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Postmodern hybridity | The magical conflation of nature, humankind, and technology in Karen Tei Yamashita's Through the Arc of the Rain Forest

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POSTMODERN HYBRIDITY: THE MAGICAL
CONFLATION OF NATURE, HUMANKIND, AND TECHNOLOGY IN
KAREN TEI YAMASHITA'S THROUGH THE ARC OF THE RAIN FOREST

by

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In considering the nature of existence as a whole, the Enlightenment notion of rationality serves as a beginning point for establishing many dichotomies that in turn come under attack in philosophical discussions. Such debates contest rationality's attempts to establish hard-line distinctions between humankind—and by extension the capability for rational thought—and non-human entities. In this model, rationality serves as a solid basis by which humankind may distance itself from the natural world as well as discount mythical aspects of culture that are not empirically verifiable.

The postmodern movement, gaining most its momentum roughly after World War II, contests these notions of the rational. The postmodern project, though highly contentious in terms of its prevailing definition and thrust, nonetheless reveals a shifting paradigm in terms of hierarchical binaries. Specifically, traditionally separations between humankind, Nature, technology, and myth reveal their interconnectedness in the postmodern era. In Yamashita’s novel, hybridity emerges as an essential characteristic for this period and finds one of its strongest voices in literature. Notions of science and myth, the natural and unnatural, and human and animal become difficult to separate. Essentially, issues in the postmodern era move from questions concerning knowledge as such—how do we know what we know?—to questions that resonate to the heart of being itself such as: what world is this? Or, what is a world? (McHale *Postmodernist* 10).

Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* illustrates this uncertainty through the use of magical realism. By mixing magical elements with realism, this novel contests many traditional binaries and emphasizes the hybridity of phenomenal existence in its largest sense. Rather than merely reconfiguring hierarchies, Yamashita’s novel underscores the *interrelatedness* and *inseparability* of the natural, socioeconomic, technologic, and mythic realms by seamlessly mixing magical and real elements.
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Introduction

Section 1: Convergences: *Through the Arc of the Rainforest*. Postmodernism and Magical Realism

I have heard Brazilian children say that whatever passes through the arc of a rainbow becomes its opposite. But what is the opposite of a bird? Or for that matter, a human being? And what then, in the great rain forest, where, in its season, the rain never ceases and the rainbows are myriad?

--Karen Tei Yamashita
*Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*

Born January 8, 1951 in Oakland, California, Karen Tei Yamashita grew up in Los Angeles. She then attended Carleton College in Minnesota, graduating with degrees in English and Japanese literature after spending her junior year as an exchange student at Waseda University in Tokyo. In 1974, Yamashita received a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship to study Japanese immigration to Brazil. moved to Sao Paulo and eventually met her husband, Ronaldo Lopes de Oliveira. While living in Brazil, Yamashita’s creative stories and plays won several awards. In addition, she received a Rockefeller Playwright-in-Residence Fellowship at East West Players in Los Angeles, CA for her play *Omen: An American Kabuki*. And in 1979, her story "Asaka-no-Miya" won first place in the James Clavell American-Japanese Short Story Contest. After returning to Los Angeles in 1984, Yamashita wrote various plays, translations, poetry, screenplays, and prose. Her novels include *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990), *Brazil-Maru* (1992), *Tropic of Orange* (1997), and *Circle K Cycles* (2001). Her first novel and the focus of this inquiry, *Through the Arc of the Rainforest* (hereafter referred to as *Through the Arc*), received both the American Book Award and the Janet Heidinger Kafka Award. This particular novel offers a satirical—and at times absurd—yet dramatic exposé on the
interrelatedness of ecological issues, cultural hybridity, and the proliferation and mutation of technology.

Considering the diversity of Yamashita's oeuvre, placing her in the canon proves challenging. As an Asian American author, some critics naturally situate her literature in this ethnic category although such a designation places emphasis on her ethnicity in spite of her collective works' overall diversity. In reference to *Through the Arc* specifically, Yamashita observes, "I don't necessarily think of *Through the Arc* as an Asian-American book, although I'm an Asian-American writer, and I don't have a problem with that. I think, though, that Asian-American literature is changing. It has to be more inclusive because the geography is changing, the map is changing" (Gier par 72). Her use of a geographical metaphor seems particularly appropriate, especially with regard to not just this novel, but also *Brazil-Maru* and *Tropic of Orange*. All three novels reconfigure conceptions of geographical and ethnic boundaries both physically and ideologically.

And to further complicate Yamashita’s place in the canon, *Through the Arc* and *Tropic of Orange* employ magical realist elements while *Brazil-Maru*, on the other hand, follows a historical fiction model based on research concerning Japanese immigration to Brazil.

*Through the Arc* itself has elicited varied criticism over its literary configuration by virtue of its structure, subject matter, and the cultural context within which it has been received. For instance, Yamashita comments on the difference in the nature of questions the novel generated in Japan versus America. While the questions at issue for the Japanese press and literary interests tended to be sophisticated and focused on the multiple themes of the novel, Yamashita notes.
It is interesting to see, how, by comparison, the United States is very provincial. *Through the Arc*, for example, is understood as an environmental message. The book was marketed the year Chico Mendes was killed. There were other books out about the Amazon and the destruction of the environment. It was difficult to get American readers to read beyond this theme. The Japanese read it in more interesting terms. (Gier par 82)

Signs of broader thematic considerations nevertheless emerge in later American criticism such as that of Rachel Lee’s *The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation*. Lee considers four novels by Asian American authors—Yamashita’s *Through the Arc* included—and examines them in terms of their negotiation with issues such as immigration, American cultural influence, gender, and sexuality from an ‘Asian American’ perspective. While Lee’s characterization of *Through the Arc* as an Asian-American novel may in some respects undermine Yamashita’s notions concerning the need to recognize a changing geography. Lee’s piece compensates for the “provincial” nature of criticism in the United States Yamashita points to concerning such literature. That is, Lee extracts themes that include yet at the same time speak beyond merely environmental destruction.

Yamashita’s novel, in the form of a telenovela, describes the journey of protagonist Kazumasa Ishimaru from Japan to Brazil and ultimately draws together an indigenous healer, a couple who raises homing pigeons, a three-armed corporate magnate and his three-breasted French girlfriend, and a Brazilian youth-turned-pilgrim. The magical and at times comedic elements of this novel work together to broach many sociopolitical and ecological issues in an extraordinary fashion highlighting the mixed
nature of these typically separate realms. For instance as the story begins, Kazumasa is playing on the coast of Japan when a fireball hits the ocean, knocks him unconscious, and he awakens to a golf ball-sized sphere whirling inches from his forehead. Despite attempts by his mother to remove the object, it is invisibly though permanently bound in place and functions as narrator. From the beginning, both Kazumasa and the reader are thrust into a world that promises unconventional experiences.

Kazumasa follows his cousin Hiroshi to Brazil and shortly after he arrives, we are introduced to Batista and Tania Aparecida D'japan whose new homing pigeon business ultimately becomes a global information network similar to the Internet. And subsequently we learn of Mané da Costa Pena, the indigenous healer who uses feathers therapeutically; the New York-based corporation GGG whose specialty is exploitation; Chico Paco, who sees the Matacão (a five foot thick sheet of plastic-like material underlying much of the rain forest) as a divine place; and Jonathan B. Tweep (J.B. Tweep), the three-armed executive that quickly leads the American GGG Corporation in its Brazilian ventures. While in Brazil, Kazumasa and his orb (ultimately discovered to be Matacão material itself) as well as the other characters, become drawn to the Matacão in one way or another. This magnetic wonder material, eventually determined to be metamorphosed garbage from population centers around the world, then serves as the nexus for social and ecological exploitation, religious pilgrimages, and American pop-culture intrusions that illustrate the novel's overarching sense of interrelatedness and hybridity. All the characters' lives are altered by the Matacão's existence, yet ultimately Matacão-eating bacteria raze the financial as well as infrastructural frameworks based on
this newfound material. In the end, the lost rain forest returns and re-assimilates the Matacão plastic.

While unmistakable ecological issues tend to dominate portions of the story, other themes intertwine with these aspects through Yamashita’s satirical constructions and lend a very hybrid, syncretistic aura to the piece as a whole. Because of this, it is easy to understand her desire to encourage a broader critical scope for this novel. Given this idea, and using Yamashita’s ‘expanding map’ metaphor as a starting point, the following inquiry into *Through the Arc* attempts not only to offer a broader thematic scope on the textual level, but also to demonstrate the special ability of this novel to speak to certain postmodern issues as seen through a magical realist lens. That is to say this novel, by virtue of its magical realist mode, offers perhaps one of the most effective vehicles for examining some specifically postmodern fictional tropes. While the analytical project undertaken here does not foreground environmental or sociopolitical issues in the novel, neither does it attempt to discount or obscure them. Rather, such issues reside within and inform the broader context of postmodern concepts. At the core of this discussion, and elemental to each section of this analysis, is the question of ontology as it relates to the novel on the level of narrative and content. In both cases the magical realist mode, among other fictional modes or genres, is the best-suited means for illustrating ontological issues.

Significantly, the term ‘ontology’ in this investigation relates to the understanding of being as such from a metaphysical standpoint, not Aristotle’s being *qua* being (Audi 564). In this analysis, the questions broached in postmodernist literature center on subjectivity only insofar as it engenders perception of a spatio-temporal reality. In this
respect, questions concerning what constitutes a subject are not the exclusive focus although the connection between the two conceptions remains important. Hence ontology, as used in this project, describes the nature of being in the broadest sense, both animate and inanimate objects. Such a characterization naturally engenders inquiry into all aspects of reality as they exist and inform the phenomenological medium. Within the parameters of Yamashita’s fiction, reliance on accepted notions of rationality to interpret ontological reality become suspect. Yamashita’s world undermines traditional grounds and disrupts binaries.

In contrast, magical realism mixes the traditional realms of the ‘magic’ and the ‘real’ not to invert or juxtapose but rather to completely contest traditional binaries and call into question the hegemony of reason. In Through the Arc specifically, this mode functions to first debase typical notions of author, narrator, and narrative structure by effacing certain modern literary expectations such as closure and the triumph of knowledge as one finds in the modern detective novel. Consequently, Yamashita’s novel questions the hegemony of empirical knowledge, and ultimately questions traditional conceptions of reality and the nature of existence as we understand it. This process underscores the mixed character of reality highlighted in various areas of postmodern theory. Specifically, the novel obscures particular notions concerning the relationship between humans, nature, and technology, and more importantly, the directive function of reason. In these obscured relationships, the novel uses technology to distort categories of reality and impedes attempts to maintain traditional ideological distinctions of what is ‘real’ as opposed to what is not under a rationality-based model.
While each of the three analytical sections of this study engages a slightly different aspect or level of the novel, when taken together these analyses demonstrate how and why *Through the Arc*’s magical realist construction highlights certain postmodern tropes that stem from the same basic ontological question which engages the nature of being in its broadest terms. Yet before discussing the specific manifestations through which this dynamic process arises, I will describe the boundaries of the postmodern ‘map’ as it were and the location of magical realism. To view something means seeing it from a *particular* point of view; therefore the following discussion offers the reader the theoretical coordinates that situate the subsequent analysis.

**Section 2: Into the ‘Post’ Mêlée**

To attach the label “postmodernist” to a novel immediately implies a certain standard albeit one on which few can agree. The nature of the term itself is somewhat problematic as both the ‘post’ and ‘ist’ prefix and suffix inscribe temporal and ideological boundaries around novels attributed this categorization. However, the distinction between what is “postmodernist” and what is not tends to be more elusive than any delineated time frame or set of ideas: nonetheless, such a distinction is not arbitrary. There are certain characteristics that for the most part seem to fit, if not define sharply, the nature of literature specifically—and sociopolitical realms generally—considered postmodern. In the broadest sense, the term “postmodern,” whether seen as a movement, era, project, or change in theoretical paradigm, suggests a transition from modernity’s effort to totalize and universalize towards a drive to emphasize “both/and” instead of “either/or” thinking, thus favoring “paradox, ambiguity, irony, indeterminacy, and contingency” over modernity’s “closure, unity, order, the absolute, and the rational”
Despite the relatively broad agreement among critics that these characteristics inform to some extent the distinction between modernity and what comes after or stems from it, the significance of particular elements, and diversity of sociopolitical realms in which postmodern discourse takes place still continue to serve as the source for lively debates (Best Turn 10-11). Nevertheless, one may still speak of postmodernism in terms of specific schools of thought or philosophical positions if not as a unified ideological description. In this respect, the particular issues become the focus of the discussion rather than their placement under the umbrella of a particular term.

While limiting the scope of a postmodernist discussion to literature and even more specifically to the genre of fiction reduces the shear bulk of disagreement over the term, much contention still remains. As Brian McHale accurately observes, "'Postmodernist'? Nothing about this term is unproblematic, nothing about it is entirely satisfactory" (Postmodernist 3). This short but weighty statement names a phenomenon that, as mentioned, eludes definition. McHale then continues his discussion concerning how one best considers the term with regard to a general movement not as simply after modernism but rather emerging from modernism as it relates specifically to fiction and engenders more of a mutation rather than an autonomous, distinctly separate era. In this respect, certain types of fiction allow for the play of various postmodern tropes, especially the breakdown of dichotomies and decentering of Western concepts of rationality, that in turn articulate issues specific to this general era that some view as either a different direction than or extension of the modern era. The notion of transformation seems most apt in describing what some consider the emergence of postmodernism—a transformation not in the issues of rationality and knowledge themselves but rather in the way we engage
such issues. This is not to say that epistemological concerns are rendered irrelevant. Instead, such concerns do not dominate the postmodern context but rather take on a relative role; epistemology no longer offers an unshakeable, solid basis from which to negotiate the entire context of existence. Bauman articulates this difference when he observes that typically modernist doubt "harnesses ignorance to the chariot of science" whereas postmodern questions tend to undermine "the trust that whatever is being said by science at a given time is the best one can say at that time" (qtd. in Natoli 21). Thus scientific knowledge with its rational basis and manifestation through technology becomes, instead of a firmly moored buoy in an epistemological sea of doubt, merely another contingency subject to the occasional yet regular ontological storm.

Toward these ends McHale avoids chronological distinctions and instead identifies what he terms a shift in the "dominant" in a given work as what moves it from a modern to postmodern characterization. That is to say, whether the dominating nature of the questions brought to bear in the text focus on knowledge or the nature of being determines the basis for distinguishing between modern and postmodern fiction. For instance, McHale identifies the dominant of modernist fiction as epistemological whereas for postmodernist fiction it is ontological (Postmodernist 9-10). The principal issues for modernist texts seem to center around questions regarding the nature of knowledge whereas for postmodernist texts, the questions move toward, or transition into questions of ontological nature. Such questions do not engage issues concerning how we know something but rather the nature of being itself. For example, McHale cites the detective novel as the "... epistemological genre par excellence" because in this genre issues center on questions of knowledge, its degree, use, reliability, transmission, and sources
Postmodernist 9). On the other hand, ontology concerns itself with the nature and understanding of being or existence not strictly in terms of human subjectivity but rather existence as a whole thus pushing beyond merely questions of knowledge. Toward this end, Brian McHale cites science fiction as the "... ontological genre par excellence" (Postmodernist 22). In this genre, different worlds come into being and/or collide—worlds that do not always operate under traditional Western empirical laws of physics. And what is particularly notable about the combined term "science fiction" is its similarity to the combination "magical realism." However it is important to note that while the former creates new worlds, the latter mixes worlds; in science fiction one willingly enters or knowingly confronts a different ontological plane whereas in magical realist texts, one continually and seamlessly crosses ontological boundaries.

Just as important, the determination of the dominant is not an either/or proposition. Instead, one set of questions—epistemological for example—cannot be raised without involving questions of ontology. In this sense, it is more a function of which set of questions ought to be engaged first; according to McHale, this is the determining factor for whether ontology or epistemology functions as the dominant in any particular work (Postmodernist 11). In addition, because of the interrelatedness of these two dominants, there can be a variance insofar as no single dominant may necessarily prevail invariably in a given text. That is, while epistemological questions tip over into ontological ones, the reverse can occur; the process is recursive rather than linear. Nevertheless once a text broaches ontological issues, the fact that it may subsequently revert to epistemological concerns does not draw it back into the modernist realm. Once the text crosses the line, it can never be strictly modern given McHale's
terms. This places emphasis on a dynamic process but also makes determining the dominant for a given text—especially threshold works—a bit more difficult.

While McHale's distinction works for describing a certain aspect of postmodernist fiction and magical realist novels in general (as well as Yamashita's Through the Arc in particular), the genesis of any distinctive discrimination immediately invokes counter examples and criticisms. A paradigm, through its own demarcation, necessarily elucidates what it excludes. In this respect, I must acknowledge what, in applying such a basis for distinguishing modernist from postmodernist fiction, becomes sacrificed in the process. What might appear at first to be an exhaustive task actually is relatively easy in that McHale himself qualifies his position by asserting.

... We can discriminate among constructions of postmodernism, none of them any less "true" or less fictional than the others, since all of them are finally fictions. Thus, there is John Barth's postmodernism, the literature of replenishment; Charles Newman's postmodernism, the literature of an inflationary economy; Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernism, a general condition of knowledge in the contemporary informational regime; Ihab Hassan's postmodernism, a stage on the road to the spiritual unification of humankind; and so on. (Post 4)

Despite the many variations listed, McHale's dominant-oriented model for postmodernist fiction informs, or at least is compatible with, some of these positions—Lyotard in particular. In another sense, McHale's model works well because it does not operate strictly by means of temporal boundaries, nor is it so broad as to render the term meaningless. While most of the fiction McHale designates as "postmodernist" stems
generally from the mid-twentieth century this historical grouping, given his criteria, becomes consequential rather than determinative. As well, the ontological/epistemological dominants as standards offer an internal coherence to his paradigm lending a somewhat stable but at times complicated basis for examining a varied yet finite selection of works. And finally, while McHale's model seems to be structurally sound, though some texts still provide challenges insofar as they collectively offer a spectrum regarding the degree to which each broaches ontological issues.

Section 3: Magical Realism? You Must be Confused

... In my mind, the whole idea of [Through the Arc] being any sort of magical realism is really on the edge of making no sense.

--Karen Tei Yamashita

Karen Tei Yamashita's Through the Arc of the Rain Forest... is a quasi-magical realist narrative. . .

--Rachel Lee

A satire written in the style of magic realism, Through the Arc. . .

--Lawrence J. Trudeau

As with the previous discussion concerning the term "postmodernist," the compound term "magical realism" also engenders ambiguity and encompasses a rather broad area of art and literature, hence the spectrum elucidated in these three epigraphs. To begin, most agree Franz Roh first used the term "magic realism" regarding German post-expressionist art in a 1925 article, and since then the term has been employed in describing—while simultaneously obscuring differences between—various works of fiction in recent decades (Schroeder 2). However, rather than tracing every variation and bifurcation in the genealogy of this term, one can at the very least establish a basic
criteria for describing the essential aspects of magical realism as they relate to literature specifically. And in doing so, there appears a parallel if not a conjunction between the essential natures of magical realist and postmodernist fiction. At its most basic level, "magical realism is a fictional technique that combines fantasy with raw physical reality or social reality in a search of truth beyond that available from the surface of everyday life. The startling irony behind this technique is that only through the conjunction of the fantastic and the factual can truth fully emerge in literature" (Mellen 1). Of course, the "truth" Mellen speaks of is not a transcendental truth but rather describes a fuller recognition of the mixed nature of traditionally separate realms. That is to say, the melding of the magical and/or mythical with the rational undermines the traditional (Western Enlightenment) dichotomy that heretofore separated these two aspects of phenomenal existence as a whole. Perhaps more importantly, this destabilization is not so much exclusively an issue of epistemology in that such a conflation merely implies a necessary broadening of knowledge and reason, but rather a radical challenge to reason as a solid foundation diametrically opposed to an ethereal magical realm. The crux of the issue is not a question of how the magical can be rationally explained. Instead, in its interaction with the magical, rationality necessarily betrays its inherent limitations as a solid basis from which to behold and describe phenomenological existence.

In this sense, ontological questions must be addressed, as McHale explains, not instead of but rather before epistemological concerns. Given McHale's point, we discern a solid correlation between postmodernist and magical realist texts. In fact, in "Sheherezade's Children" Wendy B. Faris illuminates the connection between the epistemological/ontological shifts as discussed by McHale and the vehicle of magical
realist fiction. Specifically, the relationship between postmodernist fiction and magical realism emerges in McHale’s discussion of Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* He points out the way in which Faulkner’s characters Quentin and Shreve go “beyond reconstruction [of the murder-mystery] into pure speculation (*Postmodernist* 10). Speaking to this example Faris observes how in the falling away from the epistemological, Faulkner’s characters have begun to invent, thus realizing an imaginary realm and moving away from the domain of realism (“Sheherezade’s” 166). Thus, a confluence of magical and postmodernist fictional techniques occurs through the characters’ shift from epistemological reconstruction to ontological creation. In this case, the move away from realism simultaneously places Faulkner’s novel closer to—if not within—the postmodernist realm while it situates the magical realism mode decisively within it.

Given this correlation between McHale’s postmodernist fiction and magical realism, I offer one more important explanation regarding magical realism before entering into a discussion of Yamashita’s novel: geographic origin. That is to say, despite magical realism’s origins in European art and various uses in literary criticism, this designation has been strongly affixed almost solely to Latin American authors and their works over the last sixty years. While María-Elena Angulo also mentions Roh’s use of the term “magical realism” in the 1920s with respect to painting, she nonetheless places a particular Latin American emphasis on its use regarding literature. She asserts “what is important for our purposes is to consider that in Spanish America in the forties the term was used to express a new literature inherent to the mentality and attitude of its writers” (3). In doing so, she somewhat essentializes this term and thus hints at geographical and temporal boundaries in its use. In all fairness to Angulo, she does chronicle the various
debates from the 1930s to the 1980s that center on just what constitutes magical realism as well as what differentiates the magical from the fantastic. Nevertheless, most debates focus on the finer points of magical realism—and its various modes—as they have arisen in Latin American literature of the mid to late twentieth century.

In contrast to Angulo’s assertion, Shannin Schroeder points out, “magical realism, for many, connotes Latin American literature, but the denotation of the term—and its potential for application far beyond one continent’s literary endeavors—has been greatly neglected” (1). Although Yamashita’s *Through the Arc* centers on the South American country of Brazil, Schroeder’s comments still remain salient, as Yamashita is an Asian American author. While Yamashita’s novel takes place in Latin America, its geographical or indigenous origin should not subsume its culturally hybrid character just as her status as an Asian-American author should not. In fact, Yamashita recognizes the influences of Japanese immigration into Brazil and incorporates this in *Through the Arc* as first Kazumasa’s cousin Hiroshi and then Kazumasa move there. This migratory aspect of the novel simultaneously expands the map of Asian-American literature and the scope of magical realism. Moreover according to Faris, the Latin American origin of many magical realist novels could be considered secondary to their mode insofar as “the category of magical realism can be profitably extended to characterize a significant body of contemporary narrative in the West, to constitute . . . a strong current in the stream of postmodernism” (“Sheherezade’s” 165). Faris then mentions authors and works she situates within a magical realist scheme such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, D. M. Thomas’s *The White Hotel*, and Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Mellen 115)—works that stretch, geographically, from India to Cornwall to
Colombia yet also incorporate, to varying degrees, a conflation of magical and realistic elements.

In light of Faris and Schroeder’s arguments, Yamashita’s comment in the Murashige interview against placing *Through the Arc* in a magical realist category do not appear to undermine this project. Also, rather than cordoning the novel off from a magical realist realm, Yamashita’s observations, assuming their candidness, actually serve to underscore the idea that she did not write the novel as an attempt to place it within a particular category but rather to reflect, in a certain way, the complex experiences of living in a country such as Brazil. As she explains after the epigraph I offered, “And [the disjunction between culture and technology is] the kind of thing *Through the Arc* is trying to convey about living in a country that’s both developing and developed—that has an Indian and aboriginal culture that is yet undiscovered and dying. At the same time it has an urban culture which is highly cosmopolitan” (Murashige 50). In light of Yamashita’s attempt to convey such a heterogeneous country and culture, assigning a magical realist mode to this novel does not appear too prescriptive. In fact in his discussion of Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Neil Ten Kortenaar correlates what Yamashita is attempting to do in *Through the Arc* and the magical realist mode. As he explains,

A critical consensus has it that magical realism is particularly well-suited to the handling of materials from the Third World, where colonialism has resulted in the juxtaposition of cultural frameworks with different origins and uneven development means that different modes of production exist side by side.
According to such a reading, magical realism . . . is the literary expression of cultural hybridity. (766)

The terms Kortenaar uses to describe magical realism’s drive parallel the terms Yamashita uses to try to capture the nature of Brazil with its hybridized socioeconomic and technological structures.

Furthermore, Delbaere comments on how “writers do not as a rule think of themselves as magical realists or write exclusively magical realist works; if the label fits some of their novels or stories it is usually because what they had to say in them required that particular form of expression” (qtd. in Schroeder 12). In light of this comment, proposing a magical realist mode for describing Through the Arc is more accurate. As well, to cast Yamashita’s novel as emblematic of a magical realist genre would, as Chanady suggests, inscribe particular geographic and historical limitations (qtd. in Schroeder 13) and perhaps imply a preexisting structure superimposed upon the content. In contrast, describing magical realism as a mode broadens its scope from such ideological boundaries and lends works such as Yamashita’s novel a certain immediacy that draws the reader’s focus to the substance of the piece—a critique of rational ontology—rather than emphasizing geographical placement. In addition, doing so offers us an appropriate tool for understanding how magical realism offers a specifically apt mode for illustrating postmodern tropes such as ontological uncertainty.

That being said, one cannot deny the deeply penetrating influence of South and Central American writers on the magical realism mode. And in returning to Yamashita’s previous comments concerning her project to convey the hybrid sociopolitical/techno nature of Brazil, one sees in general why a diverse, postcolonial context might offer
fertile ground for writing in such a mode. Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier views magical realism as a natural emergence from Latin America and a device that "... flows out of the continent of South America and of Central America with their mélange of cultures, unique birds, flowers, and animals" (Mellin 3). And in even more vivid terms David K. Danow observes.

The geographical proximity of the jungle to the city elicits a related omnipresent sense of the closeness of the prehistoric past to modern life, of myth, or primordial thinking, to scientific thought. Yet that closeness, filtered through a creative human imagination nurtured on a mix of the traditions and beliefs of the native Indians, as well as those of the transplanted Africans and Europeans absorbed into that world of prolific cultural hybridization, allows for a seemingly inevitable portrayal of the fantastic as factual and realistic. (71)

Danow's comments provide a striking characterization of what Yamashita's novel elucidates on multiple levels. For instance the narrative structure and narrator—itself a magical element examined in detail in Chapter 1—epitomize precisely the various proximities Danow suggests as it conflates among other things the prehistoric with the modern, the mythical with the scientific, the indigenous with the transplanted, and the jungle with the city. More significantly, however, such conflation begins with the narrator and narrative structure but also informs the rest of the novel's content. When taken together, these magical realist elements serve to underscore notions of hybridity and the melding of realms traditionally cast as separate and operate to focus on questions that deal with the nature of being—ontological issues—rather than merely issues of knowledge. Therefore, magical realism's emphasis on the ontological is better suited to
depict the intricacies of such a heterogeneous condition, as opposed to any single epistemology.
Alice’s confusion in this small excerpt from her conversation with a hookah-smoking caterpillar offers a fitting dialogue for characterizing a facet of postmodern concerns with ontological questions. Of course, this example is taken for its immediate implications because when viewed in its broader context, the story as a whole does not fit a postmodern paradigm. As a fairytale, Carroll’s story is set in a world the reader enters knowingly as enchantment, whereas most twentieth-century magical realist works like Yamashita’s operate to blend the realms of the magical and the real more smoothly (Schroeder 8) thus imparting a particularly postmodern spin. This important difference notwithstanding, the brief conversation between Alice and the caterpillar alludes to a very significant ontological question that Yamashita’s novel broaches on multiple levels. Initially, Yamashita offers an “Author’s Note” at the beginning of the novel that proposes a novela or telenovela framework for the story:

The story that follows is perhaps a kind of *novela*. a Brazilian soap opera, of the sort which occupies the imagination and national psyche of the Brazilian people on prime-time TV nightly and for periods of two to four months, depending on its popularity and success. . . . In traveling to the most remote towns, one finds that a single television in a church or open plaza will gather the people nightly to define and standardize by example the national dress, music, humor, political state.
economic malaise, the national dream, despite the fact that Brazil is immense and variegated. Yet even as it standardizes by example, the *novela*’s story is completely changeable according to the whims of public psyche and approval, although most likely, the unhappy find happiness; the bad are punished; true love reigns; a popular actor is saved from death. (vii)

This “Author’s Note” not only underscores the metafictional quality of the work, but it also establishes a notion of national identity as mediated and constructed through technology. Given this prefatory comment by the author, the question “who are you?” resonates to the core of being itself. As the telenovela functions to standardize, it also superimposes notions of homogeneity, both cultural and economic, upon very diverse groups of people who resist, assimilate, and appropriate such impositions. In this way, it brands an image in the psyche of those who watch it that in turn affects their self-images. With such an imposition on their life-world, they cannot help but reflect on who they are as individuals as well as a community. Answering such questions in this particular context proves difficult as the mixture and shifting of categories based on “public psyche” problematizes any clear-cut definition. Paradoxically, that which standardizes (the telenovela) is nonetheless subject to whims, and thus malleable by nature; attempts to standardize are self-defeating in that no single standard can maintain superiority.

Moreover, the concept of the telenovela works to create a hybridity of sorts that knits together a magical realist scheme and the broader postmodernist literary concepts. In this respect, the form of the telenovela simultaneously implies a standardized cultural intrusion into the diverse cultural enclaves of Latin American countries as well as offers an opportunity for appropriation and reconfiguration of pop-culture. While in the 1970s
many in Latin America viewed television as an imperialistic cultural imposition by the
U.S., Latin-produced telenovelas on the other hand subverted the form by adapting older
forms of Latin American popular culture, and in Brazil specifically, there is scholarly
evidence that the pedigree of the telenovela stretches back to oral traditions of
storytelling (Winn 436-7); syncretism, rather than imposition, drives this dynamic
process. While the hegemonic forces of American popular culture emerge toward the end
of the novel, the telenovela framework still functions to self-consciously place the story
in an ostensibly coherent scheme that in actuality betrays a very hybrid and constructed
nature. And once again, metafictional issues aside, the formation of identity directly
relates to the nature of being insofar as one must consider any subject's existence in
relation to its environment, be it physical, social, or ideological. Hence when the line
between subject and object becomes obscured through the inherent interrelatedness of
nature, humankind, and technology, the basic understanding of being and existence shifts.
Therefore in employing such a framing device as the telenovela, Yamashita foregrounds
ontological issues over epistemological ones and casts the work as a whole within a
postmodernist poetics. Notably, the telenovela framework fits a postmodernist paradigm,
according to McHale, on the grounds that it creates "...a second ontological plane or
level within the plane of the fictional world..." thus functioning as an "'ontological
pluralizer'" (Constructing 125). In this manner, the telenovela establishes an ontological
level once-removed from that of the characters in the story.

In moving from this overarching structural element of the novel to narrative
specifically, the ontological questions still dominate. In general terms, issues concerning
caracter, narration and narrative perspective abound in the ongoing conversation within
the field of literary criticism and study. Specifically, questions regarding the narrator and character in fictional works have spurred debate that broaches areas of ontology both internal and external to the fictional worlds created in such works. With regard to first and third-person narrative context in fiction, the ways in which narrators reveal consciousness vary the ways in which readers view the narrator's relationship to the story. This is true for modernist as well as postmodernist texts. In postmodernist texts, however, the issue becomes a question of specifically what ontological position certain first and third-person narrators occupy in particular narratives and what devices lead to any assumptions—as well as paradoxes—regarding their ontological status.

To be certain, constructions proposed by Dorrit Cohn such as psycho-narration, quoted monologue, and narrated monologue carry certain implications regarding the narrator's position in relationship to a given character as well as the events within the story. As she explains, psycho-narration involves a narrator's own discourse concerning a character's perception; quoted monologue is a character's mental discourse without narrative comment; and narrated monologue entails a character's discourse under the pretext of the narrator's dialogue (14). In the latter case, as Cohn explains, third-person pronouns replace first-person pronouns thus "leaving the relationship between words and thoughts latent" and "[casting] a penumbral light on the figurative consciousness" in a way that direct quotation cannot" (103). All three narrative devices reveal a given character's consciousness and establish a particular relationship between character and narrator that, despite ambiguity, nonetheless originate from and reside within the textual world. In this sense, the narrator's (and by consequence the reader's) perspective or
vision varies as such structural devices operate to move the reader’s point of view from a specific character’s consciousness to a more oblique perspective.

However, such narrative structures as articulated and applied by Cohn deal immediately with traditional modern texts in the context of third-person narrative. That is to say, in such a context the variation of interpretation centers upon the question of who speaks or whose thoughts we ‘hear.’ Specifically, the reader must determine from where the ‘voice’ in a text originates among possibilities that vary between author and character as well as to which of these two positions the narrator can be ascribed. While making such distinctions can involve complex interpretive methods, especially when a text contains not just one but rather a combination of structures, the need for an even more complex model emerges with the inclusion of postmodern novels, especially those in the magical realist mode, given the ontological multiplicity—a salient point regarding Yamashita’s narrator in particular.

As mentioned, the parameters of the term ‘postmodern’ leaves quite a lot of latitude as far as definitions are concerned: as such, it is not necessarily specific. Nonetheless, while any specific delineation between modern and postmodern may be questionable, certain characteristics specific to each exist between texts that fall within these vague yet distinguishable periods. Therefore, in an effort to trade a vague designation for perhaps a less vague one, this discussion considers the narrative structure within Yamashita’s novel as specifically magical realist and generally postmodern. That is, the narrator and narrative structure emblematize McHale’s shifts in the dominant from epistemological toward ontological concerns and do so by means of a magical realist mode.
Hence, the discussion to follow still engages some of the basic questions and assumptions within the field of fictional narrative, yet relative to a structure atypical of traditional fictive models. Yamashita's novel marks a significant change in narrative structure from modern fictional narratives to a postmodern model made possible in part through its magical realist mode. Specifically, this novel fulfills a central criterion of this mode in the form of an "irreducible element" as described by Faris:

The 'irreducible element' is something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as they have been formulated in Western empirically based discourse, that is, according to 'logic, familiar knowledge, or received belief,' as David Young and Keith Hollaman describe it. Therefore, the reader has difficulty marshalling evidence to settle questions about the status of events and characters in such fictions. (Ordinary 7)

This observation by Faris not only epitomizes the overall structure of Yamashita's novel, but the narrative structure as well. More to the point, such a narrative construct adds a new dimension to the question posed in relation to earlier narratological concerns. To ask, 'who is speaking?' within the context of Yamashita's novel elicits ontological implications beyond a typical author/narrator/character nexus. This issue arises as the narrating orb uses the first-person pronoun "I," immediately suggesting a conscious presence emanating from an otherwise inanimate object: "But, of me you will learn by and by. First I must tell you of a certain Kazumasa Ishimaru to whom I was attached for many years" (Yamashita 3). In fact, such implications press the very boundaries of the "Western empirically based discourse" that Faris refers to and speaks directly to McHale's postmodern shifts in the dominant. That is to say, the Enlightenment project
asserts the efficacy of reason that in turn implies a single, correct mode for representation achievable through mathematics and science (Harvey 27). And it is precisely the erosion of this faith—beginning in the mid-seventeenth century and manifesting itself in the visual arts and literature—that culminates in, among other things, the shifting dominants McHale describes in postmodernist fiction.

In light of this general transformation, there is a narrative device Yamashita uses in her novel that melds traditionally distinct narrative realms in an inventive manner. She creates a narrator that does not fit easily within traditional models as it blurs the at-times distinct boundaries established between narrator, reader, and character as well as the traditionally real and mythical. The narrator in this novel is simultaneously, and paradoxically, a character as well as an objective, omniscient presence (a concept in itself arguably untenable within the realm of Western metaphysics). Such a construction makes it difficult to distinguish between a conscious subject and an inanimate object; both are manifest in a single entity and complicate traditional taxonomy. Thus, Yamashita’s narrating orb pushes questions concerning knowledge into questions of being—epistemological into ontological—because it fuses the magical with the real. Yet just as significantly, this shift occurs on multiple levels beyond simply the narrator.

As previously discussed, *Through the Arc* begins on the coast of Japan where some children, protagonist Kazumasa Ishimaru included, are playing. Suddenly, an orb of fire hits the ocean surface casting debris in all directions. Consequently, Kazumasa is knocked unconscious and when he awakens, there is a small ball spinning on its axis inches from his forehead. Despite his mother’s attempts to remove it, it seems to be invisibly though permanently anchored in place. This orb subsequently becomes an
accepted appendage by the characters in the story as well functions as the narrator of the novel for the reader. In a short period of time, Kazumasa and his parents “began to depend on the ball, accepting and justifying it as they might a pacifier or battered old teddy bear” (Yamashita 5). Significantly, this narrator turns out to be the central “irreducible” element, or as Faris aptly puts it, an “[element] that exists symbiotically in a foreign textural culture—a disturbing element, a grain of sand in the oyster of that realism” ("Scheherezade's" 168).

What is especially notable is that this ball narrates the story from a perspective that is neither completely human nor completely objective. As well, this ‘speaking’ orb is not fantastic but rather magical. On this point Faris explains Amaryll Chanady’s distinction: “In magic realism, ‘authorial reticence ... naturalizes the supernatural’ so that it “does not disconcert the reader” whereas the fantastic exudes a hesitation thus “[presenting] antinomy, ‘the simultaneous presence of two conflicting codes in the text,’ as unresolved” (Ordinary 20). This distinction is essential to the dynamic created in Yamashita’s novel because, despite any residual hesitation on the part of the reader, the uncontested position of the orb as narrator and character works to occlude any textual delineations between the real and the magical. The ball does not conflict with the novel’s ontological plane (the otherwise realistic aspects) but instead merges with the characters and plot yet remains magical in origin. Rather than the presence of a traditional narrator – whether fictional, implicitly an author, or explicitly a character – questioning magical elements, the narrator itself is a magical element. Once again, the dissolution of such delineations speaks to a broader significance with regard to traditional Western ontological presumptions.
Speaking directly to this point, L. Robert Stevens and G. Roland Vela observe that "western [sic] man's scientific and technological achievements are in great part due to his ability to separate fact from fiction, myth from science, and illusion from reality. It is a paradox of western culture that it draws its psychological strength from a spiritual-mythical well while its muscle is drawn largely from science and technology" (qtd. in Schroeder 40). The full significance of this observation with regard to Yamashita's narrator surfaces as the reader discovers the orb's true nature. That is, by considering the ball's origins both in manifestation and makeup, one senses the theme of existential hybridity the narrator embodies - a theme that operates on multiple levels, once again conflates science with myth, and ultimately broaches the ontological realm. To begin, Yamashita's narrator observes, "That I should have been reborn like any other dead spirit in the Afro-Brazilian syncretistic religious rite of Candomble is humorous to me. But then I could have been reincarnated, if such things are possible, into the severed head of that dead chicken or some other useless object - the smutty statuette of St. George or those plastic roses" (3). This comment immediately confronts the reader with a quasi-character born from a syncretistic tradition - itself a mixture - as well as expressive of the human characteristic of humor. Essentially, a religious rite generates the ball from technological castoffs in the form of garbage; once again, science and myth become melded. In addition, this particular process constitutes an important element of magical realist texts in that a traditional myth becomes restructured. As Shannin Schroeder comments with regard to Thomas King's Green Grass, Running Water, Yamashita's novel follows a magical realist model because it "... counteracts its own spiritual origins by humorously reframing the traditional myths" (70).
However, to add to its complexity, this ball is eventually discovered to be made up of Matacão material; a layer of plastic substance about five feet thick discovered when rains wash away the topsoil in denuded areas of the Brazilian rainforest. This material’s formation results from the metamorphosis of non-biodegradable garbage from world population centers. As the narrator explains,

Enormous landfills of nonbiodegradable material buried underneath virtually every populated part of the Earth had undergone tremendous pressure, pushed ever farther into the lower layers of the Earth’s mantle. The liquid deposits of the molten mass had been squeezed through underground veins to virgin areas of the earth. The Amazon Forest, being one of the last virgin areas on Earth, got plenty.

(202)

At once, the ball’s origin is understood as a conglomeration of modern society’s technological garbage manifested through a hybrid religious rite. In this manner, it combines two traditionally distinct realms and reframes, as Schroeder describes, traditional myth. Moreover, it seems Steven’s and Vela’s observation becomes manifest in Yamashita’s orb. Essentially, this narrative device illustrates the conflation of the mythical with the technological in a very striking manner. Through its use of technological muscle in the novel, Western culture appears to have contaminated its “well” from which it sought autonomous psychological strength.

When the capacity to experience humor is added, the ball’s function in the novel as a combination of character and disconnected narrator or authorial voice emerges. The ball occupies a position of liminality both existentially and operatively: it is simultaneously, and paradoxically, inanimate and animate. Thus, it offers the reader a
graphic illustration that combines traditionally ‘real’ elements such as refuse and humor with a mythical/religious tradition and perhaps, as Ursula K. Heise observes, metaphorically stands as a lens for examining socioeconomic practices with regard to ecology that does not favor the human over all else (“Local” 127). In fact, it is precisely the latter aspects that give the reader a sense of the incredible as the ball’s existence, while not explicitly an aspect of Candomblé, nonetheless elicits a certain feeling of transcendence. The ball is not referred to as spiritual nor does it possess an agency that can be summoned, but it still has a presence about it that is beyond realist description.

Speaking to this point Faris asserts that

Even though magical realist narrative may contain no explicit references to spirits of any kind, and may even be critical of particular religious traditions, the irreducible elements and the defocalized mode cause the reader to feel a sense of contact with an indeterminate and undefinable domain, a feeling that endows the text with a slight and occasional mysterious aura. (Ordinary 64)

Despite the ball’s manifestation as a result of the Candomblé ceremony (Yamashita 3), it distances itself from a purely spiritual association through its reaction of humor, even if still transcendent by nature. More to the point, it transcends the traditional phenomenal world yet maintains an imbededness within it and in doing so lends the text Faris’ “mysterious aura.” Once again, the real and the mythical are conflated thus precluding any immediate reconciliation on the part of the reader while simultaneously complicating the ontological structure within the fictional world. The beach scene with Kazumasa is a realistic aspect of the story whereas the sudden appearance of a small sphere spinning inches from his forehead creates an ontological rift in the novel’s otherwise consistent
world. It is Faris’ irreducible element; it cannot be explained by traditional Western empiricism.

Yet, perhaps the most significant question regarding Yamashita’s narrator is still ‘who is speaking?’—but in a literal rather than relative sense. To answer this question, one must first determine what space the narrator occupies within the novel’s fictional world. With traditional modernist texts, in many instances such a question is moot. That is to say, given Cohn’s distinctions between narrative structures, the question of ‘who speaks?’ results from a structure that blends or confuses a narrator with a character or a character’s psyche. For instance in the case of a quoted monologue, the reader is offered a character’s mental discourse and while this method may sacrifice depth for directness (Cohn 98), the reader nonetheless knows that the information originates with a certain character despite its mode of transmission. To proceed one step further in complexity, Cohn’s narrated monologue offers the same information as a quoted monologue, yet in the guise of the narrator’s discourse (14). Despite the conflation of narrator and character, however, each remains separate existentially if not textually. Without a doubt, such a construction invokes a particular ambiguity. As Cohn explains, “By leaving the relationship between works and thoughts latent, the narrated monologue casts a peculiarly penumbral light on the figural consciousness, suspending it on the threshold of verbalization in a manner that cannot be achieved by direct quotation” (103). However, such a suspension occurs strictly within the constraints of an ontologically stable context. That is, while the expression of thought or consciousness may hover between character and narrator, the nature of being as such with regard to characters and narrator remains fixed.
Yamashita's magical narrator precludes such questions. It contests traditional notions of fictional narrators as it embraces not just simply conflation, but also more radically, resists a distinction between either an autonomous narrator or character; paradoxically, it is both and yet neither. Notably, Yamashita’s narrator challenges Andrew Kania’s argument denying the ubiquity of fictional narrators. Kania claims not every story has to have a fictional narrator; therefore, it must be assumed that the author narrates those novels that lack this element. However, Kania bases his argument on the premise that the narrator either is or is not a character: a premise that does not fit well with Yamashita’s narrator given its liminal status. At the heart of Kania’s argument against the ubiquity of fictional narrators is the idea of an ontological gap between the real and the fictive. As he asserts:

Clearly fictions are in some sense part of our world – we really do interact with them – so we should be able to have some sort of access to them. But it is not clear that the real world is part of every fictional world – certainly not in the same way – so it is not obvious that a fictional entity could have any intentional relation to a real entity, as presentation, or telling, implies. Thus it makes more sense to suppose a real agent could show the fictional to us than suppose a fictional agent could. (51)

Kania essentially suggests a distinct ontological delineation between the fictive and the real, and thus defaults to the real – in the form of the author – when the narrator’s status does not fit that of a character.

For Kania, there is no possibility for any sort of “...ontological dual-citizenship in the real and fictional world...” (51), yet Yamashita’s narrator seems to be just the
type of narrator that possesses such a dual-citizenship. Essentially, the ball is not
confined to the ontological world of the characters, but neither is it separate. The ball
interacts with characters (after all, it is attached to Kazumasa), and is seen, feared,
contemplated, and in general regarded by characters other than Kazumasa. Specifically, if
the ball were ontologically separate from the level of the story, it would not be
acknowledged by, let alone a focus of, the characters. At most, it could only be a
psychological aspect of a particular character. However, the ball is conscious of events
beyond any comprehensive capabilities of the characters yet lacks agency, once again
placing it on a slightly different ontological plane than the rest of the characters. As the
ball explains, “While I could not, of course, control the events that were to come, I could
see all the innocent people we would eventually meet” (8). In this statement, the ball at
once distances itself from the ontological level of the characters with its clairvoyance
while it asserts its lack of ability to act. On a deeper level, this paradoxically lends the
ball an authority in vision while robbing authority in a directive sense.

However, the limited authority the ball possesses should not be confused with the
author. Just as the ball does not default to the author as a result of Kania’s argument,
niether does it do so because of its ostensible omniscience. Interestingly, John Morreall
offers an argument similar to Kania’s with respect to ontology. According to the former,
the designation ‘omniscient narrator’ within third-person narrative is somewhat of an
oxymoron in that a narrator necessarily adopts or offers a point of view but

To have a view or perspective is to see things form one angle rather than another.
For vision and for knowledge generally, to have a point of view is to know
partially and serially. Omniscience is precisely knowledge without a point of
view; it is knowing everything completely and simultaneously. And so omniscience could not provide a filter for a story in the way that the limited knowledge of an internal narrator does. (432)

Given Morreall’s explanation, the portions of Yamashita’s novel that are narrated in the third person must therefore ultimately arise from the author’s “omnipotence . . . in creating the story” (ibid. 434).

However, a close look at the last pages of Yamashita’s novel creates problems for Morreall’s argument as this portion mixes first and third person narration. The issue with Morreall’s assertion arises with the ultimate dissolution of the ball by a strain of bacteria. Despite the fact that the ball is physically gone, it nonetheless continues to narrate:

Kazumasa and Lourdes had not waited to see if the Matacão would follow the ignominious course of the disintegrating ball. The day after my death, Kazumasa and Lourdes with Gislaine and Rubens, anxiously slipped away from the Matacão, filled with a mixed sense of relief and longing. The loss of the ball to Kazumasa was strange, as if he had undergone radical plastic surgery. (211)

What is most striking about this passage is that the first and third sentences are narrated in the third-person while the second is unquestionably first-person narration emerging from the ball. Hence, this textual construction suggests that the third-person narration in the first and third sentences is also ‘spoken’ by the ball albeit in absentia. While we cannot automatically assume the orb ‘speaks’ the first and third sentences, their proximity and relationship to the portion spoken by this magical narrator makes such an assumption more likely than the alternative. And given this case, Morreall’s argument that such
narration must necessarily default to the author becomes questionable. The only other possibility is to assume the author is speaking through the ball effectively placing her within the story. Yet even this assumption is difficult to accept because it would entail alternating between omniscient quasi-character and omniscient author. In fact, the entire structure of the novel consists of similar alternations between 'voices' or perspectives at the level of paragraphs. Therefore, one cannot assume that the third-person narratives simply arise from the omnipotence of the author as the ball explicitly usurps the knowledge or omniscience, which both Morreall and Kania ascribe to the author.

Additionally, the quasi-human status of the narrating orb subverts arguments for an impersonal voice, or rather, the idea that one does not necessarily need to assume the narrator and the presence referred to as "I" are the same. As previously noted, the ball is in one respect a character in that it is apparent to the other characters and, while it lacks agency, nonetheless possesses physical extension within the ontological matrix of the fictional story. However, one of the attributes of a narrative that leads to the possibility of an impersonal voice is the notion that narrators can at times relate information impossible for any narrating "I" to know, assuming it is a human character with human limitation of memory and local cognizance. As Henrik Skov Nielsen explains, "It is as though one has granted the first-person narrator a right that would otherwise seem to belong to the epic narrator, the right of basically free access to previous thoughts, speech, and details" (136). Yet this is precisely what Yamashita has done by creating this particular narrator. Given the ball's unique existential qualities and dual ontological citizenship (existence on the level of the author as well as within the story), the positing of a narrator separate from the ball does not appear easily argued; in this respect, it seems plausible to assume the
narrating "I" of the story is in fact the ball, which is capable of such ontological
dignities as laid out by Nielsen.

To add additional complexity to the narrator's status—and further embed this
novel within a postmodernist grouping—the narrating orb directly addresses the reader at
the beginning and end of the story. This once again problematizes or at least limits
Kania's concepts of narrative and brings up a point related to—and perhaps an extension
of—McHale's discussion concerning circuits of narrative communication and their
transgressions. According to McHale, transgressions or mixing of ontological spaces
within narrative discourse is a hallmark of postmodernist texts. This entails discourse
between what he puts into terms borrowed from Gérard Genette: "extra-diegetic" or
"diegetic" narrators and narratees (Constructing 91). In simple terms, an extra-diegetic
narrator/narratee exists outside the fictional world whereas a diegetic narrator/narratee
exist within the fictional world. Notably, these terms signify the ontological levels of the
narrator and narratee and transgressions of these levels leads to the ontological
uncertainty characteristic of postmodernist fiction. For instance, when an extra-diegetic
narrator addresses a diegetic character or vice versa, there occurs a transgression of the
existential boundary that separates the two.

However, Yamashita's narrating orb compounds the shifts discussed by McHale
in that it moves between two planes on the textual level. That is, aside from the orb's
magical characterization and concomitant ontological transgressions within the fictional
world, it also shuttles between the fictional world and that of the reader. Speaking to this
last point, the narrating orb crosses the boundary between the fictional world and the
reader as it addresses the reader directly. Despite the fact some may argue that the use of
"you" in a text does not necessarily refer to the reader, this particular text seems to in certain instances. As the novel opens, the narrator directs an explanation of its recursive existence toward the reader: "By a strange quirk of fate, I was brought back by a memory. Memory is a powerful sort of thing, although at the time I made my reentry into this world, no notice at all was taken of the fact. . . . brought back by a memory. I have become a memory, and as such, am commissioned to become for you a memory" (3).

This comes before the story begins so must be directed toward the reader. In case, the diegetic narrator addresses the extra-diegetic reader. Then as the novel closes, the narrator once again addresses the reader four times within the last two paragraphs:

But all this happened a long time ago.

Now, you may look out across this empty field, strewn with candle wax, black chicken feathers and those eternally dead flowers, discarded jugs of cane brandy, the dirt pounded smooth by hundreds of dancing feet. Press your face into the earth where the odor of chicken fat and blood and incense still lingers. . . . Now the memory is complete, and I bid you farewell. Whose memory you are asking? Whose indeed. (212)

As with the first example, the phrase, "this happened a long time ago" gives the impression that the narrator is once again addressing the reader. Notably, these examples go beyond simply extra-diegetic and diegetic boundaries to the ontological level of the reader. As McHale comments, "more scandalous still are those cases in which an extra-diegetic narrator pretends to address the empirical reader directly. Here the violation is 'upward,' with an addressor on a lower plane pretending to communicate with a superior addressee" (Constructing 94). That is, the orb as character/narrator extends its existence
to the reader’s level by addressing him/her. In fact, this narrator places itself within not just the ontological realm of the reader but into the very psyche of the reader as a memory. In addition, the repeated references to returning—"brought back," "reentry into this world," "brought back"—speak of a cyclical process which, along with basic ontological uncertainly, also fits characteristically within a magical realist construct. David K. Danow notes the way that time, in many magical realist novels is "frequently presented as cyclical, rather than linear. What occurs on one occasion (which is not likely to be the first) is destined to take place again on another, perhaps different, plane" (74). This offers a markedly untraditional Western conception of time because it lacks a telos, and thus alters notions of being over time. The narrating orb, already ontologically suspect, has entered and reentered this world and although "commissioned to become a memory" can theoretically return because memory served as its vehicle for reentry at the beginning of the story.
Chapter 2: The Nature/Human/Techno Nexus

In moving from the narrative structure in Yamashita’s novel to broader issues, the ontological questions remain. Toward this end, one of the dominant aspects of the novel emerges as a ubiquitous melding or conflation of categories otherwise distinct in different contexts. Specifically, Yamashita’s novel problematizes distinctions between the human world—technology inclusive—and the non-human world. Of course, such debates have not arisen strictly in a contemporary context nor have the delineations been consistently clear-cut in modern history. Nevertheless, certain schools of thought persist in drawing some type of distinction based on the seemingly exceptional human capability for rational thought and a concomitant development of technological artifacts and processes. For instance, Victor Ferkiss points out that “Marx was a complete believer in the subordination of physical nature to people and their purposes,” yet also observes that he as well as Engels spoke out against capitalism’s ecologically destructive tendencies (*Nature* 107). In terms of Marx’s comments, *Through the Arc* offers a next step because it also illustrates capital-driven ecological destruction yet critiques the anthropocentric subordination of nature Marx advocates.

Understandably, the issues implied by comments such as those of Marx and others have only become more contentious over subsequent decades. And among the specific arguments within contemporary ecocritical traditions, many debates still revolve around the question of nature’s relationship to humankind and technology. Arguments range from anthropocentrically based positions that regard human agency as essential for ecological management to movements such as deep ecology that consider humans, rationality notwithstanding, as equal in value to any other organism or even a destructive
blight on nature. Similarly, some consider technology as a means for preserving, conserving, or otherwise augmenting nature and its processes—or even as a natural process in itself—while others see such human artifice as an imposition and ultimately destructive force operating in opposition to natural ecological processes. While these two positions are extremes, there is a spectrum of points ranging from one to the other. Murray Bookchin, for instance, views a 'rational' use of technology as a means for enhancing nature as well as humankind's quality of life. As Ferkiss explains, one of Bookchin's fundamental premises is the notion that technology can create an abundance that will foster latent cultural potentialities as well as survival (174). Hence, Bookchin's notions tend to regard science and technology as liberating forces for the most part to be used in conjunction with nature for the ultimate goal of freeing humankind from toil while solving issues of scarcity. Within this model, Bookchin regards technology as a natural result of human evolution and thus not necessarily a separate, artificial aspect of culture in particular or nature in general.

While acknowledging technology's rational basis, Bookchin criticizes what he terms postmodernism's "most vulgar forms" as simply reductive forces that disdain rationality altogether and instead embrace incoherence (Ecology xvii). On this point he essentially considers the postmodern debasement of reason, such as deconstruction and its critique of logocentrism, as fundamentally based on white, Western, male, European origins and thus narrow and exclusionary. Although such a characterization of postmodern ideology might in some cases reflect an accurate portrayal, one can nonetheless consider postmodernism's questioning of reason without completely adopting such a hard-line position. While a critique of reason and empiricism as the sole
arbiters of 'truth' undoubtedly informs to a greater or lesser extent a postmodern project. one may assume a qualified position as to its significance in the larger postmodern context. Rather than portraying a postmodern characterization of reason in strictly hegemonic terms, one could envision the operative force of reason as it relates to rather than opposes non-rational realms such as subjectivity. A much more dynamic process can work within the human/nature/technology association, a process central to the concerns of Through the Arc.

Significantly, Bookchin espouses this dynamic notion. That is, he considers rationality—and by extension technology—as an essential aspect of an evolving human animal in its social and natural environments (Ecology xx). Specifically, he describes “Nature” as a composite of “first” and “second” natures. In this description, the terms differentiate biological evolution from social evolution, respectively (Re-enchanting 18), the latter term encompassing technological aspects of society. On this point I agree with Bookchin’s characterization, and Gregory Bateson speaks of a similar conception. In discussing the connection between the individual mind and the external world, the latter suggests “that the delimitation of an individual mind must always depend upon what phenomena we wish to understand or explain. Obviously there are lots of message pathways outside the skin, and these and the messages which they carry must be included as part of the mental system whenever they are relevant” (462). Through this statement, Bateson asserts the mind must be understood as an element of a circuit that extends beyond the body to the environment. For instance, to understand how the mind perceives color, one must also consider the electromagnetic energy the mind, through the eyes and optical nerves, receives. Any sensory contact with the environment necessarily entails the
mind as an essential component in circuits that extend beyond the physical body.

Ultimately, this process extends the mind, through its legacy of ideas, to "immanence" within the ecosystem as a whole (ibid. 460).

Essentially, Bookchin and Bateson arrive at a similar conclusion although from slightly different directions. Both think rationality stretches beyond the individual and effectively melds humans with their environments. In each case, human rationality does not separate humans from all other nature but rather becomes a component in the circuits connecting mind and environment. Thus, the postmodern question of rationality as it operates in this analysis does not entirely discount the term as arbitrary or based on a particular historical/ideological tradition but instead considers it, as Bookchin and Bateson do, an integral aspect of nature. Nonetheless, aspects of Yamashita's novel diverge from Bookchin's characterization of humans and nature when he extrapolates a certain telos from his evolutionary scheme. That is, while one may grant his point that human technology is an aspect of nature as a whole and humans have agency through reason in directing technology, to then assume technology can and will perform a positive role in the continued evolution of the human animal seems problematic—a proviso that Bateson's opinions and Yamashita's novel seem to highlight especially well. For instance, the idea that the "free world" should control the Matacão eludes to this point (Yamashita 96). For Bateson, the primary challenge is not directing technology toward a Bookchinesian telos but rather changing the thought patterns that persist in denying the mind's extension into and dependence upon the environment. In this sense, Bateson and Bookchin both posit a telos of sorts although in two radically different conceptions: the former as a broad consciousness and the latter an almost mechanized utopia.
Moreover, Philip Hefner describes an exacerbating element to the whole issue of rational agency in the natural world when he discusses the relationship of human reason and technology to non-human nature. To begin, Hefner acknowledges a similar concept as Bookchin and Bateson in considering the integral relationship between technology—as an extension of human rationality—and nature. As he explains, there has been a noticeable shift in thinking that points toward "abolishing dualisms, crossing the boundaries between humans and nature, between technology and nature, and between humans and technology" especially in many of the earth and behavioral sciences (663) although not to the extent Bateson envisions as necessary. Hefner then discusses the dissolving of such dualisms as occurring predominantly through the imaginative process of the human mind combined with and in turn directing technological processes.

Nevertheless, he brings up the salient point—what I consider a blind spot, especially in Bookchin's argument—that while the imaginative process liberates, it also engenders vulnerability insofar as the choices to be made by humans with regard to what form and direction technology should adopt (664). While we are free, to one degree or another, to direct technology, we nonetheless have to make such choices within the milieu of a natural world ("first nature") rife with dynamic processes of its own. Thus, the Bookchinean notion of directing nature to its fullest potential becomes a difficult project in two respects. First, we must decide collectively and specifically just what constitutes this telos. And second, even if we are to accomplish the necessary shift in collective consciousness put forward by Bateson, consensus is not always in the best interest of ecology, and worse yet, unforeseen consequences of human intervention must inevitably shroud future discussions concerning technological applications. Given these
conditions, Bookchin’s notion that capital-driven technology lies at the heart of ecological and social ills seems a bit reductive. Simply put, even assuming humans can collectively attain awareness of their ecologically based consciousness and come to a consensus on what is to be done, for every action taken or change made on the scale of molecules to that of entire ecosystems, there will always be the inherent unpredictability and spontaneity of natural processes requiring more technology with similar unpredictability, ad infinitum.

In addition, the hazards of technological processes themselves must be considered for their own sake. Speaking to this point, Ulrich Beck coined the term “risk society” to characterize the ever-deepening complexity of technology and the resulting problem of safe management. As he puts it, this concept “... describes a phase of development of modern society in which the social, political, ecological and individual risks created by the momentum of innovation increasingly elude the control and protective institutions of modern society” (qtd in Franklin 47). Beck formulates an idea that situates problems of technology beyond rational control. Given this view, questions posed to this point concerning what decisions and by whom they are to be made become secondary. Thus, in considering Beck’s concept of a risk society, certain aspects of existence as we know it have been altered. Under Beck’s theory, the notion of technology as a controllable, progressive human force fades as technology itself becomes autonomous from human agency. Epistemological questions centering as they do on knowledge, become secondary to ontological questions that speak to the heart of existence and the nature of our dynamic world, in part because permutations constantly change notions of being and existence.
Through this transformation, science and technology assume a reactionary rather than directive role.

Significantly, Yamashita offers a particularly interesting perspective on the relationship between technology and the non-human world that adds in such factors such as spontaneity and hyper-complexity. For comparison, in Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, the disease that eventually wipes out the human race exemplifies an epistemological vulnerability. In this novel, disease eventually wipes out the human race because despite the technology of the period, no one could seem to stem the epidemic. Questions raised by Shelley’s novel center on, as McHale puts it, typically modernist epistemological issues such as “... the problem of ‘unknowability’ or the limits of knowledge” (*Post* 9). In contrast, Yamashita’s magical realist construction presents an imaginative and striking characterization of ecological issues as well as humankind’s function regarding such issues that Shelley’s novel does not, particularly given the former’s place in a postmodern framework. Most importantly, Yamashita’s novel does not posit cures for ecological crises as simply matters of gaining more knowledge or increasing technological application but rather illustrates such crises as, to a certain extent, both resulting from and informed by technological applications. Aside from humans and technology exacerbating ecological problems, the non-human world operates through such unpredictable and dynamic processes that given the best intentions in technological applications, results may not necessarily be what are expected or desired. Rather than knowledge as such forming the basis of questions, issues of being or existence emerge as rational bases dissolve.
While *Through the Arc* most certainly posits epistemological questions, ontological issues dominate. Yamashita’s novel offers a complex model of the nature/human/technology nexus that calls into question basic assumptions concerning this tripartite relationship not merely insofar as knowledge operates between the realms, but more importantly in the way these ostensibly separate spheres of being overlap and contest distinctions. Once again, Bookchin’s inclusion of technology under the overarching theme of “nature” seems appropriate and in accordance with this characterization. The difference comes about in the bi-directional relationship of these realms that in turn problematizes his notion of a telos associated with technology. And perhaps just as importantly, Yamashita’s novel offers a remarkably apt means for expressing the complexity of this relationship not only on the level of the nature of knowledge itself, but also on the level of the understanding of being. That is, the magical elements in the novel serve to reveal the unpredictability of natural processes as a result of and in response to the effects of technology. The point is not so much that the magical elements have a specifically predictive quality, but rather they offer a means for conceptualizing, through non-empirical examples, the variable character of ontological issues as they relate to the core of being rather than strictly empirical knowledge. Given the unpredictable quality ascribed to nature in this novel, one sees human agency as directing technology while nature responds in new, capricious ways. This describes a two-way process and in turn raises questions such as what is this world, or what are humans in relation to it?

Yamashita’s novel, set in the Brazilian Rain Forest, centers on the discovery of the Matacão, a plate of metamorphosed garbage regurgitated by the earth. This material
turns out to be valuable in a myriad of technological applications including the
reproduction of natural bird feathers used in a therapeutic, acupressure-type manner for a
multitude of ills. These two aspects of the novel are striking in that they speak directly to
Hefner's comments describing the “techno-mirror” which shows us what we want most
from tools (technology): to extract resources and cure disease, both as quasi-religious
activities (657). However, these discoveries in the novel— in conjunction with results
both predicted and unforeseen—raise typically postmodern questions regarding ecology,
socioeconomic concerns, and technology's capabilities as well as weaknesses. An
obvious illustration comes as the commodification of both the Matacão and bird feathers
leads to further destruction of rain forest as well as bird populations. In fact the latter
become endangered through the commodification and exploitation of their feathers and
ultimately decimated because they are found to harbor typhus-carrying lice. Moreover,
the production of Matacão plastic feathers complicates these issues as these
technologically produced substitutes spontaneously elicit adverse affects.

Moreover, this novel illustrates a broader theme—in large part possible because
of its magical realist makeup—that demonstrates the relationship between nature,
humans, and technology as cyclical and co-effective rather than predictably linear in a
causal sense. The traditional Enlightenment dichotomy of technology/reason as opposed
to subjectivity and contingency breaks down in Yamashita's work. In other words, this
novel represents nature not as a force that yields to technology but rather as a dynamic
process that reacts to the application of human technology in unpredictable ways. In one
respect the composition of the Matacão, as a result of the metamorphosis and
redistribution of garbage through a geological process, illustrates this notion. In the
novel, a dialectical development operates that lacks the traditional telos associated with earlier metaphysical models, as it contradicts Bookchin's notion of dialectical naturalism and the potential for ever-increasing progress toward wholeness. His notion of "logical evolution" seems to be couched in terms such as 'development' that have dangerous latitude for interpretation as well as a tendency toward a simplified, unidirectional trajectory. John A. Livingston articulates this problematic term as he explains that in a traditional sense,

... development means the gradual unfolding or realization of an organism, a community – or even an idea – toward a richer, finer, fuller, higher, or more mature state of being [while] in the contemporary technoculture, the word "development" is used to describe land speculation, land subdivision, construction, and the work of the wrecker's ball on cherished old buildings in the city core. "Development" is also used to describe the advancement of the exotic ideology. It represents the crushing and scarification of forests, the mutilation and corruption of waterways, the savaging and toxification of living soils. (60)

Livingston's characterization of development contrasts with Bookchin's insistence on the use of human reason and technological extension as an instrument for furthering natural development or, as he puts it, fostering "logical development" (Philosophy 17). Also, Livingston's comments speak toward the particular direction of consciousness Bateson sees as needing to be altered. The crucial aspects of the complex relationship between nature and humans – and by extension technology – that Bookchin glosses over are the inseparability of social, political, and economic realms as well as the indeterminacy, from a human perspective, of natural processes. In so far as the narrator explains, immediately
following the discovery of this new resource, “a few expressed genuine concern that the free world should maintain control of the Matacao” (Yamashita 96). The discovery of the Matacao elicits various responses regarding its potentially beneficial as well as harmful uses yet Yamashita offers a comment that relates directly to Bookchin and Bateson’s assertions. Yamashita’s satirical statement emphasizes how euphemistic, abstract terms function in the guise of coherent substantiations. By what standards do we determine who constitutes the ‘free world’ and who does not? And again, Bateson appears to have a more tenable position than Bookchin in his assertion that first we must rethink and redefine the ‘mind’ in terms of eco-circuits. This shift in consciousness would certainly assuage some of the issues Livingston brings up concerning perceptions of development. Such a shift does not operate on the level of arbitrary socioeconomic groups but rather through a collective broadening of consciousness. Toward these ends, Yamashita’s novel offers an ecological allegory, through markedly magical or irreducible elements, that illustrates this inseparability between the economic and social realms; however it also underscores the unpredictability of nature as it is acted upon by and reacts to such forces. While a Batesonian transformation of consciousness may alleviate hegemonic ideology, it nevertheless cannot take into account this inescapable unpredictability.

Yamashita’s novel emphasizes the relationship between nature and humankind as constantly in flux thus preempting efforts to direct nature to its “. . . most fully developed, rational ‘what-should-be’” (Bookchin Philosophy 21). While the novel illustrates humankind’s interaction with nature as a dialectical process of sorts, the end results do not necessarily mark technologically directed progress toward some particular potentiality or ultimately more rational form. Instead, this novel elucidates the disjunction
between notions concerning the benefits of technology as juxtaposed with the reality of the difficulty in completely foreseeing and understanding the possible effects. In addition, the interrelatedness of the socioeconomic and ecological realms, when combined with the mentioned indeterminacy, creates a process of sorts wherein each reinforces the other.

Once again, one of the central elements of Yamashita's novel that complicates a notion of nature realizing a rational telos is the discovery of the Mataçã. The description of its formation varies from many of the other typical issues raised concerning nonbiodegradable substances in landfills. Rather than the realistic proposition that such material will remain essentially unchanged for millions of years. Yamashita gives nature a more active role in its response to humankind's pollution. The Earth actually transforms it into a material re-deposited through geological processes and subsequently exploited in the service of technology well before its origin is understood—long before epistemological understanding. From this perspective, one could argue that this mass of garbage has in some respects fulfilled its potentiality in that it has become a material—albeit in an unforeseen manner—that will ultimately be of use to technology as a substitute for other natural materials.

This specific example from the novel complicates Bookchin's notion of dialectical naturalism. Initially upon discovery of this material, a large American company (GGG Corporation) seeks to exploit it as a natural resource. Its usefulness in multiple industries from medicine to aeronautics would at first seem a positive result guided by reason. In a Bookchinese sense one could interpret the metamorphosed garbage, when reclaimed and put back into the service of technology, as fulfilling its
rational potentiality. After all, this material would revolutionize many aspects of human life because of its special properties. The narrator observes that

In the next few years, Matacaö plastic would infiltrate every crevice of modern life – plants, facial and physical remakes and appendages, shoes, clothing, jewelry, toys, every sort of machine from electro-domestic to high-tech, buildings, furniture – in short, the myriad of commercial products with which the civilized world adorns itself. (143)

Yet the discovery of this material and its subsequent value leads to further destruction of the rain forests in a second Amazonian gold rush of sorts. The technological advances that promise to utilize this material in such a manner as to ameliorate reliance on other natural materials ironically raise ecological concerns. Hence, while the Matacaö is a fictional, magical construction, it nonetheless illustrates issues that parallel real concerns such as the exploitation of resources, and perhaps more importantly, the question of who decides how best to direct the application of technology.

For instance, people as well as flora and fauna are displaced and destroyed in an effort to exploit this newly discovered material. In this respect, one cannot easily differentiate between what Bookchin considers a proper versus improper use of technology. While it is important to note that he considers ‘post-scarcity’ not as ‘...mindless affluence’ but rather ‘...a sufficiency of technical development that leaves individuals free to select their needs autonomously and to obtain the means to satisfy them' (qtd. in Ferkiss *Nature* 175), certain problems with this characterization remain. One cannot separate the socioeconomic forces that drive technology and technology itself, especially when considering by whom the means are controlled. As David Watson
points out, “the gigantic technological structures, the reorganized forms of life, and the very modification of the experience of reality itself, are all considered necessary ‘trade-offs’ for the industrial bribe” (485). Therefore, this observation destabilizes Bookchin’s concept of a dialectical naturalism that can be rationally and technologically driven to realize a ‘higher’ potentiality and social equality. The social, economic, and technological realms are so interdependent and interrelated that determining the trajectory of any single aspect becomes virtually impossible.

This economic dynamic prevails in Yamashita’s novel as well. Not only is the codependent and mutually affective bond between these spheres emblematized by the Matacão and its socioeconomic implications; it is also illustrated in other ways regarding interactions between nature, society and technology that produce unexpected results. As Watson continues, “technology—actually an interlocking system of apparatus, rational techniques, and organization—doesn’t merely follow design but changes the world in a systemic, ecological way” (ibid. 485). As with technology, nature is just as complex and even Bookchin acknowledges this point as he observes, “The complexity of organic and climatic processes still defies scientific control, just as the marketplace’s drive to expand still defies social control” (“Will” par 35). Evidence of the former issue appears in the novel through the formation of the Matacão and Matacão plastic bird feathers (first therapeutic then harmful), and the latter issue surfaces when GGG Corporation bases its business decisions purely on economic factors. These illustrations emphasize the very much intertwined and unpredictable, uncontrollable, and inseparable forces of nature, society, and technology, as they remain essential within the experience of such dynamics
today. Moreover, one cannot consider technology autonomous from this process or able to be applied as a corrective force with easily determined results.

Despite Yamashita’s characterization of this nexus as contingent upon its very mixture of forces and thus not, as Bookchin would have it, easily directed for beneficial means if only informed by rationality, she nonetheless implies the importance of volition in partially determining the trajectory of technology. Notably, Yamashita illuminates the tenuous relationship between nature and socioeconomic concerns in discussing initial reactions to the Matacao. As the narrator explains, “Those of the supernatural bent believed that unknown powers that were life-giving and rejuvenating emanated from the Matacao and that these powers could be used to benefit humanity or wreak havoc, depending on who was able to harness them” (96). Within this characterization, the Matacao is seen as not only a potential resource, but also as a potential source for either beneficial or harmful ends.

But more significantly, the reference to the need for control by the “free world” exposes the problem with the concept of a logically driven, socially homogenous decision-making body. Yamashita implies the inseparability of socioeconomic disparity from the realm of technological application and economic use of resources. Therefore, the matter is not simply one of gathering a consensus as a first step to directing technology: rather, the disparity between the ideal of equality and the social reality of inequality with regard to the decision-making process poses an issue that precludes any unified discussion of what may or may not be the proper application of technology and resource use. For example, Tweep’s multi-national GGG Corporation first establishes a monopoly on bird feathers then on Matacao plastic products: “GGG’s marketing strategy
was pure. You will recall that before J.B. arrived, GGG had no product on which to test its strategy; therefore, GGG developed a strategy that simply created a miracle product that would bring the greatest returns if GGG could control all the markets relating to that product. GGG had wrapped up the entire marketplace” (Yamashita 112). And then subsequently, “The new technology associated with Matacão plastic would rapidly become the wave of the future, and GGG Enterprises was definitely leading this wave with most of the technology under wraps” (ibid. 141). Once again, Hefner’s comments regarding decision-making are appropriate insofar as having choices immediately summons the need to choose between options. In this respect, having the liberating capability for technological options ironically puts constraints on any given decision in light of political or ecological decisions. But worse yet, there are additional implications in both Hefner’s remarks as well as Yamashita’s text. Socioeconomic forces are inseparable from the way in which resources are utilized: one cannot simply separate technology as a means from nature as an end. Any attempts to create this separation further complicate the process and GGG’s capital-driven strategy starkly illustrates this progression.

In combination with the inseparability of socioeconomic forces and resource use comes the issue of the unforeseen effects of combining technology with nature. This combination’s inherent inconsistency as perceived through the lens of human reason further complicates the existing problem caused by disparate socioeconomic pressures. For instance, even if GGG directed its study and use of the Matacão material solely toward beneficial ends (as agreed upon democratically), the ultimately harmful effects of the feathers and eventual disintegration of the material by bacteria were unforeseeable.
Despite the idealistic Bookchinese notion of a truly 'democratic' system by which the population as whole—rather than multinational corporations such as GGG—consider the proper types and applications of technology to nature in making decisions, nature does not necessarily operate by the same rules as collective human reason. Hence, the Matacao and its products/effects subvert two premises of Bookchin's reasoning: first, that a truly and universally egalitarian democratic process is achievable, and that reason under such conditions will tend to direct the application of technology to nature in a beneficial manner (although standards by which these are considered beneficial are themselves subject to debate). Not only does the Matacao illustrate the problems inherent in this line of reasoning in terms of the Matacao industry and its ultimate material disintegration, but other aspects of the novel underscore such issues as well.

Sociopolitical issues aside, the discovery of a certain area within the rainforest gives just as austere an illustration, if not more so, of the fecundity and unpredictability of nature. As the narrator describes, this area resembled an enormous parking lot, filled with aircraft and vehicles of every sort of description. The planes and cars had been abandoned for several decades, and the undergrowth and overgrowth of the criss-crossing lianas had completely engulfed everything. On one end of the field, a number of the vehicles seemed to be slipping into a large pit of grey, sticky goop, a major component of which was discovered to be napalm. (99)

Such an area in the middle of the rainforest operates as an effective metaphor for the way in which nature reclaims or appropriates technology. In this respect, nature possesses an agency similar to that of humankind: it does not merely submit to technology but rather
incorporates it. This is not to say that such areas are immune to pollution but rather that
they are able, to a certain extent, to absorb human detritus and technological castoffs
within their systems and actually create new environments—syncretic hybrids. The
description of the Matacão questions pollution in a traditional sense. Conventionally,
pollution is existentially foreign in that it is an intrusion of unnatural materials into the
natural world and generally destructive to a given environment. The novel’s ‘junkyard.’
on the other hand, illustrates a process by which pollution contributes to the natural world
insofar as it becomes part of the ecosystem rather than acting as a destructive force.
Moreover, the narrator’s comment that this area “resembled a large parking lot” clearly
illustrates traditional progress operating in reverse. Generally, parking lots displace and
denude natural areas whereas in the novel’s case, the jungle subsumes the parking lot.

In addition to the basic issue of pollution, this metaphorical instrument created by
Yamashita becomes even stronger as the narration progresses to the discovery of animals
that have adapted to this rainforest junkyard. Once again using magical realist elements,
the author creates an ecosystem whereby non-human nature assimilates artifacts and cast-
offs of technological progress:

What was most interesting about the discovery of the rain forest parking lot was
the way in which nature had moved to accommodate and make use of it. The
entomologists were shocked to discover that their rare butterfly only nested in the
vinyl seats of Fords and Chevrolets and that their exquisite reddish coloring was
actually due to a steady diet of hydrated ferric oxide, or rusty water. (100)
The description of this ecosystem parallels human adaptation and appropriation of nature.
The butterflies, as well as other animals such as mice that only nest in tailpipes, assume a
human-like agency and adapt themselves to thrive in a specific environment. When such artificial remnants become a natural habitat, the traditional hierarchy between human technology and the non-human world is called into question.

In an even more significant illustration of the techno-nature blending that operates within the novel, a troupe of monkeys is discovered living in some of the old bomber planes of the junkyard. This example extends beyond the use of technology to sociological questions and underscores the previous discussion of the inseparability of these realms. As the narrator once again describes.

One of the more exciting studies being undertaken was the documentation of the social behavior of a tribe of monkeys that had established territory in the carcasses of the bomber planes and their relation to a second tribe whose territory was decidedly the fossil remains of former gas-guzzling automotive monsters. A number of monkeys' skulls were found riddled with machine-gun bullets, which gave credence to the theory that the tribe established in the bombers had somehow triggered the mechanisms that lead to their omnipotence in the monkey world.

(101)

This example erases the distinction between humans and nature as well as reinforces the inseparability of sociological concerns from the use of technology. In considering this illustration, are humans the dominant species because they can create such technology even if it is destructive? Or rather, are humans just another aspect of nature, their technology notwithstanding? In other words, if monkeys are considered rationally less sophisticated than humans yet are able to employ human technology, have they advanced, or are humans more animalistic than they care to consider? A third possibility may be
that humans and the natural entities in the novel use technology simply to gain evolutionary advantages over competitors. This last concept describes the novel's monkey tribe, butterflies that only nest in vinyl seats and mice that live in tailpipes. These possibilities, while diverse, nonetheless reinforce the overarching point that hierarchies between nature, society, and technology are unstable and the effects of various combinations unpredictable.

Yamashita's novel combines both human and non-human realms in a chaos theory of sorts. In fact, this theory has a foundation in ecological circles and highlights nature's unpredictability rather than a directive process of continual organization. As Donald Worster points out, "For centuries we have assumed that nature, despite a few appearances the contrary, is a perfectly predictable system of linear, rational order" but that view is changing because scientists are now considering that "the world is more complex than we imagined. . . ." (286). While some proponents of chaos theory may consider it as operating separately from the human animal and its effects, Yamashita's characterization of ecological processes hints at a type of chaos that includes within its processes humans and their socio-techno constructions. The novel does not portray technology as a system of organized progression, but rather as moments of reason interacting and in turn being acted upon by nature to create new conditions and ecosystems heretofore unexpected.

However, Yamashita does not present technology as merely one of the chaotic (though natural) ecological factors. Rather, this novel highlights both the inclusion of human effects on the environment as well as the unpredictability of nature's tendency toward chaos. In essence, this once again destabilizes the Bookchinean concept that the
rationally directed application of technology can lead to a proper ecological evolution. First, any concept of ‘proper’ evolution would have to be a human construct and thus necessarily problematic as a universal notion; second, a true consensus is idealistic and unattainable; and last, given the natural tendency toward ecological disorganization (not in a pejorative sense but rather in a non-anthropocentric sense), the idea that one can apply technology in a logically instrumental manner is naïve. While particular technologies may help us to quantify to a certain extent the relative changes in ecosystems, they cannot as tools be separated from human interests—social or economic—nor can their full effects be accurately determined until after their application. These two aspects open large areas of interpretation and speculation that void notions of technology’s invariable efficacy.

Notably, the nature of the Matacão itself calls into question the first proposition. Given the assumption of a direction of ecological evolution that is preferable, does this mean that the metamorphosed collective garbage of population centers has, in being thus transformed into a new, useful, material, progressed to its logical fulfillment? If so, then this conclusion parallels the idea that nature’s castoffs such as dead plant material and animal corpses have as well reached such a progression in that they have, as with the Matacão, been transformed into a (humanly) useful substances such as soil, fertilizer, and petroleum. The key – and problem with the logic – is that the concept of a particular potentiality as a goal is a human construction and does not consider the interrelatedness of other factors such as the not-so-useful byproducts of both petroleum products in the actual world and Matacão processing castoffs in the novel. Once again, the multiplicity and interrelatedness of technological effects comes to the surface in Yamashita’s piece.
As the narrator observes, "Then there was the growing concern over the mining process of Matacão plastic. The chemical runoff from GGG’s secret technique had been collected and analyzed and found to cause genetic mutations in rats after five generations" (160).

Not only the metamorphosis of garbage into a unique material but also the harmful by-products of its processing offer illustrations of the peripheral effects of technology. As with the current petroleum and mining industries, GGG’s exploitation of the special plastic involves unforeseen, or at least unintended, consequences that must be dealt with yet cannot be easily categorized as logical evolutionary steps.

Not only does the commodification of the Matacão offer an illustration of the interrelated issues between the socioeconomic/techno and natural realms but the same use of another resource seems to round out the notion of inseparability. In parallel with the discovery of the Matacão is Pena’s use of feathers as a quasi-acupressure type of therapy. Even his name is emblematic because pena means “feather” or “pen” in Portuguese.

Beyond the connotation of a feather or quill as a writing implement, the juxtaposition of a feather as a non-human element with the pen—itself a form of technology—once again engenders notions of indigenous and technological hybridity. Additionally, Mané’s discovery of the feather’s power is paradoxical in that it is a ‘natural’ process that requires no application of technology as such while one could nonetheless consider it a technology of sorts. In fact, this element in the novel initially contrasts well with the Matacão because of this characterization. While his friends “ . . teased him, calling him ‘Mané Feather.’ . . the feather, he claimed, was better than smoking or drinking. It had worked wonders on his sleepless children and was completely natural” (18). While this contrast appears to distinguish technology from nature, the feather and the Matacão
eventually merge through socioeconomic processes—the commodification of Matacão plastic feathers—and ultimately succumb to natural processes as bacteria consume their constituent material thus reinforcing the inseparability of the former two realms of existence.

Moreover, Mané operates as a symbol of those displaced by the discovery and subsequent exploitation of the Matacão. Early in the story we learn that “. . . the soil over his farm and for many miles in every direction was scrubbed away. It had begun with the fires, the chainsaws and the government bulldozers. Before that, Pena had wandered the forest like the others—fishing, tapping rubber and collecting Brazil nuts” (Yamashita 16). The socioeconomic implications here are obvious and probably not too far from actual real-world instances. And economic concerns displace Mané once again because the Matacão makes farming untenable yet serves as a tourist attraction. Initially, the government offers him and others like him “low-cost, riverside condominiums built on the edges of the Matacão” only to condemn them and yield to private American franchises (ibid. 17). Despite Mané’s ultimate rise to “feather guru,” technology’s double-edged nature in terms of resource-related social problems is overt and emblematic of a lack of Bookchin’s ‘collective’ democratic decision-making process – an issue already revealed as idealistic at best.

The expanded discovery of the therapeutic effects of feathers, as with the Matacão’s special properties and universal applicability, causes its commodification. Tweep, the three-armed executive in the GGG Corporation and the man responsible for the company’s exploitation of the Matacão, eventually contacts Pena to discuss ‘featherology’ and consider its market applications. As well, Michelle Mabelle, a French
ornithologist with three breasts, accompanies him. The telling aspect of this trio is in the combination of what they symbolize. Tweep emblematizes the capitalistic techno machine, Pena symbolizes a more regional, low-tech subsistence existence, and Mabelle epitomizes scientific inquiry and taxonomy (and, as will become apparent later, an ecological concern). Moreover, Mabelle offers an increasingly complex illustration through her marriage to Tweep. Her image as a life-giving entity—a "mother Earth" of sorts with three breasts—when combined with Tweep’s techno machine hints at an initially harmonious marriage of technology and nature similar to Bookchin’s proposition. Three arms of technology compliment three breasts of biological sustenance and result in the triplet ideals of the French Revolution: “J.B. wrapped all three arms around [Michelle]. She was pregnant, and it looked like triplets. Liberté. Égalité. Fraternité” (Yamashita 161). However as with real world marriages between technology and nature, ideological differences result in divorce. Yet, this is not to say these spheres are inherently separate. Instead, this example emphasizes the notion that agendas which avoid recognizing the interrelatedness of these realms lead to conflict. Hence, these three characters ultimately represent a combination of concerns that, as previously discussed, are inseparable but not always compatible given conflicting human choices and agendas.

In addition, Yamashita comments on reason and its inseparability from economic concerns through the character of Tweep. To begin, Tweep’s three arms seem to speak to the idea of increased efficiency so crucial to technology and its concomitant notion of progress stemming from the Enlightenment. On a surface level, rather than the typical self-consciousness that would be associated with such a physical oddity, Tweep views his
third arm as a distinct advantage, or more specifically, as progressive. The narrator
observes,

... J. B. was far from ashamed of his extra appendage and only kept it out of sight
to prevent hysterical reactions from observers on drugs or those prone to wild
hallucinations. He accepted his third arm as another might accept ESP, or an
addition of 128k to their random access or the invention of the wheel. As far as J.
B. was concerned, he had entered a new genetic plane in the species. ... He was a
better model, the wave of the future. (30)

These notions parallel the concept of development and progress as noted by Bookchin
and Livingston earlier. That is, Tweep considers himself as a step in the process of a
"more mature" state of being as well as an effective agent of development in terms of
efficiency (although his lack of concern for resource exploitation simultaneously departs
from and contests Bookchin's telos).

Perhaps even subtler yet more telling is the special method of "trialectics" that
Tweep pioneers. Through this method of problem solving, options are sorted into three
possible solutions wherein the middle option is always chosen (56). This is an extension
of the typical dialectic model as proposed by Hegel and applied by Marx. Just as Hegel
viewed the dialectical process as a journey toward truth as well as the epitome of the
philosophic project, Tweep considers his trialectics as an improvement of this process.
"He was beginning to think that trialectics would eventually revolutionize modern
thought and philosophy, and he envisioned, when the time came, backing up his decision
by a firm handhold in the Theory of Trialectics" (56). In a sense, Yamashita appears to be
criticizing certain traditions of Western thought not only regarding an emphasis on
progress, but also on certain philosophical methods such as reason and its purported efficacy as applied to socioeconomic issues. Tweep's theory of trialectics is not an improvement on the methodology of Hegel's dialectics, but rather merely a progression, in a narrow sense, designed to improve the capitalist system at the expense of natural resources. Thus, Yamashita alludes to the notion, in contrast to Bookchin, that reason is interwoven to such an extent in Western conceptions of progress that its employment as a tool for directing technology toward 'good' ends is unrealistic. Tweep's method appears rational in that he sorts problems (taxonomy) and always chooses the middle option (consistency), yet the entire process is capital-driven. After applying his process of trialectics to GGG's problem of finding that perfect $9.99 product the narrator explains.

J. B. sat at one of the many three-terminal settings and punched in the standard input. He could hardly believe the line-up across the monitors. This 9.99 item actually met all the requirements for shape, packaging size, clothing and accessory development; matched the psychological and philosophical makeup of a wide range of prospective buyers; collaborated sympathetically with a high percentile of patented and patent-pending inventions; and met all the short-term and long-term planning projections for investment, loan and taxes. (57)

His trialectical process culminates in finding the ultimate product for GGG to market: Mané's feather. Hence, the 'progression' from Enlightenment dialectics to Tweep's trialectics results in a decision making process even more firmly rooted in market concerns. In this instance, the use of reason does not guarantee reasonable decisions regarding the use of technology or ecological issues because Tweep's product leads to the decimation of bird populations.
Mabelle's involvement with Tweep shows how concerns in the form of health issues are also bound to technology. As the narrator acutely observes, "It was announced that [Mabelle] had been chosen as the first recipient of the GGG Fellowship for Scientific Studies in Ornithology and the Relationship of the Feather to Human Health. She was all aflutter with talk about hummingbirds. But Pena understood intuitively that her studies had moved onto topics tertiary" (75) (as in Tweep’s three arms). Additionally, the dualistic characteristic of technology – in the form of scientific inquiry – becomes apparent in that while Tweep employs Mabelle as a consultant with the ultimate ends of marketing feathers, she is concerned with the study of birds for their intrinsic value as well as their relationship to human health. Even more telling is the rhetoric used by Tweep regarding ecological concerns. In response to such concerns he asserts, "we want to bring people back to nature, back to health. We want them to be ecologically responsible, too. Every time a person puts a feather to his ear, picks up the primary of a rare tanager or a scarlet ibis, they’ve got to think about the birds, about nature" (113). It is precisely this social/ ecological ideology from a company with resource-based concerns that underscores the complexity and interrelatedness of socioeconomic and ecological issues.

Notably, this relationship as symbolized by the trio of characters is not static but rather dynamic. This is evidenced through subsequent events concerning feathers, Matacão plastic, and human health. One of the first changes to take place is the ever-lessening effectiveness of the feathers. Mané begins to notice that it takes the feathers of increasingly rarer birds to achieve the therapeutic effects: "[He] had once found the proper balance of relaxation and excitement in the simple feathers of the parrot or pigeon.
but lately, he had discovered that his needs were met only by the more sophisticated feathers of rarer birds" (121). Something has changed yet no one knows why.

Interestingly, the decrease in feather efficacy appears to occur as Mané becomes firmly entrenched in Tweep's capital machine—a phenomenon with dual implications. First, it emphasizes the spontaneity and unpredictability of certain natural phenomena, and also metaphorically illustrates the seemingly perpetual increase in human needs and wants.

Speaking to this last point, GGG begins to manufacture feathers out of Matacão plastic, thus attempting to replicate nature with artifice and supply the growing demand for feathers. And once again, the themes of economically driven technology and ecological unpredictability arise in terms of commodification, resource exploitation, and unforeseen results. In reference to the latter issue the narrator explains, “Further investigation revealed that the natural magnetism of the Matacão plastic could in certain circumstances, feather rubbing being primary, produce hallucinations” (197). This discovery also reinforces the inseparability of the technological, social, natural, and economic realms because all are affected by it.

As the novel closes, Yamashita creates yet two more twists that operate to further underscore this notion of natural processes that derive power from and extend beyond not only technological control but also basic human reason. First, there is an outbreak of typhus that wipes out ten percent of the human population. But what is worse is that birds are determined to be the carrier of the parasitic vector for this disease. And of course, the craze fueled by “featherology” is what truly amplifies the effects of this pathogen. In response, a massive campaign to eradicate the disease-carrying avian lice is launched. Planes fog the rain forest with DDT and ultimately decimate the entire Brazilian bird
population. Not only do humans and birds succumb to a natural aberration, but Matacão plastic also falls victim to a natural pathogen: a particular strain of bacteria. As the narrator describes, “The Matacão, too, was slowly but definitely corroding, as was everything else made of Matacão plastic” (207). However, given that bacteria has adapted to feed on the Matacão plastic, one must once again question distinctions between the natural and unnatural because without the plastic substrate, the bacteria probably would not have proliferated. Nonetheless, while one may debate the ‘naturalness’ of this organism, in the end microorganisms that spontaneously appear are able to absorb humankind’s technological artifacts and, because of the interrelatedness of the natural, social, economic, and technological realms, seriously alter these spheres.

Ultimately, Yamashita’s novel is not necessarily an assertion of nihilism but rather an emphatic declaration of the complexity inherent in the relationship between human and non-human spheres as well as indeterminacy of effects resulting from actions in any single or combination of spheres. With respect to the allegorical makeup of this novel, the most significant statement that seems to emerge is not so much a biocentric vision, but rather the need for realization with respect to the role humans play in their capacity as a capricious element of an overall capricious Nature. This is essentially the aspect that contradicts Bookchin’s assertion that humans must, are in fact destined to, manage and direct what they collectively determine to be nature’s proper unfolding. Nature with a capital ‘N’ includes humans but to then assume rationality on the part of the latter can and will direct the remaining non-human elements (which are essentially inseparable from humans) is a bit generous, to say the least.
At the same time, Yamashita resists a more radical deep ecology standpoint. The novel portrays of humans more as an important, vulnerable, while at the same time potentially (and actually) destructive force. Perhaps Mumford’s view on technology and civilization best articulates one of the main points that Yamashita’s novel makes. As Ferkiss comments, Mumford consistently believed “... technology and civilization act upon each other; but while technology is all-important, in the last analysis it is people who decide” (*Nature* 177)—and therein lies both the problem and solution. This statement points to one of the essential elements in Yamashita’s characterization of the human/technology/nature complex that problematizes a simplistic ideal of technology’s capability for liberation. Moreover, this element of human choice works to further complicate the already manifold and co-deterministic nature of this inseparable, tripartite construct.
Chapter 3: Towards a Technological Ontology

Any new service environment, such as those created by the alphabet or railways or motor cars or telegraph or radio, deeply modifies the very nature and image of people who use it.

--Marshall McLuhan
Laws of Media

In the previous chapter, conflation of the natural/human/technological realms emerges primarily through the ways Yamashita's novel contests the dominance or priority of one sphere over another. The interrelatedness, interdependence, and co-affectiveness of these spheres problematize traditional binaries or hierarchies. In this respect, conventional ontological notions based on an Enlightenment metaphysical model become destabilized; rationality, hierarchies, and centers of stable meaning lose their power in schematizing reality. As an extension of the previous discussion, the following analysis will engage technology specifically in its functions as a dynamic process whereby the already vague distinctions between the mentioned realms—nature, humans, and technology—become even more ambiguous. In Yamashita's novel, technology in terms of scientific applications to media, culture, and resources infiltrates the human and natural spheres to such an extent that the previously discussed melding of traditionally separate realms increases in degree. Ultimately, the ontological landscape once again changes radically as questions concerning what is real and what is not arise within multiple facets of the lebenswelt in the novel.

In Chapter One, I have already discussed the telenovela in terms of homogenizing and superimposing the notion of a unified national, cultural collective. However, in looking at this phenomenon from another angle, a different yet just as significant process emerges. Yamashita's "Author's note" at the beginning of the novel not only shows how
the telenovela ostensibly “standardizes” or “defines” a national character, but also implies a significant melding process beyond nation and culture. The physicality of the TV, located either in a church or plaza, immediately evokes notions of technological amalgamation into the mytho/religious (church) as well as the social (plaza) spheres. In the church for instance, the traditional focal point or gravitational center was the clergy and their message, whereas the television now serves as a draw. Images on the walls and in the stained glass relinquish some of their authority to the images on a vacuum tube.

Toward these ends, McHale mentions the postmodernist characteristic of the television as figuratively or literally objects from another world or some other order of being and quotes Rushdie as he remarks, “‘[T]he television in the corner is a kind of miraculous being, bringing a kind of revelation . . . television is what we now have for archangels’” (Constructing 130). This new ‘archangel’ (or demiurge among multiple technological demiurges) alters consciousness and an understanding of the nature of existence as much if not more than any Jesuit missionary doctrine: McLuhan’s epigraph at the beginning of this chapter characterizes the process accurately.

This conflation of myth and technology emerges most strikingly and literally through a particular image in the novel. Dona Maria Creuza, mother of the invalid Gilberto to whom Chico Paco is a friend, considers the Mataçao as a divine place. She initially learns of this phenomenon on the television (a significant event in itself) and becomes so taken with notions of its ostensible divinity that “she had held a rosary in one hand and had placed her other hand on her television and prayed to the small saddled figure of St. George” that her grandson Gilberto would regain his ability to walk (Yamashita 26). In this case, the television is a direct line to the godly Mataçao. It is a
technological conduit to the heavenly place she feels holds the power to cure her grandson. Whether she lacks the financial resources to take Gilberto to a medical specialist or the technology to cure him does not exist is irrelevant because she ironically taps a mythical resource through a technological artifact. Moreover, the vision of her with a rosary in one hand and the other hand on the television creates an image whereby she epitomizes the confluence of the mythical, human, and technological. Just as the television functions as a techno-conduit to the divine, she acts as a human channel between technology and myth—a medium of sorts.

Chico Paco also regards the Matacão as a divine place and, because of his love for Dona Maria Creuza and Gilberto, embarks on a pilgrimage to this newly discovered phenomenon and constructs a shrine in honor of St. George. As a result, Gilberto regains his ability to walk and Chico Paco’s pilgrimage underscores the Matacão’s godly nature. Yet this event, as with Mané’s featherology, becomes infused with varied socioeconomic and technologic influences. Immediately after Chico Paco builds the shrine, controversy arises over its legality in terms of land use. Initially, the government designates the Matacão a national park and decides to level the shrine. This incident, just as with Dona Maria Creuza and the television, offers a metaphor for the ubiquitous mixing and inseparability of the techno/nature/human realms. As the bulldozer nears the shrine, “Chico Paco bowed his head sadly while an enormous crowd watched in painful silence. The TV cameras watched, too, and far away, so did Gilberto and Grandmother Maria Creuza, who were in turn watched by other TV cameras. . . . The bulldozer grunted and smoked angrily, but it could not push the shrine over” (Yamashita 50). This short passage first illustrates the bulldozer of technology—authorized, constructed, and fueled by
rationality—as it tries to tear down a mythic symbol but cannot. Similar to the television in the church, technology cannot eradicate the mythic but rather the two exist in a nonhierarchical relationship. Furthermore, Gilberto and Dona Maria Creuza watch the event on television, while television cameras in turn watch them: a reciprocity that emphasizes technological infiltration into the life world. This offers a progression of this process when compared to the first example with Dona Maria Creuza, the television, and the rosary. That is, in the first case, she acts as a medium between technology and myth whereas in the latter example she becomes part of the event itself through television. Just as the metaphysical existence of the Matacão resides in the images she sees on television, her existential being, for those who watch her, exists in technologically produced images.

The shrine incident further mixes technology with the mythical. The bulldozer cannot destroy the shrine and thus reinforces perceptions of the Matacão’s divine nature despite the subsequent discovery that the large amount of scrap iron in the base of the shrine explains its permanent affixation to the magnetic Matacão. As well, Chico Paco’s success as a pilgrim vaults him to fame and creates a pilgrimage industry. In this instance, radio becomes the medium through which prayers enter the technological and economic realms: “After some inquiries, Chico Paco soon got a hold of a fledgling station which broadcast country music near the Matacão. Presently, Radio Chico was on the air with country music and a new show called ‘Answered Prayers’ (Yamashita 128). Through Radio Chico, Yamashita makes a satirical comment on televangelism, and at its base, the inseparability once again of the mythic, technological, and economic spheres. As Radio Chico’s success grows, the illustration of this indissoluble mixture becomes even more evident. The narrator comments.
There were bills to be paid, accounting to oversee, meetings to attend, newsletters to edit, plans to develop. Then too, there were religious leaders to see or placate, some of them irate, some oozing with religious unction, some looking for an eight o’clock spot. Overnight, Chico Paco was faced with an operation that was bursting at the seams, expanding in every direction without control. (Yamashita 163)

While the majority of this passage details the overt economic elements of his techno/religious operation, the last sentence echoes Bookchin’s comment mentioned in Chapter 2 concerning how the marketplace’s drive to expand “defies social control” (“Will” par 35). However, I would add that the marketplace’s inherent force to expand also defies institutional boundaries—religion, based on ontological principles, is just as susceptible as secular social institutions to this economic drive.

More importantly however, such a shift in and proliferation of technological and economic forces do not engender a complete replacement of the customarily mythic but rather produce a process of syncretization, which can be seen in the examples discussed concerning the television as well as the radio. Neither completely occludes the mythic but instead combines with it to make a new, compound form. Hence, the emphasis for the magical realist novel, as this analysis consistently demonstrates, is a melding or syncretism of traditionally distinct domains as emphasized in a postmodern context. Technology—as an outgrowth of scientific thought based on empiricism and reason—mixes with the metaphysical in both fiction and the real world. Toward this, Ferkiss explains,
As science increasingly abandons the quest to discover the essential meaning of
the universe, dismissing the question as unscientific, individuals turn to other
sources in their search for ultimate reality—not only to traditional western
religious and political values but also to ideas from the East and even to systems
such as astrology, which the men of Locke’s time thought they were destroying.
The study of the I Ching and the use of Tarot found in the vicinity of such
bastions of scientific scholarship as Berkeley and M.I.T suggest that the formerly
close relationship between science and magic may perhaps be undergoing some
kind of renewal. (*Future 20*)

Yamashita’s novel illustrates this point, especially regarding Pena’s
“featherology” mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. What is particularly significant
about Mané’s practice is the way its nomenclature implies a scientific basis with its
‘ology’ suffix. In fact the narrator comments on how Mané’s featherology “... was,
someone said, science in the guise of folklore” (80). According to Ferkiss, people turn
away from science as the means for establishing an ontological basis for the experience
of being whereas Mané’s practice becomes science disguised as myth. Both cases
transgress the boundaries between the two traditionally separate realms. Moreover,
during a lecture Mané gives as the “Guru of Featherology” he offers counter arguments to
those skeptical of the feather’s efficacy in terms that immediately call into question the
science/myth, primitive/advanced binaries: “‘Well, they say I’m a primitive. But you
suck smoke—that is primitive. After all, you can see smoke. Look at the TV—they say
the pictures are sent through the air by invisible waves.’ Mané pointed at the feather.
‘Principle’s the same here—invisible waves, a force you can’t see’” (79). In this
dialogue, the novel points out a shortcoming with a purely empiricist model insofar as there is a definite difference between understanding how a process or phenomenon works and its validity. "Featherology" cannot be invalidated simply because it does not fit current scientific paradigms just as television is magical to those who do not understand its function on the level of electromagnetic physics. Once again, the former speaks to a de-privileging of science and the latter implies science can be construed as magic. In both cases, any hierarchical binary relationship dissolves.

The 'magic' of television also goes beyond a lack of knowledge concerning its technological function and while this lack of knowledge still holds true, it only describes a surface phenomenon. It is primarily an epistemological issue albeit one that teeters on the ontological. In contrast, the constructive nature of television briefly mentioned envisages an even more significant issue that directly informs a much broader and specifically ontological question. The power of television and radio, as well as other technology, to create reality seems a much more profound postmodern issue brought out in Yamashita's novel, especially through magical realist means. Admittedly, television in this capacity does not play a major role in the novel, but it does nevertheless operate to frame the entire story—as a telenovela—as well as hint at its constructive capacity in the ways just mentioned. As if to emphasize this concept, Mané offers other small commentaries on television's 'magical' ability to alter reality. As he remarks, "'Funniest thing. I talk for two, three hours, see. Then when it's finished they do something, make it come out 'bout one-half hour. Speed everything up. That's how come you can watch a story, guy gets born and dies in one hour" (Yamashita 117). And later in the novel we learn how "he enjoyed watching himself give lectures in languages he could not
understand. He liked to watch his own mouth moving with these strange noises coming out" (ibid. 157). Through these examples, Mané points out the relativity of the term 'magic' with regard to television—once again, from a Western perspective an issue of epistemology—yet also alluding to the constructive capability of this technology. Television has the power to re-present reality thus attributing malleability to concepts such as time and being.

These examples of "featherology" and television as conflations of science and myth hint at a more radical mixture involving humans and technology that emerges through the exploitation of the Matacão. *Through the Arc* pushes ontological plasticity to a new level in terms of simulation as it reflects ideas from French philosopher Jean Baudrillard. The novel takes Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra to hyperbolic levels by means of its magical realist mode. First, however, Baudrillard's basic conception of simulation and simulacra, and its position within the postmodern milieu, must be explained in order to see how it materializes and further destabilizes the ontological landscape in Yamashita's novel.

To hint at the scope of Baudrillard's influence in social and postmodern theory, Douglas Kellner points out how he is "proclaimed as a fundamental challenge to our orthodoxies and the conventional wisdom in Marxism, psychoanalysis, philosophy, semiology, political economy, anthropology, sociology and other disciplines" (Jean 1). Given the wide-reaching and fairly inclusive list of specific fields, it seems superfluous for Kellner to end his statement with "... and other disciplines." Yet such a laundry list of sorts alludes to a postmodernist sensibility in that, as described before, the term itself implies an expansive and diverse landscape. Despite the seemingly divergent areas
informed by Baudrillard's sociopolitical/philosophical models, the inseparability of these realms in the unfolding of day-to-day human existence merely underscores the complexity of the term postmodernism and difficulty in establishing a unified theory to explain its multiple, interrelated processes. Nevertheless, the simulation/simulacra element of Baudrillard's expansive and shifting theoretical project offers an engaging lens for analyzing the various ontological shifts in Yamashita's novel.

Initially, the terms simulation and simulacra emerge from a poststructuralist theory and describe a process by which basic epistemological and ontological assumptions become suspect. Just as Derrida extends Saussure's semiology to the notion of language's purely self-referential nature, Baudrillard broadens the concept to images—initially video and photographic—to posit the idea that the image lacks any sound basis to which it refers. For Derrida, words (signifiers) do not refer to particular objects (signifieds) but rather create meaning only through their relationship/difference to one another; no signified can escape or transcend this process. In this sense, the signifier and signified become equal, and consequently there are only signifiers (Derrida "Semiology" 333). The implications of this linguistics, as Derrida proceeds to point out, erode the very basis of Western metaphysics "... which imposed, and never will cease to impose upon semiological science in its entirety this fundamental quest for a 'transcendental signified' and a concept independent of language" (ibid. 333). The connection Baudrillard makes with Derrida's ideas comes to light in the basic disjunction between sign systems and reality. Derrida considers this primarily in terms of language whereas Baudrillard extends the semiological realm to include images that are, as with words, separate from but constitutive of that to which they ostensibly refer.
However, one must recognize a distinction between Baudrillard's characterization of the dynamic process by which images defer meaning as compared to the concepts of poststructuralists such as Derrida. While Baudrillard's theory of simulation corresponds to Derrida's critique of referentiality, he nonetheless takes such poststructuralist notions to their extremes and in doing so, completely obliterates the realms of meaning and reference—a step some poststructuralists avoid as they point out the problematized questions of these realms without completely annihilating them (Kellner Jean 90-1). Baudrillard, on the other hand, tends to push such poststructuralist ideas into the sphere of nihilism. Specifically for Baudrillard, reality exists in the simulacrum, which represents the final stage in a process. Essentially his point centers on the notion that the proliferation of images, especially in contemporary society and the media, drastically affects perception by not just distancing individuals from semiological groundedness as does language's referential nature, but more radically creating reality. The process he describes evolves as follows:

[the image] is the reflection of a profound reality;

it masks and denatures a profound reality;

it masks the absence of a profound reality;

it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum.

(Baudrillard Simulacra 6)

The first stage of simulation begins with religious icons and ultimately leads to the last stage of pure simulacra that dominate economic, political, and social realms through the vehicle of mass media. And finally his concept of hyperreality emerges as a consequence of the proliferation of simulacra. This describes a world in which "the
model comes first,’ and its constitutive role is invisible, because all one sees are
instantiations of models (while one reproduces models of thought and behavior oneself)” (Kellner Jean 83). The essential feature of Baudrillard’s ideas arises through a distancing from reality caused by the superimposition of images and models. It is not that reality does not exist, but rather that the representations of reality—from simulation to simulacra—have become in essence reality itself, in fact more real than the reality they claim to model. As Harrison explains, “In ‘Forgetting Baudrillard,’ Baudrillard argues that ‘history has stopped meaning, referring to anything—whether you call it social space or the real. We have passed into a kind of hyperreal where things are being replayed ad infinitum’” (90). Thus, while one can still discern vestiges of poststructuralist semiotics in terms of non-referentiality, it is clear that Baudrillard has effectively pushed semiology to the next (ontological) level.

It is in this sense I have chosen to single out and apply his notions of simulation and simulacra to Yamashita’s novel. In terms of chronology, these concepts stemming from poststructuralist ideas seem to align more tightly and offer logical applications to the particular ontological issues that emerge in the novel. That is to say, while Baudrillard’s simulation and simulacra center on semiotic systems in the widest sense of representation, the fundamental mechanism appears in *Through the Arc* in ways that push beyond merely semiotics as they invade the ontological realm of being. In terms of images, Yamashita’s novel offers somewhat subtle illustrations that become more significant as the story progresses. For instance, one senses a Baudrillardian essence as one of the characters, Chico Paco, reminisces about a youth who layers naturally colored sands in bottles to create various local scenes, then at the behest of a tourist, recreates the
Mona Lisa (a copy of a copy) and ultimately uses synthetic sand mixed with gold and silver (Yamashita 25).

This example offers a metaphor for the process of the image Baudrillard describes. That is initially, the images produced by the youth center on immediate, original aspects of his life and surroundings. In fact, his first creations possess a certain 'tie' to phenomenological reality in that he employs natural materials to replicate "the scenes of his home, mud huts, coconut trees and grazing cattle" (ibid. 25). The scenes originate from his life experiences, as do the constituent materials. The naturally colored sands he first uses metaphorically 'ground' his images insofar as they derive from the substrate upon which the cows' grass, coconut trees, and huts arise. Although such creations are still images, they are images of a first stage. That is, such images reflect a profound reality—not profound in the Baudrillardian religious sense, but profound in terms of the immediacy with which they correspond to phenomenological experience. The images in the bottles still operate as signifiers yet they stand in close relationship to the experienced world: they are simulations but not yet simulacra.

However, once he copies a picture of the Mona Lisa for a tourist, he has effectively moved into the second stage of simulation whereby the image now denatures a profound reality in that he makes a copy of a copy of the real portrait; the simulation now stands twice removed from the original image. And finally, once he moves away to make "...every sort of picture from the President of the Republic to the great Pelé" (29) out of synthetic sands mixed with gold and silver, the images finally shift into the final stages of the image as they become pure simulacra. Moreover, the inclusion of precious metals such as gold and silver seem to symbolically infuse the images with an
autonomous meaning/value. Just as Baudrillard describes the final stage whereby the image does not relate to a profound reality, the value of the sand bottle images become intrinsic rather than referential. Their reality resides in their own commodified significance instead of their power or function to signify. The next logical progression, and only missing element in the textual example within this Baudrillardian parallel would be mass production of the sand bottles. Although the narrator offers no mention of this, the youth does move away, sell his creations, and become famous suggesting commodification as well as a further distancing of the end product from the producer. Despite the oblique application of Baudrillard's concepts to this small excerpt from the novel, the implications of this process come forward in an increasingly dramatic fashion as the story progresses. In terms of simulation and simulacra, Yamashita pushes the already hyperbolic Baudrillardian concepts even further as simulacra invade the very being of nature, humans, and technology in her novel.

As Baudrillard asserts, "after the metaphysics of being and appearance, after energy and determinacy, [comes] the metaphysics of indeterminacy and the code" (Symbolic 57). The "code" he speaks of stems from the DNA model\(^{12}\) but extends to codes beyond the molecular and into sociopolitical structures: the code then determines the manifestation and processes of all aspects of social reality. Baudrillard continues, "cybernetic\(^{13}\) control, generation through models, differential modulation, feedback, question/answer, etc.: this is the new operational configuration (industrial simulacra being mere operations). Digitality is its metaphysical principle (Leibniz's God), and DNA is it prophet" (ibid. 57). Notably, the discovery of the Mataçao's chemical composition is analogous to the genetic code in terms of universal (biological) building
blocks and a related shift in metaphysical paradigms. The description of the Matacao's "tightly bound polymer" nature parallels DNA insofar as both consist of repeated structural units and form the underlying code for all diversity of, in the case of DNA, life, and in the case of Matacao plastic, almost everything. In both cases, a drastic metaphysical paradigm shift occurs. In this characterization, traditional ontological foundations dissolve and the mechanistic yet variable nature of reality emerges. Specifically, Baudrillard points out how

The religious, metaphysical, or philosophical definition of being has given way to an operational definition in terms of the genetic code (DNA). . . . We are in a system where there is no more soul. . . . This having been established, there are no more individuals, but only potential biological mutants. From a biological, genetic and cybernetic viewpoint we are all mutants. (qtd. in Watt 128)

Interestingly, Yamashita offers illustrations that allude to this concept of genetically deterministic codes as well as mutants such as the three-armed Tweep and his three-breasted wife Mabelle. As well, the positive way in which these two view themselves and others like them further emphasizes the notion that the mutant is the rule. This also relates to the short discussion in Chapter 2 on chaos theory and science's arbitrariness in delineating 'normal' patterns in nature. As mentioned in terms of rationality, Tweep views himself as an improvement in nature and considers his extra limb an adaptive advantage. Strikingly, he perceives his augmented physique as signifying " . . a new genetic plane in the species. . . . He was a better model, the wave of the future" (Yamashita 30). Thus with Tweep and Mabelle, as well as the newly adapted species previously discussed, this novel speaks to the notion of the genetic code and mutation
collectively as an underlying directive process inherent to the human, non-human, and technological realms. Similarly, Baudrillard expands this concept to encompass processes from the molecular to the social. The 'code' becomes the animating force within all biological, sociopolitical and technological realms. It is precisely in this respect that simulacra and hyperreality emerge as a new ontological basis for both Baudrillard and Yamashita's characters.

As mentioned, this final stage of simulacra results from a process Baudrillard details beginning with religious iconography and progressing through socioeconomic changes such as bourgeois society, the industrial revolution, and consumer culture. Hence the small portion applied in this analysis represents merely a single aspect of Baudrillard's theoretical evolution. Admittedly his DNA analogy, even when stripped of much of its socioeconomic and historical accoutrements, still remains contentious and somewhat abstract at its core. In reference to this as well as other Baudrillardian metaphors, Kellner points out, "indeed, one of the more frustrating features of Baudrillard's method is his use of scientific, or pseudo-scientific metaphors and concepts to illustrate his theories. Baudrillard's writings are full of references to black holes, entropy, DNA and genetic, digital codes and information theory, satellites and cybernetics" (Jean 84). Nevertheless Baudrillard's concepts of simulacra and DNA still seem, on their most basic levels, to come forward in the novel in ways that once again mix domains traditionally differentiated such as humankind and nature, nature and technology, and the real and the magical. Despite Baudrillard's contentiousness and use of abstract scientific metaphors, one may nonetheless draw parallels between his notions of genetics and simulacra and certain dominant elements in the novel.
Based on the discussion to this point, one gleans how technology enjoys at best a tenuous distinction from humans and nature and it is precisely through the precession of simulacra in Yamashita’s novel that any vestiges of such distinctions disappear. Once scientists determine the chemical makeup of the Matacão plastic—decipher the code—companies ultimately develop the means for shaping and forming the material into virtually anything. As the narrator observes, “Every industry from construction to fashion would jump into Matacão plastics” (142). In fact, the new plastic technology would not just invade but more importantly replace aspects of life from body parts to food—in short, Nature:

. . . Matacão plastic was so true to reality that, even upon touch and a lot of palpating examination, one could not tell the difference. At the plastics 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. . . . Matacão plastic managed to recreate the natural glow, moisture, freshness—the very sensation of life. . . . [It] would infiltrate every crevice of modern life—plants, facial and physical remakes and appendages, shoes, clothing, jewelry, toys, cars, every sort of machine from electro-domestic to high-tech, buildings, furniture—in short, the myriad of commercial products with which the civilized world adorns itself. . . . Matacão plastic would even be used to create artificial food (sushi samples, etc.) A few people had mistakenly eaten artificial food samples with no bodily discomfort or detriment. (142-3)
In this description, Yamashita takes Baudrillardian simulacra to the next level and further destabilizes traditional ontological grounds within the novel. The chemical polymer structure of Matacão plastic mirrors DNA's polymer structure and in a similar fashion serves as the basis for much of the phenomena in the novel—non-biological phenomena that seamlessly blend with the biological. At this point, distinctions between what is real or artificial, natural or human construct evaporate into one vast system of simulacra driven by codes—genetic and molecular. Such binaries hold no significance, as oppositions no longer serve to define reflexively but rather deflate in an ontologically destabilized atmosphere. In this way, technology becomes merely a process among others and effectively dissolves its function in a human/techno or natural/techno binary just as various people in the novel effectively digest the plastic food they mistakenly eat as if it is real. Technology functions as prosthesis not in terms of artificiality (for artifice is rendered irrelevant through the precession of simulacra) but in terms of an *extension* of the human literally as with "facial and physical remakes." In this sense, physical modifications to the human body through Matacão plastics are equally as natural as Tweep's extra arm or Mabelle's extra breast.

In moving from the microscopic analysis—genes and molecules—to a macroscopic view, simulacra driven by a magical realist mode dominate large portions of the novel's landscape. Of course, subsequent discovery of more Matacão material under areas of rain forest at once alludes to an ever-broadening presence of this magical material, but perhaps most notably, Matacão plastic becomes the single constituent in fabricating "Chicolândia." This theme park is built in honor of the novel's "angel" Chico Paco and his original pilgrimage to the Matacão on behalf of Gilberto. Chicolândia.
originally the brainchild of Gilberto and bankrolled by J. B. Tweep, will be the amusement park extraordinaire. Conspicuously, this particular aspect of the novel corresponds to Disneyland, which Baudrillard analyzes for its hyperreal existence and far-reaching simulative implications. The way in which Disneyland operates—according to Baudrillard—reflects the character of Chicolândia in Yamashita’s novel, though the implications of the two phenomena differ slightly.

In returning to the concept of hyperreality, Kellner explains how “for Baudrillard, the hyperreal is not the unreal but the more than real, the realler than real, as when models of the United States in Disneyland appear more real than their instantiation in the social world, as the United States becomes more and more like Disneyland” (Jean 82). This model of hyperreality—the notion that the model precedes the original and thus is “realler than real”—is the same process at work with Yamashita’s Chicolândia. In general, both exist as simulacra insofar as they move beyond replication or reference to some real world signified. Instead, each generates its own reality. As the three-armed Tweep ruminates over the forthcoming Chicolândia project, “after all, Matacão plastic had been molded into everything imaginable, both life-size and lifelike. An entire world could be created from it” (Yamashita 167). The mention of a world being created speaks to its generative rather than reproductive quality placing Chicolândia into direct correspondence with Baudrillard’s characterization of Disneyland and more importantly, the postmodern realms of hyperreality and heterocosm. However unlike Yamashita’s Chicolândia, Baudrillard posits a more sinister and repressive impetus at the core of the cultural phenomenon of Disneyland:
Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation. . . . It is meant to be an infantile world, in order to make us believe the adults are elsewhere, in the 'real' world and to conceal the fact that real childishness is everywhere, particularly amongst those adults who go there to act the child in order to foster illusions as to their real childishness. (Simulations 25)

Despite Baudrillard's polemical characterization (common in his work) of the rationale behind Disneyland, his concept of its hyperreal nature as explained as well as McHale's postmodernist mechanism of the heterocosm, still closely fit the nature of Yamashita's Chicolândia.

It is not a re-creation but rather a genesis and as such spawns the reality of geographical locations as well as filmic worlds, already simulacra themselves. In this manner, Chicolândia erases fixed spatio-temporal points generally thought of as maintaining ontological homogeneity. Specifically, we learn from Yamashita's narrator how

Everything in Chicolândia was being made of Matacão plastic, from the roller coasters to the giant palms, the drooping orchids and the buildings, whose interiors and exteriors were designed to imitate scenes from Gilberto's favorite movies—Cabaret; Heidi; Cleopatra; Snow White; Spartacus; Hello, Dolly; Cat Ballou; Raiders of the Lost Ark; The King and I; Star Trek IV and so on. The animated animals . . . would soon create a bizarre ecology as they tramped through a projected maze of magnificent scenes: Babylonian towers on a desert
oasis, the Taj Mahal, the docks of Amsterdam, Times Square in New York City, the Miami International Airport, the French Riviera, the Las Vegas strip, Patagonia, the California gold rush, Egyptian and Peruvian pyramids, Indonesian temples, medieval castles, the Titanic, ancient Rome, mythical Greece, and the moon. Gilberto’s imagination and memory of television were endless. The former invalid, who had never known any place other than his birthplace on the multicolored dunes, and now the Matacão, could soon be suddenly anywhere in both time and space. (168)

While Chicolândia parallels Disneyland in terms of simulacra and a subsequent ontological shift, it does not immediately evoke the magical element put forward as an integral aspect of Yamashita’s novel. However, because the novel’s entire amusement park is constructed with Matacão material, it is fundamentally magical in that its foundation arises from a magical construct as discussed in Chapter 2. Thus, the entire Chicolândia enterprise emerges from a substance that does not operate under a traditional Western physics or metaphysical model. Consequently, Chicolândia serves as a zenith of the magical and postmodern synthesis in the novel. Because its most basic constituent is a magical element—Matacão plastic—and it exists as pure simulacra, it creates a complex heterocosm and once again broaches the ontological and postmodernist realms. Not only does the novel mix worlds in terms of the real and the magical, but it also compounds this process by including real world phenomena.

Notably, the creation of this heterocosm goes beyond merely the separation between the world of fiction and the ‘real’ world. Emphasizing this break, we have the typical postmodern ontological issues that emerge through the creation of a physical
world, a “bizarre ecology” (Yamashita 168) that incorporates historical as well as American pop-culture icons and real world geographical locales. As with the narrating orb but in a reverse direction, the mixing of such cultural and geographical elements mentioned in the cited passage involve diegetic and extra-diegetic planes. The incorporation of ‘real world’ places and people taken completely out of context and placed in the fictional world compounds the boundary created through the diegetic and extra-diegetic worlds. McHale articulates this compound postmodernist phenomenon as he explains how

. . . it is the appearance in fictional worlds of individuals who *have* existed in the real world: people such as Napoleon or Richard Nixon, places such as Paris or Dublin, ideas such as dialectical materialism or quantum mechanics. These are not *reflected* in fiction so much as *incorporated*; they constitute enclaves of ontological *difference* within the otherwise ontologically homogenous fictional heterocosm. (*Postmodernist* 28)

Whereas the narrating orb transgresses the diegetic boundary upwardly into the extra-diegetic realm of the reader, a similar effect although in a reverse direction occurs when such real world places and movies become drawn downward into the diegetic plane of the story. Furthermore, this process obliquely approaches Baudrillard’s idea of simulacra insofar as it further destabilizes the relationship between traditional conceptions of the real and the unreal. According to Baudrillard, real-world images and constructions such as Disneyland create a hyperreality; to recreate these elements in a work of fiction emphasizes the disjunction caused by self-referentiality. This idea, when combined with McHale’s comments concerning diegetic transgressions exacerbates ontological
instability. Heterocosm by its very nature causes ontological schism because it obscures distinctions between typically separate ontological spheres. And once the boundary between the real and fictional or real and magical becomes blurred, traditional concepts of a stable perspective from which to regard one’s position in relation to the external world blurs as well. In this sense, external phenomena lose any firm anchoring in terms knowledge or history, become simulacra, and consequently invest ontological concerns with more weight than epistemological issues. There are no original models but rather simply, as with Derrida’s semiology, endless chains of signification that perpetually refer yet point to no transcendental signified; this is an endless process of differance. Once again, the last line of the passage explains how Gilberto could “be suddenly anywhere in both time and space”—the phenomena he experiences do not refer to real world events with fixed geographical or temporal coordinates because they are compressed in time and infused with their own reality. More to the point, he has no ontological ‘yardstick’ against which to measure such a world but rather accepts it as it unfolds while the reader has difficulty in untangling the interwoven diegetic and extra-diegetic ontological levels.

In the final analysis, the continuum discussed ranging from the single TV in a church or plaza to the immense landscape of Chicolândia engenders a process in the novel whereby Baudrillard’s simulacra—stemming from poststructuralist concepts—invade the novel, push beyond mere image, and consequently foreground questions of phenomenological existence. Just as significantly, magical realist constructs create the driving force behind this overall process. That is to say, the initial discovery of the Matacão’s composition or its code heralds, as with the discovery of DNA’s double helix, an age of new metaphysics. Baudrillard’s use of the DNA metaphor for his process of
simulacra parallels the technological processes that occur in the novel immediately following the discovery of the plastic’s compound. What is most significant is that in both cases, these discoveries transform the nature of being. For Baudrillard, the new ontological matrix consists of code-dominated simulacra whereby no originals exist any longer; just as with digital reproduction, any copy becomes indistinguishable from the original because there are no originals. In a similar fashion, those in Yamashita’s novel also experience a world of simulacra as the magical Matacão plastic and its molecular code infuse the natural and human realms because, as pointed out previously, “Matacão plastic managed to recreate . . . the very sensation of life” (Yamashita 142).

Ironically, the DNA code emerges one final time as a strain of bacteria consumes Matacão plastic and consequently all the economic structures built on this magic medium: “Chicolándia and its plastic jungle, once void of insects and real living creatures, had been invaded by devouring bacteria” (Yamashita 206). Just as importantly, the compound heterocosm created only aggravates such ontological ruptures because the world of Chicolândia arises out of the existentially ubiquitous plastic material and also incorporates real world places and pop-culture artifacts though succumbs to a spontaneous biological phenomenon; in a sense, the Matacão molecular code simply yields to the bacteria’s genetic code. More significantly, however, is the concept that all of these effects, ranging from molecular to geographic scales, wholly subsume any homogenous ontological basis and indivisibly fuse not just humans, nature, and technology, but also the magical and the real.
Conclusion: Hybridity and Inseparability Dominate

Ultimately, the initial discussion concerning the difficulty of placing *Through the Arc* in the canon, let alone Yamashita as an author, serves to illustrate one of the intractable qualities of postmodernist literature discussed throughout this analysis. That is, in delineating or distinguishing between novels, genres, or ideological eras, one tends to simultaneously highlight whatever becomes excluded from the category established. This can be seen in considering Yamashita’s oeuvre in terms of her place as an Asian-American writer or *Through the Arc* specifically as a magical realist postmodern work.

Nevertheless, lines must be hinted at if not emphatically drawn in order to get a sense of not just where a specific work stands but also perhaps to view the work as it relates to a particular writing mode or socio-political era. In this respect, the categories of magical realism and postmodernism as literary descriptions become manifest through more of a Venn diagram in terms of confluences rather than autonomous, abstract categories existing on completely separate planes. Hence, the magical realist mode of writing operates exceptionally well to illuminate a central area of postmodernist theory; it highlights a relatively dominant postmodern trope that destabilizes rationality as a solid basis from which to discern and describe the phenomenological world. The magical realist mode then becomes the catalyst by which the epistemological/ontological transformations take place.

Specifically the magical realist mode initially infuses Yamashita’s novel in the form of the narrator and Matacão plastic and progresses to become a dominant force. That is, it further destabilizes epistemological bases while simultaneously reframing ontological questions. Moreover, a telenovela framework inscribes the story and adds an
additional layer of complexity to this text by foregrounding the story as a sub-text within a larger concept already rife with issues of knowledge and being. The nature of the telenovela as explained by Yamashita and others establishes a constructivist theme that begins to erode—through technological means—notions of being and culture in terms of homogenous, stable categories. As well, the television and radio become firmly mixed with the mythic: an illustration that emphasizes notions of their inseparable, hybrid existence.

While the telenovela framework and subsequent quasi-human narrator function to begin the destabilization process, the unification of humans, nature, and technology as discussed in Chapter 2 works to further debase traditional paradigms that operate to draw distinctions between these realms. In creating this tripartite relationship, a couple of illustrative results occur. First, technology—as an extension of human ration/scientific thought—loses its place as the sole arbiter of truth and understanding. In this respect, rationality functions as an integral aspect of humankind and as such, cannot simply be considered as a tool separate from yet easily applicable to natural forces in a directive sense. As demonstrated, examples in Yamashita’s novel elucidate the capricious character of nature in response to technological application attributing to the former a resistance to the latter’s directive forces. In Yamashita’s characterization of this process we see parallels with Latour’s concepts of risk society and hybridity as well as elements of chaos theory. In sum, the melding of the human/nature/techno categories as presented in Yamashita’s novel through a specifically magical realist mode speaks to larger issues discussed in various areas of postmodern theory. Taken together, these issues push
epistemological questions into an ontological realm thus reinforcing the overall postmodernist literary aspect as explained by McHale.

In moving toward the latter part of the analysis, Baudrillard's concepts of simulation and simulacra further emphasize and reinforce the melding processes already discussed. Significantly, this particular portion of Baudrillard's work—simulacra specifically—arises from a postmodern platform insofar as it functions to further grind down technology's ostensible foundation of rational solidity. Additionally, his application of poststructuralist semiology to the media and cultural realms offers an apt comparison to analyses already considered. While Baudrillard predominantly describes the process of simulacra in these terms, the illustrations of simulacra in Yamashita's novel move this concept into the overarching mixture of the natural, human, and technological realms. Yamashita takes the concept of simulacra to its next logical step by illustrating the ways in which such a phenomenon further conflates the discussed categories. This process relates back to the core of McHale's notions concerning the epistemological to ontological shift he sees as the common denominator of postmodernist fiction. Once again, we see how Yamashita's novel speaks to postmodernist theory with regard to fictional works as well as certain theorists themselves, thus creating a substantial connection between postmodern theory's abstraction and its hyperbolic application to an imagined ecological, sociopolitical realm.

In using this Baudrillardian lens to examine *Through the Arc*, the telenovela once again comes under scrutiny but from another angle. Through Yamashita's assertion of the telenovela's constructive power and its placement in a church or public square, she implies the metaphysical shift discussed by Baudrillard and characteristic of a
postmodern era. It is not so much that "God is dead" but rather that god has arisen in technology as Rushdie observes in Chapter 3. Television, radio, and technology in general, shapes a new metaphysics in terms of identity and reality—both significant ontological considerations. And just as technology invades and changes the nature of metaphysics, the converse is also true as Yamashita's "featherology" takes an indigenous, mythical practice and casts it in the guise of science. Additionally, Yamashita's description of the Matacão's molecular makeup reflects Baudrillard's DNA metaphor as it relates to a coded basis dictating the manifestation of reality. This concept further debases traditional metaphysical models as it describes the function of images and simulacra in terms of codes that create the matrix of reality. In the same way, Matacão plastic's polymer structure operates as the code from which the simulacra in the novel emerge. This magical element infuses the novel's world from body part reconstructions (analogous to genetic engineering) to the entire theme park of Chicolândia. The science of chemical engineering invades the natural realm thus again questioning original demarcations between not just the natural and the artificial but also the magical and the real. Issues of ontology eclipse epistemological concerns; technology becomes magic, magic becomes technology, and both constitute inseparable, essential aspects of nature in its broadest sense.

Through this illustration of existential reality's hybrid nature, Yamashita makes a statement that surpasses merely technological, ecological or political critique. Her focus appears to be on the interrelatedness of these various spheres and thus emphasizes the importance of recognizing this syncretistic mixture. Through this absurd, comic, tragic, satirist novel, she highlights the problems with privileging one aspect of the life world
over others, whether human rationality, technology, mythology, or non-human nature. In this sense, Yamashita’s comment concerning an “expanding the map” of Asian-American literature takes on an even more significant meaning. In *Through the Arc*, she has magically expanded the three-dimensional matrix containing the map as well as all other traditionally separate spheres of postmodern existence.
Because the designation “magical realism” is rife with ambiguity and requires further articulation on a case-by-case basis, a much more in-depth discussion of its historical pedigree as well as application to *Through the Arc* follows these general introductory comments.

While the Djapans are not discussed in this analysis, their carrier pigeon business nonetheless supports the concept of techno/nature conflation in that it ultimately operates as a global communications network.

For a more in-depth discussion of the detective novel and its epistemological basis, see McHale’s *Constructing Postmodernism*, pp. 147-51.

McHale attributes this concept to Jurij Tynanov and subsequent explanation by Roman Jakobson. However, McHale broadens the definition offered by Jakobson by asserting the concept of many dominants operating during any given literary period rather than a single dominant as being emblematic of a particular period.

Mellen’s use of “fantastic” must be qualified here, as she seems to use this interchangeably with “magical.” However, there is an important distinction between these terms made by Faris and explained further in Chapter 1.

For more on the self-reflexive constituent of much postmodernist fiction, see Hutcheon’s discussion of Siegle, pp. 35-6 in *The Politics of Postmodernism*.

See Parts I & II in Cohn’s *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*, as the author articulates the specific application of the three narrative structures in third-person narrative primarily and their subsequent analogies with first-person narratives secondarily.

Candomblé is an Afro-American religion found primarily in Brazil. The religion came from Africa to Brazil, carried by African priests and followers brought as slaves from the sixteenth to nineteenth century. (see “New Religious Movements” <http://religiousmovements.lib.virginia.edu/nrms/macu.html>.)

Matacão – Portuguese for “boulder.”

As Kellner observes, for Baudrillard, “the postmodern world is devoid of meaning; it is a universe of nihilism in which theories float in a void, unanchored in any secure harbor by any secure moorings” (Jean 118).

Baudrillard uses Monod’s mechanistic understanding of DNA’s ability to replicate itself, as well as the occasional mutation, as a model for social processes and change. For a more thorough discussion concerning Baudrillard’s use of Monod’s genetic model, see Watt’s “Baudrillard’s America (and Ours?): Image, Virus, Catastrophe.”

For more on the shift from a material-based technology culture to an informational-based (codes/cybernetics) techno-culture, see Donna Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* and Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern*.

“Precession,” as used by Baudrillard, denotes the idea that simulacra actually precede real-world instantiations rather than follow from them. This word characterizes the distinction between simulacra and simulations—the former come before, and thus are not simply duplications, whereas the latter follow from such instantiations.
McHale begins with the notion of heterocosm as describing the ontological difference between the real and fictional worlds but then extends this concept to also describe the inclusion of real world events, places, or people in fictional works. This phenomenon creates, as he puts it, "enclaves of ontological difference" that create a more complex fictional model as they debase the traditional fiction/real world distinction (*Postmodernist* 28-9).

15 From Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.

16 From Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*.
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