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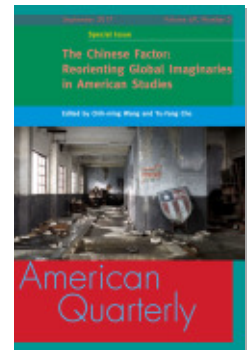
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# Animacy at the End of History in Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea*

Christopher T. Fan

“Why are the representatives of concluded  
humanity depicted with animal heads?”<sup>1</sup>

One rejoinder to the claim that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism is that some observers of China's rise have had no trouble imagining the end of American-style liberal capitalism. As the argument goes, a “Beijing consensus” of authoritarian, control capitalism will eventually eclipse a “Washington consensus” of decentralized, free-market capitalism.<sup>2</sup> It is thus only a matter of time until the reins of global hegemony change hands. While it would not be inaccurate to read this particular “China threat” narrative as merely the latest in a long history of “yellow peril” articulations, it is also the case that China has for many years been shaping conceptions of American futurity with a predominance and consent hitherto unseen. Some of these conceptions, like those of Martin Jacques and Giovanni Arrighi, are sanguine: China's restoration of its millennia-long geopolitical superiority is an occasion for hope—perhaps of an era of “accumulation *without* dispossession”—even as it inaugurates a new “systemic cycle of accumulation.”<sup>3</sup> In others, China's embrace of capitalism is just another indication that we have already arrived at the end of history, whether G. W. F. Hegel's and Alexandre Kojève's 1806, or Francis Fukuyama's 1989.<sup>4</sup> In still others, China's disregard for the environment, combined with its rapid growth, exaggerates the worst aspects of US-led capitalism, portending nothing less than the end of the world.<sup>5</sup>

The Bush II and Obama administrations' policies of China containment notwithstanding, one consequence of these China-oriented scenarios is that orientalist epistemologies and cultural logics have made room for modes of East–West relationality other than the hegemony, antinomy, and fantasy that Edward W. Said so famously documented. We now contend with relations such as interdependency, partnership, and conflation that no longer require anachronism to function imaginatively, and whose spatiotemporal presence

both maintains and blurs the coherence of “US” and “China” as discrete economic, political, and historical entities.<sup>6</sup> While the rejection of globalization announced by the success of resurgent ethnic nationalisms in recent years might appear to signal otherwise, we are far from seeing the last of the political economy in which the US–China trade and finance relationship has become too big to fail.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, despite the current US administration’s campaign rhetoric of antagonizing and decoupling from China, and despite China’s aggressive development of alternatives to its economic relationship with the United States (e.g., its “One Belt, One Road” trade and infrastructure program extending into countries in Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia), it is doubtful that we will have to revise the oft-repeated claim that the US–China relationship will be the twenty-first century’s most important geopolitical relationship. Orientalism’s projections, anxieties, and reality effects will continue to cut both ways in a constant churn of residual and emergent forms, sparing no one. What orientalism no longer reliably produces is a guarantee that the West will always prevail.

In the United States, one response to this grinding halt of orientalism’s self-confidence machine and its rigged futurity has been what I would like to call a pragmatic acceptance of China’s rise. The term *pragmatism* has appeared frequently in discussions not only of Asian economic miracles like China and Singapore but also of neoliberalism and late capitalist foreclosure of personal futurities.<sup>8</sup> Pragmatism in this sense refers to a style of (self-)governance and (life-)planning that is ostensibly nonideological, opportunistic, empirical, and market sensitive.<sup>9</sup> What I have in mind here can be clarified by Aihwa Ong’s analysis of Asian economic miracles’ negotiation of neoliberalism through the “flexible” logic of the “exception,” in which “graduated” diminishment of sovereignty are accepted in exchange for the “political optimization” of states and bodies.<sup>10</sup> Her primary case study is China, and her analysis of that country’s capitalist transition mirrors the pragmatism that she finds there:

In the transition from a centrally planned economy to capitalist development, the Chinese state devised various strategies to address rather specific problems of capitalist development that will also contribute to the political imperative to reunite with breakaway territories. . . . Obviously the point is not to judge sovereign power by some formulaic or container view of sovereignty but to adjust our analytical tools to examine various instruments and procedures of governing.<sup>11</sup>

Ong’s admonishment to “adjust our analytical tools” is, I would argue, an instance of the overlapping of state- and subject-level pragmatisms that I want to describe in this article. Arrighi’s attempt in *Adam Smith in Beijing* to identify

what is “truly novel and anomalous” about China’s rise by exchanging Marxian for Smithian frameworks might qualify as another.<sup>12</sup> I therefore want to think about how the object-level pragmatisms on display in Ong and Arrighi interact with the subject-level pragmatisms that we find in Lauren Berlant’s theorization of “cruel optimism,” which names a pragmatic negotiation of the “everyday”—her phrase is “exhausting pragmatics”—amid neoliberal austerity’s relentless smoothing of crisis into an “ordinary” state of affairs.<sup>13</sup> These pragmatisms operate at the level of fantasy as well as through the protocols of institutions. They offer a powerful method for negotiating not only large-scale ironies and conflicts vis-à-vis ideology and, say, economic policy, but also the manifestations of these ironies in everyday life. Amid impasses of austerity and precarity, the apotheosizing of results as the arbiter of all value becomes something anyone can relate to, from Chinese Communist Party planners and American precarious laborers to survivors in a dystopian near-future. There is nothing like the threat of apocalypse to focus institutions on the pragmatics of survival, and nothing like the boredom at the end of history to focus individuals on the pragmatics of the everyday. How might we clarify, beyond simply insisting on analogy, the capacity of a vast array of late capitalist subjects to relate with each other via pragmatic values?

The ambiguities about the end of history versus the end of the world generated by China’s rise have not only shaped the geopolitical imaginations of contemporary novelists but also provoked anxieties and conflicts that force into relief various pragmatisms. The line of approach I take in this essay is to ask how relations associated with these pragmatisms might be apprehensible through the genre conventions of the novel. Along these lines, I am interested in Mel Y. Chen’s theorization of the “animacy hierarchy,” which she defines as a “scalar position” “between animate and inanimate—that is, beyond human and animal,” and how it might help us detect the pragmatic acceptance of China’s rise specifically in the register of literary characterization.<sup>14</sup> My focus is on Chang-rae Lee’s 2014 novel *On Such a Full Sea*, which is exemplary of contemporary dystopian fiction that features the US–China relationship. Two things in particular distinguish *On Such a Full Sea* from many of the US–China dystopias that have appeared of late: namely, its self-reflexive attempt at imagining a form beyond history’s end by replacing the liberal bourgeois subject that grounds the novel form with a posthistorical animacy.<sup>15</sup> The question that the novel appears to pursue is something like this: How can a Chinese worker, *as Americans see her*, be an adequate protagonist for the novel? This question, I argue, is at the same time a question of whether subjects in US–China capitalism are coherent beyond a narrow range of types. It is also, as I

see it, an extension of a problematic outlined by David Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen: “Neither the human nor China is as self-evident a concept as it might initially seem. . . . In Western imaginations of the universal human, China constitutes one paradigmatic site of the inhuman, the subhuman, and the humanly unthinkable.”<sup>16</sup> What Lee’s novel illuminates is how, at our present historical conjuncture, all of these questions become articulations of an even more fundamental question: whether it is possible now to imagine beyond late capitalism’s windless closure.

### Temporality in the End Times

For some readers, *On Such a Full Sea* might appear to instantiate “techno-orientalism”: a discourse that rose to cultural prominence in the 1980s with the emergence of cyberpunk fiction and film and that, in its earliest theorizations, named a cultural logic that imagined “Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms.”<sup>17</sup> Ridley Scott’s 1982 film *Blade Runner* and William Gibson’s 1984 novel *Neuromancer* are often identified as exemplars of cyberpunk and techno-orientalist aesthetics more generally. Since David Morley and Kevin Robins coined the term in 1995, techno-orientalism has come to operate more as a genre label, referring broadly to future- and technologically oriented narrative and visual genres that contain some element of orientalism—regardless of whether that orientalist content is conflated with technology at all. *On Such a Full Sea*, which features no such conflation, is “techno-orientalist” only in this generic sense. So if it is at all useful to think of the novel through a techno-orientalist analytic, then we would need to focus *metacritically* on how the novel problematizes not only our desire to conflate Asian subjects and technology but also our countervailing liberal desire to dismiss such a desire as racist and then bestow some form of humanism on the racialized subject. In other words, Lee’s novel is “techno-orientalist” insofar as it worries about how our responses to cultural logics that challenge the humanity of Asian subjects are limited to recapitulating and endorsing liberal subjectivity.

The inspiration for *On Such a Full Sea* came to Lee when he was on a train passing through a “derelict” Baltimore neighborhood: “On the return trip, we passed by again, and again I saw that sad neighborhood, which I realized I’d been seeing throughout my adult life. Decades, and really nothing had changed.”<sup>18</sup> The fictional solution Lee offers to this apparent stagnation is to “re-populat[e] this and other abandoned urban areas like it all in one stroke, boom . . . with a homogenous colony of foreigners.”<sup>19</sup> Lee’s decision to cast Chinese workers as these “foreigners” was, he explains, a “response to American anxiety about

China and about American decline, two of my core interests. So it [fit] into what I was thinking about: America's future and China's influence and presence in America."<sup>20</sup> The reconstituted Baltimore in the novel, which is renamed "B-Mor," was modeled on a factory dormitory in Shenzhen that Lee visited.<sup>21</sup> In interviews, Lee's comments on these workers betray his perception of Chinese workers as minor characters, as opposed to world-historical protagonists. The argument I want to make is that Lee's pragmatic acceptance of China's rise can be observed in his centering of a Chinese worker in the novel rather than correct for stereotypes in a way that would simply reproduce or endorse a liberal, bourgeois subject. Lee has provided indications that he is cognizant of this problem of humanism and form. Regardless of authorial intention, what I am suggesting is that, minimally, Lee recapitulates this problem by submitting a specific character type (the Chinese worker) to a counterintuitive mode of characterization (minoritized or waning protagonicity).

The principles of characterization and value that structure *On Such a Full Sea* are very much developed at these imaginative limits, which align the novel closely to a genre that Mark Fisher calls "capitalist realism": "the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to *imagine* a coherent alternative to it."<sup>22</sup> Critics of capitalist realism and its cognates have glommed onto dystopian fiction and film: cyberpunk novels like Gibson's, postapocalyptic novels like Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), naturalist television shows like HBO's *The Wire* (2002–8), and films about catastrophe-in-progress like *Children of Men* (2006), Bong Joon-ho's film *Snowpiercer* (2014), and Joss Whedon's *Firefly* (2003). One reason for this attraction might be the amenability of dystopia to the Kojèvean-Fukuyaman end of history anxiety that Fisher elaborates.<sup>23</sup> At the end of this essay, I turn to Kojève's theory of the end of history in order to revive some of the imaginative possibilities found there (though not in Fukuyama, and so not in Fisher), and restore them to the notion of capitalist realism that I hope to show is clearly being tested in *On Such a Full Sea*.

If iterated enough at scales from the micro- to the macro-political, the injunction of pragmatism suggests a steady decline into dystopia on a road paved with compromises and indignities. Berlant helps us see how this decline shifts the temporality of narrative to that of the "impasse," which she defines as "a stretch of time in which one moves around with . . . both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things . . . and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event."<sup>24</sup> Crucially, the genre of the impasse is rooted in "the way the body slows down what's going

down [and thus] helps to clarify the relation of living on to ongoing crisis and loss.”<sup>25</sup> The impasse offers a way to recontextualize the figure of the animalized human that so often emerges in dystopian fiction as a result of crises of state control (e.g., *Blade Runner*’s replicants, *The Road*’s cannibals, *Firefly*’s reavers), and whose potential for redemption points to an outside of the capitalist realist cul-de-sac. Victor Bascara argues that these figures, horrifying as they are, “may also constitute the formation of an emergent class entitled to recognition.”<sup>26</sup> The temporality of animacy in dystopian narrative, in other words, is that of the impasse—a stalling out between two positions—and it is perhaps for this reason that animacy in Lee’s novel can often be found mediating the end of history and the end of the world: two of our most familiar tropes for thinking through the impasses standing between late capitalism’s crises and its uncertain futures.

The narrative present of *On Such a Full Sea* extrapolates economic and environmental trends of our present some 150 or 200 years into the future. The world has succumbed to environmental catastrophes associated with the kind of hyperindustrialization that destroyed the fictional Xixu City in China: “It was as if the entire valley and everything in it were slowly scorching.”<sup>27</sup> Because of these catastrophes, all of humanity eventually falls victim to “C-illnesses,” which are never clearly defined, but are paradigmatic examples of a trope that Heather Houser calls “ecosickness”: a “pervasive [bodily] dysfunction” that “cannot be confined to a single system and links up the biomedical, environmental, social, and ethicopolitical.”<sup>28</sup> As we learn more about the world’s social and spatial structure—its rigid stratification into affluent “Charter” cities and vassal “facilities” that produce goods for Charters—it becomes clear that C-illnesses are more than just a background condition; they are the novel’s central world-building principle.<sup>29</sup>

After an essentially lifelong struggle with C-illness and treatment, the denizens of this world succumb to “the Crash, a degenerative condition in which the major organs begin to fail, one after another, caused by the accrued ill side effects of the serial therapies, or maybe the therapies themselves . . . until complete shutdown ensues, and there’s nothing left to be done.”<sup>30</sup> In a novel appearing a mere six years after the most severe economic crash since the Great Depression, it is difficult *not* to read this description as an allegory for capitalism’s crises, with the indistinguishability between treatment and malfunction echoing corrective measures like austerity that are worse than the crisis itself and that have pushed countries like Greece to the point of “complete shutdown.” Thus, even though the “C” of the appellation is never defined, it strongly implies “cancer” while also inviting interpretations like “crash,” “climate,” “capital,”



and “China.” C-illnesses ground the novel’s engagement with contemporary “toxic discourses,” to use Lawrence Buell’s phrase, in which China has become associated with environmental catastrophe, pollution spillover, toxicity, and apocalypse.<sup>31</sup> What Lee’s novel demonstrates is how orientalism provides a connective tissue joining end of history and end of the world thinking, and how the everyday is endured under the threat of annihilation.

Differing from the template of “outbreak narratives” that Priscilla Wald describes, *On Such a Full Sea* begins at a point long *after* the initial outbreak panic.<sup>32</sup> By the narrative present, society has learned to live with and organize its modes of production around the brute fact of perpetual outbreak. After the environmental catastrophe in Xixu, the city’s residents are brought over to America to repopulate B-Mor by the citizens of so-called Charter cities: ultra-wealthy, walled utopias whose “tallish, attractive [residents] of various races and ethnicities” signal the actualization of the postwar American “neoliberal multiculturalism” that Jodi Melamed has described.<sup>33</sup> Charters and facilities have replaced nation-states with a federated model of quasi-corporate city-state franchises. Within B-Mor’s walls we find a transplanted, hyperurban Chinese space replete with food stalls, multigenerational households, and *Blade Runner*-like media overload: nonetheless, the city was specifically designed to produce uncontaminated food. Food production has been urbanized because the anarchic “open counties” that constitute the vast unincorporated spaces outside the walls of Charter cities and facilities are toxic and unfit for agriculture. Looming in the background of this setting are hints of the slow decline of the human race. Even Charters, with their best-in-class health care, “didn’t actually live more than a few years longer” than facilities residents. On top of this, “a growing number of [Charter] patients . . . had stopped responding to [C-therapy] treatments altogether.”<sup>34</sup>

C-illnesses refract contemporary discourses that portray China’s rise as an intensification of capitalist crisis vis-à-vis environmental devastation, and that see China as the linchpin in any attempt to address the global consequences of such devastation. In a typical contribution to the “toxic discourse” that has, of late, attached itself to China in the minds of Western observers, Jonathan Watts writes: “An alarming number of [China’s] problems are spreading across borders to become a global security concern. . . . Unless China kicks its coal habit, scientists say greenhouse emissions will surge, global temperatures will rise, and climate change will create millions more eco-migrants and food supply instability.”<sup>35</sup> Julie Sze writes that arguments like these, in which China is dragging the rest of the world into irreversible environmental catastrophe, in fact betray an “eco-authoritarian” envy precisely in their ascription of an

outsized share of blame and responsibility to China: “Within the United States, our greatest ecological desire is to fixate on China as the focal point of the vast majority of global pollution, and thus displace our own responsibility for global environmental damage. . . . China is our psychological displacement and doppelganger. . . . We fear China and its pollution; at the same time, we are defined by our envy of the power of authoritarian government to make positive environmental changes.”<sup>36</sup> The epidemiological undertones in the Watts passage rearticulate a racialized trope of disease that, as Nayan Shah has shown in his study of San Francisco’s Chinatown, has so often been associated with the “yellow peril.”<sup>37</sup> Fan Yang’s reading of viral videos about China’s immense smog problem demonstrates how reformist, China-blaming toxic discourse situates “China’s *present* smog as a problem in Euro-America’s *past*.”<sup>38</sup> Said’s orientalism is very much alive and well here.

The significance of the novel’s plot picking up long after the urgency of the initial outbreak of C-illnesses is that temporality has been therefore liberated from the inexorable urgency of emergency and exception. It becomes possible, then, to see how the pervasive threat of C-illnesses has insinuated itself into various social forms: and it is in these forms that we can observe overlaps with forms of “exhausting pragmatics” that constitute Berlant’s descriptions of everyday life.<sup>39</sup> These appear most strikingly as health care narratives of the sort that became ubiquitous in the run-up to the Affordable Care Act’s passage in 2010.<sup>40</sup> We are presented, for instance, with the details of facilities insurance plans that, in effect, literalize the biopolitical determinants of class identity and social stratification: “The maximum stay period in the health clinics is effectively one work cycle (six days), no matter the condition or needs of the patient, as the family is now responsible for the fees past that time, fees that are well beyond most any B-Mor clan’s capacity to pay.”<sup>41</sup> Even though Charter residents enjoy no restrictions on their health care, they are constantly under threat of expulsion from their Charters: a more severe version of the present-day threat hanging over Americans with employer-provided health care.<sup>42</sup> Under immense economic and social threats (which mediate the by-now commodified threat of C-illnesses), Charter residents transvalue their imminent worthlessness into individuating visions of self that Berlant calls “*safety-deposit objects* that make it possible to bear sovereignty through its distribution, the energy of feeling relational, general, reciprocal, and accumulative”—with an emphasis on the last: they see themselves as “Connoisseurs of Me,” “exquisite microcosms” consumed by a “tireless drive for excellence” and a “compulsion to build and to own.”<sup>43</sup> While the rewards to Charter residents for successful research are immense, the consequences of failure are severe: “Very little is guaranteed for

a Charter person, if anything at all . . . one must continually work and invest and have enough money to sustain a Charter lifestyle or else leave [to the open counties].”<sup>44</sup> Neither in the orientalized space of the facilities nor in the neoliberal Americanized space of the Charters is anyone spared from what Berlant calls “the slow train wreck that is always coming in the catastrophic time of capitalism, where if you’re lucky you *get* to be exploited, and if you’re lucky you can avoid one more day of being the focus of a scene that hails and ejects you when it is your time to again become worthless.”<sup>45</sup> Train wrecks notwithstanding, the temporality that allows these bureaucratic details to infuse the novel’s narrative coincides with what Berlant calls “slow death”: the “physical wearing out of a population in a way that points to its deterioration as a defining condition of its experience and historical existence.”<sup>46</sup> The stagnation or heat death of this impasse shifts the novel’s focus away from emergency and exception to the “dispersed management of the putatively biological threat.”<sup>47</sup>

I want to draw attention here to how the temporality of “slow death” in Lee’s novel *cannot* in fact accommodate the urgent temporality of the “outbreak” on display in Shapiro, Shah, and Chen, and how this incompatibility highlights one important difference between Saidian orientalism and its postsocialist mutations. The temporality of slow death dissolves the yellow peril threat posed by C-illnesses, thus allowing C-illnesses to be incorporated into the social totality and to exist as something *other* than threat: as a career-making goad for Charters, for instance, or as an ethos of the death drive for facilities residents. Indeed, the stability of the world’s social structure depends on Charter residents’ refusal to surrender to C-illnesses and facilities residents’ corresponding embrace of a fatalism about death.<sup>48</sup> Here we find an allegory for the absorption of a Saidian orientalism’s resolute hierarchy into the uncertain hierarchies of political economic interdependency. Along these lines, we might additionally consider that the one feature of Buell’s model of “toxic discourse” absent from *On Such a Full Sea* is reformism; the question of how to solve the world’s environmental crises is never raised.<sup>49</sup> The novel takes place at a historical vantage point at which the end of the world is clearly in sight, but just far enough into the future that urgency is impossible. This narrative structure thus recapitulates the temporality of climate change discourse, which has always struggled to make long-term events feel urgent. These temporalities thus reflect more on our psychology than our natural world, which helps us understand why Lee sees the novel’s environmental catastrophe as “a psychic condition, of feeling beleaguered,” and why Lee has rejected attempts by reviewers and readers to categorize his novel as “cli-fi,” or “climate science fiction.”<sup>50</sup>

We might therefore interpret the central drama of *On Such a Full Sea* as the possibility that a new temporality is being born: one that might overturn “slow death” but does not resume an orientalist urgency. The novel’s plot begins when its main character, Fan, a sixteen-year-old fish farm diver, leaves the walls of B-Mor in search of her boyfriend, Reg, who is allegedly C-free. As the novel’s limited omniscient narrator—an unidentified “We” that functions like a Greek chorus—registers Fan’s itinerary through the novel’s world, it puzzles over the various disturbances she leaves in her wake and the violent trials she endures. Crucially, Fan is pregnant with her and Reg’s child. As the carrier of a genetic code that could potentially spread and have a revolutionary impact on her world, Fan instantiates a trope that Wald calls “the healthy carrier”: a figure “who both suffers and represents the sins of the modern world. This figure embodies not only the forbidden intrusions, the deep connections, and the most essential bonds of human communion but also the transformative power of communicable disease.”<sup>51</sup> The healthy carrier, in other words, is a revolutionary figure that radically disrupts structures of value and temporality: Fan’s child could be a carrier of C-illness, or, like its father, it could be C-free. Its undecidability oscillates between significations of threat, Utopian alternative, and equivalence. After Fan leaves B-Mor, a kind of entropy is unleashed. Food stocks collapse, and residents begin to breach sacrosanct rules of community decorum. Demonstrations against conditions in the facilities even begin to crop up. The “We” narrator wonders whether “these incidents were in some tangled way inspired by Fan’s actions.”<sup>52</sup> As a potential social contagion, Fan’s constant movement creates ripples but also distributes revolutionary energy such that it never concentrates in a specific area long enough to amount to change. While the unrest in B-Mor temporarily interrupts the cozy Charter-facility symbiosis, conservative forces prevail. Food stocks recover, and the few remaining B-Mor residents who protest their lot soon grow bored of action. By the end of the novel, stability has been restored, and it is unclear whether the spectacle of Fan’s movement has pushed her world any closer to a time of justice or beyond the end of history.

### Posthistorical Form

In her reading of the Dardenne brothers’ films, Berlant argues that in the impasse of cruel optimism there is no hint of “revolutionary possibility.” In their films, “the citizen’s dissatisfaction leads to reinvestment in the normative promises of capital and intimacy under capital. The quality of that reinvestment is not political in any of the normative senses, though—it’s a feeling of

aspirational normalcy, the desire to feel normal.”<sup>53</sup> This aspirational normalcy, I would note, coincides with the “exhausting pragmatics” of the impasse. The opportunism and confounding optimism that so energetically drives characters like the Dardennes’ Rosetta (a paradigm of what Ong calls an “exception to neoliberalism”) is the same that drives the indefatigable Fan.<sup>54</sup> The difference between characters like Rosetta and orientalized characters like Fan, however, is that, even though both are clearly animacies in their struggle for humanity, we are scandalized by Rosetta’s fall from liberal subject with bourgeois aspirations into objecthood/inhumanity, while Fan’s aspirational subjecthood proceeds from a place of mystery and is what most puzzles the “We” narrator. The “We” narrator’s bafflement, in other words, suggests that while it is easy for us to empathize with Rosetta’s struggle for humanity, it is not as easy to affirm Fan’s humanity. Moreover, the narrator’s bafflement suggests that it is necessary to work through this unease because the desire to bestow an abject subject’s humanity by fiat creates additional problems—perhaps like the ones created through an undigested civil rights discourse that results in what Melamed calls “neoliberal multiculturalism.”

This struggle becomes clear in the “We” narrator’s descriptions of Fan as an animacy. She is at one point described as “an arbitrary plant or small tree in a section of counties bush.”<sup>55</sup> More often, Fan is described as piscine. Her talents as a fish farm diver are preternatural: “More than the other divers, [she] took to the tanks with a quiet abandon. . . . She once told us that she almost preferred being in the tanks than out in the air of B-Mor, that she liked the feeling of having to hold her breath and go against her nature.”<sup>56</sup> While putting on her diving skinsuit, “only the pale gleam of her bare feet and hands and face [indicated] her humanity. Once she pulled on gloves and flippers and her eye mask, she looked like a creature of prey.”<sup>57</sup> It is perhaps because of Fan’s piscine qualities that Reg does not eat fish: a fact that the narrator and Charter researchers suspect might have something to do with his being C-free, but that we might read as revealing Reg’s position in the animacy hierarchy.<sup>58</sup> These passages depict the “We” narrator’s struggle to reconcile the animacy of a Chinese worker with the interiority of the bourgeois subject.

Fan’s geographic and social mobility from facility to counties to Charter is unprecedented in her world’s stagnant social structure, in which even the mere ideation of social mobility has become all but impossible. The singularity of her act prompts the “We” narrator to observe and comment on her progress in light of a vexing question that situates them firmly at the end of history: “whether being an ‘individual’ makes a difference anymore. That it can matter at all. And if not, whether we in fact care.”<sup>59</sup> The obsolescence of individual-

ism and the apparent unavailability of negative action constitute the only true *novum* in the novel, to borrow Darko Suvin's term for the element of the new that distinguishes science fiction from other genres.<sup>60</sup> These are also central features of Hegelian end of history theories from Karl Marx through Kojève, Fukuyama, and Giorgio Agamben.<sup>61</sup> As I have been suggesting, what makes *On Such a Full Sea* unique is how it redounds animacy back on the novel form itself as a solution to the problem of reconciling its protagonist's radical particularity with her explicit typicality.<sup>62</sup> This additional, metafictional layer distinguishes Lee's characterization of Fan from deployments of the liberal figure of the "hypothetical mandarin," which is Eric Hayot's phrase for a Western tradition of Sinological Orientalism that originated in the eighteenth century and continues to function, *mutatis mutandis*, as a mode of moral training for the geopolitical consciousness of emerging bourgeois subjects.<sup>63</sup>

Lee had a specific novel in mind when he began the first version of *On Such a Full Sea*, which he later abandoned. It was to be about workers living in "the factory towns outside of Shenzhen." Lee admits that he approached his subject with "preconceptions" about how "horrible" the conditions would be and that he had in fact planned on writing a novel in the vein of Emile Zola's *Germinal*, which he describes as "a great novel about coal miners in a town in 19th-century France and their struggles—their battle against the owners and the degradation that they suffered."<sup>64</sup> What Lee expected to find in Shenzhen was a gothic setting confirming stories in the American media about dangerous working conditions, strings of suicide, and exploitation.<sup>65</sup> Lee was surprised to discover, however, that the factory he visited "was a fascinating place, certainly not awful, sort of like a prep-school campus that had been allowed to get run-down."<sup>66</sup> Rather than find Étienne Lantier and his fellow miners huddled in revolutionary discussion, Lee found clues ("a prep-school campus") that the factory's workers harbored a familiar sense of individuality and bourgeois aspiration. We might say, then, that Lee experienced a shock of the familiar, of the sort produced by accounts of Chinese rural migrants such as Leslie Chang's ethnography *Factory Girls* (2009) and Ivan Franceschini, Tommaso Facchin, and Tommaso Bonaventura's documentary *Dreamwork China* (2011), texts that seek to replace mainstream, techno-orientalist portrayals of migrant workers as technologized humans with portrayals of those workers optimistically pursuing neoliberal self-fashioning.<sup>67</sup>

Because of the incompatibility of Lee's source material with the revolutionary narrative he wanted to craft, when Lee sat down to write, he found himself writing a book that was turning out more like journalism than a novel. He explains in an interview, "You know, the writing was fine. But I think I was writing just

basically what you guys [journalists] were writing. I wasn't adding anything to that story, in my view. I didn't want to just report on it."<sup>68</sup> Reportage, as the genre of the impasse between liberal humanism and oriental animacy, failed in Lee's first attempt at the novel, but in the novel that he ultimately produced, the detached, objective style of reportage was retained in the voice of the "We" narrator. This detachment suffuses the novel in passages like these: "Did Fan care about such things? We can't be certain. We know much about her daily life but that still leaves a great deal to be determined."<sup>69</sup> Such detachment makes space for metafictional reflections such as when the narrator observes that "in terms of character" Fan is "not terribly distinctive."<sup>70</sup> I read this observation as a comment not only on her muted personality but also on how she might not qualify as the kind of liberal, bourgeois subject traditionally associated with the novel form. Throughout *On Such a Full Sea*, the narrator plays a kind of metafictional game, preempting almost every literary critical assumption that Fan qualifies as the individual that critics like Ian Watt locate at the ideological and formal center of the nineteenth-century novel (with which Lee is, again, clearly in dialogue). With the "We" narrator's comments on individuality not making a difference in mind, contrast Watt's insistence on the centrality of a strong, socially situated protagonist:

The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions: the society must value every individual highly enough to consider him the proper subject of its serious literature; and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of novels.<sup>71</sup>

With the "We" narrator's description of Fan, which denies her any access to protagonicity:

The more we follow the turns of her journey, the more we realize that she is not quite the champion we would normally sing; she is not the heroine who wields the great sword; she is not the bearer of wisdom and light; she does not head the growing column, leading a new march. She is one of the ranks.<sup>72</sup>

Even more strikingly, whenever the "We" narrator is presented with an opportunity to see in Fan the distinctive characteristics of an "individual," it instead identifies characteristics that align her closer to inanimate and inhuman than animate and human on an animacy hierarchy. For instance, Fan is described as "not beautiful but rather distinctive in her presence"; a "singular will" rather than a subject with interiority, for instance; "consistent" rather



than “moral”; having “feelings” rather than “convictions”; possessing awareness of her structural position “in the wider ecology” as “one of the ranks” rather than “self-knowledge.”<sup>73</sup> This either–or structure mirrors the conflict between bourgeois humanism and oriental animacy that the liberal reformism of *Factory Girls* and *Dreamwork China* aims to resolve. *On Such a Full Sea*, as a text centrally concerned with the imaginative limits of capitalist realism and China-inflected narratives of the end of the world/history, appears to register that, characterizing Fan as a liberal individual with bourgeois aspirations—that is, as a novelistic protagonist—would simply have reiterated a familiar orientalism in which the West, yet again, gains “the upper hand.”<sup>74</sup>

That Lee appears to address this problem through Fan’s animacy rather than (or at least as a specific articulation of) her “minorness,” to use Alex Woloch’s term, suggests that “minorness” lacks a capacity to account for the racialized minorness at the heart of orientalism. Granted, Fan occupies both of the “extremes of minorness” that Woloch identifies in the nineteenth-century novel: the worker and the eccentric: “In one case, the character is smoothly absorbed as a gear within the narrative machine, at the cost of his or her own free interiority; in the other case, the minor character grates against his or her position and is usually, as a consequence, wounded, exiled, expelled, ejected, imprisoned, or killed. . . . In both cases, the free relationship between surface and depth is negated; the actualization of a human being is denied.”<sup>75</sup> While this description comes impressively close to Fan’s itinerary in the novel, it does not equip us to account for the orientalism underlying Fan’s minorness. To push this farther, because of the way that Lee’s novel distributes its articulation of political and ethical questions pertaining to minorness *across* formal registers like characterization, genre, and narrative voice, my analysis thus far could be said to be following on the heels of Berlant’s suggestion that a “waning of genre” might be a more apt analytic in our contemporary moment for understanding the relationship between realism and the present.<sup>76</sup> In *On Such a Full Sea*, the genre of the novel falls under the same skepticism applied to liberal protagonicity.

If, as capitalist realist critics might contend, this relentless skepticism is symptomatic or mimetic of the foreclosure of alternatives to capitalism, *On Such a Full Sea* nonetheless offers reason to believe that at least an *imaginative*, if not a political or economic, alternative can be conceived through what Kojève would call “post-historical” aesthetics. In a famous footnote to his *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Kojève offers two visions of the end of history: one American and animalistic, and the other Japanese and human.<sup>77</sup> In the decade or so after World War II, after visits to the United States and USSR, Kojève



reached the conclusion that Hegel was correct in his claim that history had ended with the Battle of Jena in 1806, and that all subsequent history had been “but an extension in space of the universal revolutionary force actualized in France by Robespierre-Napoleon.”<sup>78</sup> Once the universal homogeneous state has obtained, negative action is no longer necessary or available, and “there is no longer any reason to change” (which can be taken as a description of the predominant affect conveyed in *On Such a Full Sea*). It is at this point that a transfiguration of humanity occurs: freedom has replaced necessity as the relation between Man and nature, and so “Man remains alive as animal in *harmony* with Nature of given Being,” though not as a human animal.<sup>79</sup> Kojève goes on to offer a speculative fiction about posthistorical aesthetics: “After the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas.”<sup>80</sup> This relation emerges in the “We” narrator’s narration of Fan’s itinerary: a register that can attain the realm of freedom. We can thus disambiguate the “We” narrator’s question about individuality making a difference anymore into two questions that Kojève’s footnote raises: whether Fan’s movement, which obviously causes a stir, counts as negative action, or if it instead counts as what Kojève’s student Georges Bataille called, in a critique of his teacher, “negativity with no use.”<sup>81</sup>

There is a scene in *On Such a Full Sea* that will help clarify the novel’s posthistorical aesthetics as it relates to what we might call a Kojèvean theory of characterization. In Seneca Charter, Fan finds herself in the service of a wealthy Charter resident named Miss Cathy. As is the fashion of the wealthiest Charters, Miss Cathy “keeps” a group of girls as pets.<sup>82</sup> The seven girls are, in Fan’s estimation, “Asian,” and each has had her eyes “altered” to be “huge,” making them resemble characters in Japanese animation.<sup>83</sup> Without an animal–human framework like Kojève’s in mind, these scenes might appear supererogatory or strikingly discordant with the novel’s otherwise familiar liberal humanist values in which the animalization of the human is limited, one would like to believe, to metaphor. But insofar as Miss Cathy, as a Charter, is a historical human engaged in negativity, and the girls are posthistorical animacies (confirmed by the fact that Miss Cathy asks Fan to join the group), a Kojèvean character system is in play.

Like pets, the girls are kept in an enclosure, which they never leave. The enclosure takes the form of a room adjacent to Miss Cathy’s sprawling bedroom, and it is here that the girls compose their “work”: a visual diary “drawn in the style of anime” that covers several panels of the room’s four-meter-high walls, from floor to ceiling. It is so intricately drawn that, from a distance, the walls

appear to be painted a solid color: “The scenes were not separated by borders or other framing but rather magically melded into one another, via all sides, a detail of background or figuration of one threading into the fabric of the next so that the whole appeared to be roiling in a continuous, visceral flow.”<sup>84</sup> As much as the “work” resembles anime, without a framing convention, which in comic art is used to control temporality, there is effectively no temporality at all, only a “continuous, visceral flow” of representation: a present that must be worked over again and again, that never gives way to a future but instead expands indefinitely. This accords with the narrator’s observation that, being kept, “there was now nothing that *could* happen to [the girls], no new experiences whatsoever save their routine.”<sup>85</sup> Even though they are captives, the girls have acceded to a posthistorical realm of freedom. We might therefore say that they pursue art making, which is for them indistinguishable from “work,” as “birds build their nests.”

Kojève resorts to orientalism to imagine out of an impasse of the imagination. After a visit to Japan in 1959, Kojève amended his prior conviction that postwar America confirmed Hegel’s claim that history had ended. Americans, he believed, had achieved a classless society and were relatively free from work and necessity; they had thus “return[ed] to animality.”<sup>86</sup> Japan prompted him to produce another account of history’s end: “There I was able to observe a Society that is one of a kind, because it alone has for almost three centuries experienced life at the ‘end of History.’”<sup>87</sup> Kojève thus finds his present situated at a historical vantage point very close to the speculative vantage point to which Lee transports us in *On Such a Full Sea*, that is, a point very far into the end of history. Kojève writes that “all Japanese without exception are currently in a position to live according to totally *formalized* values—that is, values completely empty of all ‘human’ content in the ‘historical’ sense.” This last comment can be clarified with recourse to Kojève’s dictum that “man is a fatal sickness of the animal,” which, according to Agamben’s gloss, means that man “can be human only to the degree that he transcends . . . the animal which supports him, and only because, through the action of negation, he is capable of mastering and, eventually, destroying his own animality.”<sup>88</sup> Since being human in the “historical” sense requires constant negative action against one’s animality, the Japanese have become human in a “post-historical” sense, being capable of negating their animality through the aesthetic. It is thus through their art—the Noh Theater, the ceremony of tea, and the art of bouquets of flowers—that the Japanese have become “negativity with no use”: human (“negativity”) animals (“with no use”), which Chen would call animacies.<sup>89</sup>

Following Kojève, we might say that Miss Cathy negates her animality by keeping the girls, thus becoming more and more “Japanese.” Here we should openly acknowledge the vulgarity of Kojève’s orientalism and sign our endorsement of Jacques Derrida’s quip in response to these very passages in Kojève: “There is a French tradition, a kind of ‘French specialty’ of peremptory diagnoses upon returning from a quick trip to a faraway land whose language one does not even speak and about which one knows next to nothing.”<sup>90</sup> The orientalism that Lee very intentionally takes up in his depiction of the girls is of a piece with the orientalist depiction of Fan as an animacy whose protagonicity is in doubt (and, again, by extension, so is the subjecthood and humanity of Chinese workers). For Kojève, an orientalism depicting Japan as an aesthetic society indicated a posthistorical space not only because it mobilized a modernist politics that imagines Utopia as aesthetic autonomy but also because the early signs of the Japanese economic miracle appeared to guarantee a political economic enclosure for posthistorical culture.<sup>91</sup> It was for this reason that Kojève believed that American capitalism, which he famously predicted as the victor of the Cold War—via economics, not ideology—would eventually have to become more Japanese. China’s rise is by no means homologous to Japan’s, except insofar as it imaginatively replicates the eventual eclipse of US hegemony, but the point here is that where our liberal instinct might be to disavow Kojève’s vulgar orientalism, Lee stops short and tarrys with orientalism. What we might learn from this is how to resist animalistic / liberal humanist strategies of imaginative containment when engaging with the negativity of animacies / Chinese workers. Put another way, we must resist becoming like Miss Cathy, whose bestowal of humanity upon subaltern subjects entails “keeping” girls like pets. Instead, the lesson of *On Such a Full Sea* might be that understanding subject formation amid shifting US–China relations requires tarrying with the negativity of orientalism: that is, engaging the problem of Chinese others as an aesthetic problem (a negativity with no use) whose resolution might lead us to an understanding of our shared status as animacies at the end of history.

If we, as American subjects, are to accept in good faith the reality of China’s rise, then we will have to tarry with the irreducible truth and subjectivity of Chinese workers, who are paradigms of the postsocialist Chinese other.<sup>92</sup> Even though the girls’ resemblance to anime characters signals an orientalist aesthetics, we are a long way from stereotype critique and its politics of disavowal, which would not allow us to go any farther than Derrida’s quip, resulting in more of the same: what Stephen Hong Sohn calls in his description of techno-orientalism the “re-articulation and re-emergence of the yellow peril.”<sup>93</sup> The

lesson here may be that in the midst of China's "truly novel and anomalous rise," to use Arrighi's phrase, orientalism has the capacity to tell us far more than what we are anxious about, or what we would like to think of ourselves: it has the capacity to help us imagine what we might unexpectedly become. While we may or may not be at the end of history, the slow work of thinking through and articulating the US–China relationship will necessarily pass through the human–animal relation. Like Kojève's birds, spiders, frogs, and cicadas, we are all pragmatists now.

### Notes

- I wish to thank special issue editors Chih-ming Wang and Yu-Fang Cho for their guidance and feedback, as well as my two anonymous reviewers.
1. Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004), 2.
  2. See Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 2010); and Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing: Lineages of the Twenty-First Century* (London: Verso, 2007).
  3. Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* (New York: Penguin, 2009); Arrighi, *Long Twentieth Century*; Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, 361–67, 379–89.
  4. On the end of history, see Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Arnold V. Miller, and J. N. Findlay, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977); Alexandre Kojève and Raymond Queneau, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, Agora Paperback Editions (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); and Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992). On Fukuyama's end of history and the Asian American novel, see Colleen Lye, "The Asian American 1960s," in *Routledge Companion to Asian American and Pacific Islander Literature*, ed. Rachel C. Lee (New York: Routledge, 2014), 213–23. Annie McClanahan has recently considered how China has become a symbol for secular stagnation, thus reviving nineteenth-century stereotypes of "Chinese stagnation" in Adam Smith and John Stuart Mill ("The Culture of Secular Stagnation," paper presented at "Futures of American Studies," Dartmouth University, June 24, 2016). See also McClanahan's reading of China's "ghost cities" as emblems of capitalist crisis as "a process without subjects" in "Photography and Foreclosure," in *Dead Pledges: Debt, Crisis, and Twenty-First-Century Culture* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017), 135–42.
  5. See, e.g., Jonathan Watts, *When a Billion Chinese Jump: How China Will Save Mankind—or Destroy It* (New York: Scribner, 2010).
  6. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978). On the Obama administration's containment policy, see Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century," *Foreign Policy* 189 (November 2011): 56–63. On interdependency and conflation, see Niall Ferguson and Moritz Schularick, "Chimerica' and the Global Asset Market Boom," *International Finance* 10 (2007): 215–39; Ferguson and Schularick, "The End of Chimerica," *International Finance* 14 (2011): 1–26.
  7. This article was conceived and written before the collective trauma of November 8 and 9, 2016, and even before the Brexit vote: which is to say it did not anticipate the populist rejection of globalization that culminated in these two events. Despite the current US president's rhetorical antagonism of China and putative rejection of globalization and free-trade agreements like the North American Free Trade Agreement and especially the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the US–China financial and trade relationship is, according to most observers, too big to fail. The politics have shifted dramatically toward an embrace or amenability to "authoritarian populism," but the underlying political economic trends appear likely to continue. See Priya Chacko and Kanishka Jayasuriya, "Trump, the Authoritarian Populist Revolt,

- and the Future of the Rules-Based Order in Asia," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, January 10, 2017, [www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2016.1266463](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2016.1266463).
8. And almost never with reference to the school of American philosophy propounded by Charles Peirce, John Dewey, Jane Addams, and Richard Rorty.
  9. China's taking up of what is often described as a "pragmatic" approach to foreign and economic policy beginning in the 1980s had more to do with a turn away from the Maoist apotheosizing of ideology than with anything pertaining to American pragmatist philosophy. As Lucian Pye argues, "Peirce was reacting against what he saw as the paralysis of excessively refined ratiocinations which inhibited decisive actions. Thus he called for more systematic learning through action and by experimentation. In contemporary Chinese political culture, the inherent problem is almost the direct opposite in that the responses to calls for action come so easily" ("On Chinese Pragmatism in the 1980s," *China Quarterly*, no. 106 [1986]: 220).
  10. Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).
  11. *Ibid.*, 100. The pragmatism I see depicted in this passage should be distinguished from the "flexibility" attributed by neoliberal economists to the Washington Consensus-style free trade policies of an "East Asian model" of postwar economic development. Rather, the success of the "East Asian model" has had to do less with trade than with "flexible rigidities" that combine free trade and state intervention. That is, the regimes that Ong examines through the trope of the exception, in which citizenship and sovereignty are opportunistically modified in pursuit of maximal economic advantage in a given timeframe. See Ronald Dore, *Flexible Rigidities: Industrial Policy and Structural Adjustment in the Japanese Economy, 1970–80* (London: Athlone, 1986); and Ha-Joon Chang, *The East Asian Development Experience: The Miracle, the Crisis, and the Future* (London: Zed Books, 2006), 109–42.
  12. Arrighi, *Adam Smith in Beijing*, 101.
  13. Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 261, 262.
  14. Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5, 2.
  15. Notable examples of recent US–China dystopias include Joss Whedon's *Firefly* (2003) television series and follow-up film *Serenity* (2005); Maureen F. McHugh's novel *China Mountain Zhang* (1992); Gary Shteyngart's novel *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010); Colson Whitehead's novel *Zone One* (2011); and season 2 of the Netflix series *House of Cards* (2013). *Zone One* might strike some readers as an outlier here, but consider the metaphor suggested by Chinatown / Fort Wonton as the sine qua non of lower Manhattan / Zone One's survival.
  16. David L. Eng, Teemu Ruskola, and Shuang Shen, introduction to "China and the Human," special issue, *Social Text* 29.4 (2012): 4, 5.
  17. On techno-orientalism, see Betsy Huang, Greta Niu, and David Roh, eds., *Techno-Orientalism: Science Fiction History, Literature, Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015); David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Stephen Hong Sohn, "Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future," special issue, *MELUS* 33, no. 4 (2008). On techno-orientalism as an aesthetic keyed specifically to the "Japan panic" of the 1970s and 1980s, see Christopher T. Fan, "Techno-Orientalism with Chinese Characteristics: Maureen F. McHugh's *China Mountain Zhang*," *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2015): 1–33. On coolie labor as mechanical labor, see Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Moon-Ho Jung, *Coolies and Cane: Race, Labor, and Sugar in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
  18. "The Chorus of 'We': An Interview with Chang-Rae Lee," *New Yorker*, January 6, 2014, [www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-chorus-of-we-an-interview-with-chang-rae-lee](http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/the-chorus-of-we-an-interview-with-chang-rae-lee).
  19. *Ibid.*
  20. Ajay Singh, "Chang-Rae Lee Talks about His Novel 'On Such a Full Sea,'" *South China Morning Post*, [www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1402299/chang-rae-lee-talks-about-his-novel-such-full-sea](http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/books/article/1402299/chang-rae-lee-talks-about-his-novel-such-full-sea) (accessed August 17, 2016).
  21. *Ibid.*
  22. Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2009), 2. See also Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Claire La Berge, eds., *Reading Capitalist Realism* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014).

23. Fisher, *Capitalist Realism*, 6–10.
24. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 4.
25. *Ibid.*, 5.
26. Victor Bascara, “Looking Backward, from 2019 to 1882,” in *Techno-Orientalism: Science Fiction History, Literature, Media*, ed. Betsy Huang, Greta Niu, and David Roh (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 63.
27. Chang-rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2014), 11.
28. Heather Houser, *Ecosickness in Contemporary U.S. Fiction: Environment and Affect* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 11.
29. Caren Irr aligns the social and spatial stratifications in *On Such a Full Sea* with a broader trend of “neomedievalism” in contemporary Anglophone novels. That is, “the revival of certain medieval figures that provide another sort of friction with a nation-state imaginary” (“Neomedievalism in Three Contemporary City Novels: Tobar, Adichie, Lee,” *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature* 42.4 [2015]: 439).
30. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 65.
31. Buell defines “toxic discourse” as an “expressed anxiety arising from perceived threat of environmental hazard due to chemical modification by human agency” (*Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001], 31).
32. Priscilla Wald, *Contagious: Cultures, Carriers, and the Outbreak Narrative* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). An important aspect of the outbreak narrative, Wald writes, is how it “draws attention to an urgent and important problem” (266).
33. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 163. See Jodi Melamed, *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011). For an extended application of Melamed to a reading of *On Such a Full Sea*, see Christopher B. Patterson and Y-Dang Troeung, “The Psyche of Neoliberal Multiculturalism: Queering Memory and Reproduction in Larissa Lai’s *Salt Fish Girl* and Chang-rae Lee’s *On Such a Full Sea*,” *Concentric: Literary and Cultural Studies* 42.1 (2016): 73–98.
34. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 277.
35. Watts, *When a Billion Chinese Jump*. See also Judith Shapiro, *Mao’s War against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
36. Julie Sze, *Fantasy Islands: Chinese Dreams and Ecological Fears in an Age of Climate Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 26–27.
37. See Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). Shah shows, in the nineteenth century, American health officials saw the bubonic plague as an “Oriental disease, peculiar to rice eaters” (150), and how San Francisco’s Chinese residents were seen as a “medical menace” (2). See also the introduction to Wald’s *Contagious*, in which she develops the template of the “outbreak narrative” through readings of the SARS outbreak in Asia.
38. Fan Yang, “Under the Dome: ‘Chinese’ Smog as a Viral Media Event,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 33.3 (2016): 9.
39. I borrow the language of overlapping forms from Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).
40. See also Anna Deavere Smith, *Let Me Down Easy* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2016).
41. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 50.
42. *Ibid.*, 52.
43. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 43; Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 179.
44. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 54.
45. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 171.
46. *Ibid.*, 95.
47. *Ibid.*, 97.
48. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 101.
49. Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World*, 45. Joshua Clover’s clarification on the attribution to Hall of the famous phrase I am reformulating here, “Race is the modality in which class is lived,” is worth quoting: “While the cited source is collectively authored, this formulation is generally attributed to Hall, in part because it appears in later single-authored works under his name” (“Surplus Rebellions,” *The New Inquiry*, May 17, 2016, <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/surplus-rebellions/>).

50. Edward Wong, "Q. and A.: Chang-Rae Lee on His Tale of Migrants from an Environmentally Ruined China," *New York Times*, March 20, 2015.
51. Wald, *Contagious*, 10.
52. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 95.
53. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 169–70.
54. Ong, *Neoliberalism as Exception*, 4.
55. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 255.
56. *Ibid.*, 5–6.
57. *Ibid.*, 3.
58. *Ibid.*, 102.
59. *Ibid.*, 3. On first-person plural in contemporary fiction, see Colleen Lye, "Unmarked Character and the 'Rise of Asia': Ed Park's *Personal Days*," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1.1 (2015): 230–54.
60. Darko Suvin, *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1979).
61. For an overview of Agamben's engagement with the end of history concept, see Sergei Prozorov, "Giorgio Agamben and the End of History: Inoperative Praxis and the Interruption of the Dialectic," *European Journal of Social Theory* 12.4 (2009): 523–42. Agamben's deepest engagement with these theses vis-à-vis the transfiguration of man is found in *The Open*.
62. This kind of metafictional move is, as Min Hyoung Song has observed, a signature feature of Lee's fiction. See Song, "Between Genres: On Chang-Rae Lee's Realism," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 10, 2014.
63. Eric Hayot, *The Hypothetical Mandarin: Sympathy, Modernity, and Chinese Pain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Fan's animacy coincides with the form of the hypothetical mandarin so that it might more effectively throw into question the entire game of orientalist cultural logics—even as it refuses to countenance the liberal satisfaction of rejecting orientalism outright.
64. Wong, "Q. and A."
65. That is, stories such as the ones in the "iEconomy" series that Charles Duhigg and David Barboza reported for the *New York Times* in 2012, which included headlines like "In China, Human Costs Are Built into an iPad" (Duhigg and Barboza, "Apple's iPad and the Human Costs for Workers in China," *New York Times*, January 25, 2012).
66. "Chorus of 'We.'"
67. Leslie Chang, *Factory Girls: From Village to City in a Changing China* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2009).
68. Wong, "Q. and A."
69. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 3.
70. *Ibid.*
71. Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 60.
72. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 198.
73. *Ibid.*, 28, 78, 152, 156, 171, 198. Importantly, these characteristics are always contrasted with each other, either in the same sentence or in the same paragraph, which emphasizes how the narrator/Lee is choosing to characterize Fan as an animacy. For instance: "Was she an especially moral person? That's difficult to say. She was consistent, is how we will put it, ever the same and same and same" (152).
74. Said, *Orientalism*, 7.
75. Alex Woloch, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 25. See also Fredric Jameson's discussion of the "waning of protagonicity" in *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013).
76. Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 6.
77. Thanks to Andrew Leong for clarifying that Kojève's understanding of Japanese history on display here is problematic at best.
78. Kojève and Queneau, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 160n.
79. *Ibid.*, 159n.
80. *Ibid.* See Agamben, *The Open*, 10; Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 88.
81. Quoted in Agamben, *The Open*, 7.
82. George Saunders's short story "The Semplica Girl Diaries" features a strikingly similar conceit of keeping nonwhite girls as pets. See Saunders, "The Semplica Girls Diaries," in *Tenth of December: Stories* (New York: Random House, 2013).



83. Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*, 176, 212, 209.
84. *Ibid.*, 215, 216.
85. *Ibid.*, 223.
86. Kojève and Queneau, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 161n. Kojève famously predicted that the Cold War would end with America's economic victory via capitalism rather than ideology (i.e., democracy's triumph over communism).
87. *Ibid.*
88. Agamben, *The Open*, 12.
89. *Ibid.*, 11.
90. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.
91. On Japan as an aesthetic society, see Eiko Ikegami, *Bonds of Civility: Aesthetic Networks and the Political Origins of Japanese Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
92. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 19.
93. Stephen Hong Sohn, "Introduction: Alien/Asian: Imagining the Racialized Future," *MELUS* 33.4 (2008): 10.