph, these enclosed spaces encompass possibilities of openness and the multiplicity of the universe.

The end of this chapter is a preliminary announcement of Arcangel's northbound journey, which starts from Mazatlán, a symbol of the origin and homeland of Mexico. It is at this moment that Arcangel has his first vision of Aleph:

Now, it was Monday, and he awoke. He awoke to all the metaphors that come from the land. He had followed a path across the continent that was

crooked, but always heading north. Now he was in Mazatlán. He could hear the waves lapping at the edges of the sand, feel the already heating breezes flowing from the sea of Cortés.

He had had a dream. And when he awoke he could still see the dream like a miniature Aleph reflected from his mind to an indefinable point in his visual horizon. (Yamashita, 1997: 51)

After his awakening in “11: To Wash – On the Tropic,” Arcangel repacks his worn leather suitcase and walks toward the marketplace. Again, Arcangel becomes a trickster performer by moving a stalled truck loaded with oranges:

His voice was powerful, the voice of a true performer. It drowned the commotion like an approaching tidal wave, thundering with fearful authority. His arms lifted, and his body seemed to glow against the morning sunlight. In each hand flashed a large metal hook.

I [Arcangel] will demonstrate the incredible strength of the human body. With the aid of a steel cable around the axle of this truck, these two solid hooks and the skin of my body, I will myself move this vehicle. What is it worth to you to see such as feat? (Yamashita, 1997: 73)

Arcangel drags the truck toward the marketplace and it is at the market where Arcangel bought the orange that he carries along the continent crossing travel:

“I would take a bag of cut nopales.” He had just pulled an entire truckload of oranges with his bare skin, but still he said, “And that orange, too. How much do you want for it?”

“This orange? Worthless, I’ll be honest with you. It is not imported. A local fruit out of season.”

“I have a need for the taste of an orange.” He opened his suitcase and put the

orange and the bag of cactus leaves in one corner.

“Where are you going with that?” the woman pointed at the suitcase.

“North,” Arcangel smiled. “I’m going north.” (Yamashita, 1997: 75)

It is worth pointing out that the Tropic, a zone that stretches across the North and South hemispheres and the setting of this significant scene, with its in-betweenness and metamorphoses, has been incorporated into the orange. In other words, the Tropic of Orange emerges at the instant and moves northward with Arcangel across the border.

On his way to the North, Arcangel has his meal in the restaurant filled with miserable and hungry Mexicans. While others in the cantina order today’s special, which provides a hamburger, Fritos, and catsup, Arcangel finds himself to be the only one having nopales:

“You don’t think it’s strange?”

“Strange? That I remember you from my birth?”

“No. About the beers. All American beers. But we are in Mexico, are we not?

Where are Mexican beer?”...Arcangel looked around at all the hungry and

miserable people in the cantina---all eating hamburgers, Fritos, catsup, and

drinking American beers. Only he, who had asked the cook the favor of cooking

his raw cactus leaves, ate nopales. (Yamashita, 1997: 131)

The scene reveals the North’s economic invasion of the South. Arcangel, as the only one who eats not the American food, but nopales of Mexican origin, conveys his symbolic role as Mexican nativism, which acts as a counterforce to the North. Arcangel demonstrates his trickster play when he leaves with the crowd in the cantina on their way to the cockfight, which is an indication of the forthcoming wrestling fight between Arcangel and SUPERNAFTA: “[Arcangel] wondered when his time would come, when he would be forced to spar with knives at his heels, to meet the final destiny of those with wings” (Yamashita, 1997: 131). After the cockfight, Arcangel struts to the center: “Unseen by anyone, he had

transformed himself into *a motley personage*: part superhero, part professional wrestler, part Subcomandante Marcos. Ski mask in camouflage nylon, blue cape with the magic image of Guadalupe in a aura of gold feathers and blood roses, leopard bicycle. Arcangel's metamorphosis of El Gran Mojado (the Big Wetback in English) motley/clown-like figure again exemplifies the trait of metamorphosis. With his magical transformations, Arcangel exerts an anti-hegemonic force that disturbs the dominant position of the North. During the northbound journey, the encountering of Arcangel and Rodriguez, a bricklayer, signifies the investigation of laborer's life. Arcangel helps Rodriguez build perfectly straight walls:

"I'm glad you came along," confessed Rodriguez. "I'm getting too old to do this work along."

"I can only work for you today."

"Too bad. This place has work for a lifetime."

Work for a life time. Arcangel pondered this.

...after all [Rodriguez] would die, and the bricks that depleted the earth did so to make room for his body. Two bricks for his head, two bricks for his hands, two for his feet. Knowing this, Arcangel set the bricks with special care, blessing and naming each brick, reconstructing Rodriguez's dying body again and again into that very straight wall. (Yamashita, 1997: 142-47)

Acting like a guardian angel of laborers, Arcangel not only works together with Rodriguez, but also laments the plight of laborers with a strange mumbling mantra, in which his Aleph vision records the five-hundred-year history of peasant's evolution:

Arcangel remembered seeing the slain body of Emiliano Zapata....Now, from the mountains of Chiapas at the border of Guatemala, that very name had been re-invoked by the people who called themselves Ch'ol, Lacandón, Tzeltal, Tzotzil,

Tojolabal, and Zoque.

Tierra y Libertad.

Revolution reinvented,

but consistently the same:

the hard labor of people at the bottom

with nothing,

nothing,

to lose.

(Yamashita, 1997: 147-48)

The chapter ends in the scene: “Arcangel made several trips with the wheelbarrow hauling bricks. . . . Rodriguez worked with a trowel quietly and carefully at one end of the long perfect wall. Arcangel wondered if it wasn’t a wall that could conceivably continue east and west forever. Labor for a lifetime” (Yamashita, 1997: 148). It is a wall that differentiates the South from the North. The lifetime labor and the endless effort of building the wall indicates the despairing impossibility of crossing it. A border that is built due to the extremely uneven economical development that demarcated the North and South hemispheres.

After encountering Rafaela, Arcangel travels north with Rafaela, Sol, and the orange on the bus. Arcangel and the passengers almost arrive at the border. However, the bus break up, and again Arcangel voluntarily offers his services to pull the bus with the steel cables and hooks:

And once again, the people scoffed at his efforts and gawked amazed as the bus inched slowly along the highway, harnessed to an old man’s leathery person, skin pulled taut across his bony chest and empty stomach, minute droplets of blood kissing the earth, dragging everything forward. It was as the burden of gigantic wings, too heavy to fly

(Yamashita, 1997: 197)

Arcangel's body at the moment embodies the conceptualization of Thirdspace, for it is Arcangel's physicality that drags everything South forward to cross the border. The scene implicates Arcangel's role of a guardian angel. The burden of gigantic wings, which keeps the angel in the secular world, is his way of showing care of people in South. Arcangel is an angel who cannot fly due to his rooted corporeality and endless sacrifice for Mexico. The cross-continent journey led by Arcangel, and the turmoil it arouses when the Tropic of Orange and everything South collides with the Great Border, the rim of the North, testify to the emerging of a Thirdspace, which derives from a disruption:

Such a commotion was aroused that no one noticed, either on one side or the other of the Great Border---that Arcangel and a broken bus and a boy and an orange and, for that matter, every thing else South were about to cross it: the very hemline of the Tropic of Cancer and the great skirts of its relentless geography. (Yamashita, 1997: 197)

After crossing the U.S.-Mexican border, Arcangel and the mass on the bus keep going northward to their destination, the city of Los Angeles:

The great multitude behind pushed [the bus] for [Arcangel]. Pushed it and its passengers and the little boy sitting on his suitcase with the orange. Pushed the Tropic ever northward. Still attached by hooks and cables to the bus, however, Arcangel---naked to the waist---continued to press toward his destination: The Village of the Queen of the Angels of Poirciuncula, the second largest city of México, also known as Los Angeles.

(Yamashita, 1997: 211)

However, with Arcangel's movement with the Tropic of Orange, the city of L.A. goes through a spatial metamorphosis. The city of L.A., here, does not belong to the U.S., but

returns to the time when it was the territory of Mexico: The Village of the Queen of the Angels of Porciuncula. The traveling of Arcangel and the Tropic of Orange induce a series of time/space metamorphoses. Here, the urban space of L. A., with its geographical transformation, is the conceptualization of Thirdspace, for it comprises the city of L.A. before and after 1848. The urban space of L.A. faces a collision, intrusion of another world, space brought up by Arcangel's pilgrimage to the North. The clash of two geometries, worlds, spaces as condensed in the city of L.A. is the starting point which constitutes Soja's Thirdspace. Toward the end of this chapter, the orange even becomes the embodiment of Thirdspace:

Finally Arcangel juggled the only orange in the city that had not been hidden or confiscated. . . . Its very presence resonated with several thousand oranges rotting in toxic landfills...hidden in dozens of obvious and ridiculous places because they were now illegal. Customs officials who now chased after their stretching border scrambled forward to confiscate a single orange....But Sol, who loved the orange, grabbed it and ran in circles. And everything in that geographical nexus churned around and around and around. (Yamashita, 1997: 213-14)

The orange, now enclosed the Tropic of Orange and as the geographical nexus, signifies the emergence of another space, real-and-imagined. Being the center point on the map of the Americas, the orange accompanying Arcangel in the northward journey centers on the vision of alternative cartography, in which the U.S.-Mexican border and the map of the Americas is redrawn. The illegal orange is a symbol of the illegals who with endless efforts crossing the great border. The orange's successful border crossing and the turbulence, differences that it arouses suggests the upcoming inevitable metamorphosis brought by these groups to the city of L.A..

In the final chapter, Arcangel transforms to be the wrestler, El Gran Mojado, in the

Ultimate Wrestling Championship. Suddenly, Arcangel spots Bobby sitting ringside, so he slings Sol into Bobby's arms and tosses the orange to Sol. However, Sol's hands are too little to catch it, and the narrative describes Bobby's reaction at that moment as follows: "There was the slightest moment of indecision, Bobby wondering how to keep the balloon and catch the orange. But the symphony of the moment spoke for itself as he released the balloon, letting it float into the spotlights, and caught the precious fruit[the orange] in midair" (Yamashita, 1997: 216). Arcangel's delivering of the orange to Sol and Bobby implicates another dimension underlying *Tropic of Orange*. While Arcangel's northward movement with the Tropic of Orange, and his fighting with SUPERNAFTA in The Ultimate Wrestling Champion deal with the conflicts between the North and the South hemispheres. Bobby's identity as Asian America signifies a third element breaking the established North-South binarism in the novel. Meanwhile, the Pacific Rim Auditorium, where the wrestling of North-South takes place, and the multiethnic family of Bobby, Rafeala, and Sol has a reunion denotes the open and all-inclusive intention as evinced in the idea of Thirdspace.

The chapter ends in a description of the wrestle that best illustrates the clash of two worlds that highlights the conceptualization of Thirdspace:

Everyone gasped as the great SUPERNAFTA imploded.

But only Bobby saw SUPERNAFTA's final weapon, his pointing finger a missile launcher that sent its tiny patriot into Arcangel's human heart.

And perhaps it was only the catastrophic finale to another fifty-two-year cycle.

The clash of a flat world

with a round world [the world enclosed in the orange!]. The clash of the same world

with itself, its hands

meeting in a prayer of blood. (Yamashita, 1997: 262-63)

In the following chapter, I will turn to Rafaela and her journey of metamorphoses across the Great Border.