# Aff – Techno-Orientalism – BFHR 7wk

### Notes

Thanks to David Sanico and Natalie Gao for turning out this file. Please email [sanicod23@chcstudent.com](mailto:sanicod23@chcstudent.com) (David) or [nataliegao2023@gmail.com](mailto:nataliegao2023@gmail.com) (Natalie) if you have any questions.

As you can see, there’s tons of different theses, impacts, and advocacies including writings about futurity, simulacra, feminism etc.---I’d encourage you to look at the different cards and see what different versions of the 1AC could look like.

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## 1AC

### 1AC – Techno-Orientalism

#### The language and code of the Western project produce an Asianized future, where the Asian Techno-Orient supplants the aspirations and anxieties of modern info capitalism, justifying Western dominance. In this state, the Asian body accelerates past the present and becomes the mirror of Western futural fears.

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These examples perfectly illustrate our definition of techno-Orientalism: the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse.4 Techno-Orientalist imaginations are infused with the languages and codes of the technological and the futuristic. These developed alongside industrial advances in the West and have become part of the West’s project of securing dominance as architects of the future, a project that requires configurations of the East as the very technology with which to shape it. Techno-Orientalist speculations of an Asianized future have become ever more prevalent in the wake of neoliberal trade policies that enabled greater flow of information and capital between the East and the West. Substantial criticism of techno-Orientalism emerged in the mid-1990s when cultural theorists began to trace its manifestations and theorize its causes and implications. Kevin Morley and David Robins, Toshiya Ueno, and Kumiko Sato, principal trailblazers of the field, laid much of the valuable groundwork. Morley and Robins’s Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries (Routledge, 1995), in which a definition of “techno-Orientalism” first saw print, remains the most cited in critical assessments of technological and Orientalist discourses; however, Ueno has probably written most extensively about techno-Orientalism as a discursive cultural phenomenon in the era of what he identifies as the “post-Fordist social environment of globalization” (223). “The basis of Orientalism and xenophobia is the subordination of Others through a sort of ‘mirror of cultural conceit,’” Ueno explains. “The Orient exists in so far as the West needs it, because it brings the project of the West into focus” (223).

Whereas Orientalism, as a strategy of representational containment, arrests Asia in traditional, and often premodern imagery, techno-Orientalism presents a broader, dynamic, and often contradictory spectrum of images, constructed by the East and West alike, of an “Orient” undergoing rapid economic and cultural transformations. Techno-Orientalism, like Orientalism, places great emphasis on the project of modernity—cultures privilege modernity and fear losing their perceived “edge” over others. Stretching beyond Orientalism’s premise of a hegemonic West’s representational authority over the East, techno-Orientalism’s scope is much more expansive and bidirectional, its discourses mutually constituted by the flow of trade and capital across the hemispheres. As Ueno observes, techno-Orientalism is first and foremost an effect of globalism. “If the Orient was invented by the West,” he writes, “then the Techno-Orient was also invented by the world of information capitalism” (228). Technological developments, driven by the imperial aspirations and the appetites of consumerist societies on both sides of the Pacific, propel the engines of invention and production. In its wake, Western nations vying for cultural and economic dominance with Asian nations find in technoOrientalism an expressive vehicle for their aspirations and fears. Our volume, Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media, documents past and current constructions of the role of Asia in a technologized future and critically examines this proliferating phenomenon.

Dr. Fu Manchu illustrates just one way in which techno-Orientalist imagery pervades Western cultural productions in the early twentieth century. The principal locales of techno-Orientalist projects as they developed in the late twentieth century have primarily been Japan and China. Ueno, whose influential analyses of “Japanimation” in the mid-1990s seeded the field of technoOrientalist studies, observes, “In Techno-Orientalism, Japan is not only located geographically, but is also projected chronologically. Jean Baudrillard once called Japan a satellite in orbit. Now Japan has been located in the future of technology” (228). Morley and Robins put a finer point on the temporal dimension of the spatial construction: “If the future is technological, and if technology has become ‘Japanised,’ then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese, too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity” (168).

Whereas Japan’s dubious honor as the original techno-Orient was bestowed in the eighties with the help of the cyberpunk movement, the techno-Orientalizing of China occurred roughly a decade later.5 China was not yet a competitor in the global economy in the 1980s, when the West focused its wary gaze on what it saw as an invasion of Japanese capital investments and imports into Western economies. When China was recognized as a newly industrialized country (NIC) in the 1990s and its influence in the global economy increased, it, too, became once again a target of techno-Orientalist fashioning. The discourse on China’s “rise” in the U.S. context, consistent with techno-Orientalist contradictions, has focused on constructing its people as a vast, subaltern-like labor force and as a giant consumer market whose appetite for Western cultural products, if nurtured, could secure U.S. global cultural and economic dominance. This dual image of China as both developing-world producers and firstworld consumers presents a representational challenge for the West: Is China a human factory? Or is it a consumerist society, like the United States, whose enormous purchasing power dictates the future of technological innovations and economies?

Japan and China are thus signified differently in the techno-Orientalist vocabulary. Both are constructed as competitors and therefore threats to the U.S. economy; but while Japan competes with the United States for dominance in technological innovation, China competes with the United States in labor and production. To put it in starker terms, Japan creates technology, but China is the technology. In the eyes of the West, both are crucial engines of the future: Japan innovates and China manufactures. And as Asia, writ large, becomes a greater consumerist force than the West,6 its threat/value dualism commensurately increases. These differences in the technological signification of Japan and China manifest themselves in the fictive forecasts of the Asiantinged future. If Japan is a screen on which the West has projected its technological fantasies, then China is a screen on which the West projects its fears of being colonized, mechanized, and instrumentalized in its own pursuit of technological dominance.

India, another NIC, has also found itself under the techno-Orientalist gaze as a consequence of U.S. outsourcing practices. As a much maligned business strategy, outsourcing has provoked extremely negative public sentiments in the United States. These opinions find expression in a particular strand of techno-Orientalist discourse that consolidates China and India as the chief threats to the U.S. service and labor sectors. These Asian nations serve as the scapegoats for corporate decisions to move service and manufacturing jobs abroad and bear the brunt of the resulting xenophobic antipathies. Chinese and Indian workers, for instance, are routinely portrayed in techno-Orientalist and technophobic vocabularies; call center employees in India adopt Western Christian names and mimic the linguistic and idiomatic style of Americans, a practice so ubiquitous as to be parodied cinematically in romantic comedies such as Outsourced (2006), conjuring images of Dickian androids (or Blade Runner’s “replicants”) who simulate human behavior and threaten the distinction between “real” and “fake” Americans. Glossy spreads of endless rows of Chinese workers in corporate factories and towns in mainstream magazines such as Time and Wired seal the visual vocabulary of Asians as the cogs of hyperproduction. In the NIC contexts, techno-Orientalist discourse constructs Asians as mere simulacra and maintains a prevailing sense of the inhumanity of Asian labor—the very antithesis of Western liberal humanism.

#### The Asian body is rendered not as human, but as an exploitable technology. The death of Vincent Chin is an embodiment of schizophrenic Western hatred that must dismantle the Oriental factory machine to reclaim its personhood, subjectivity, and masculinity.

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From the earliest era of Asian peoples in the United States, their technical abilities were both lauded and erased. An exemplar is the Chinese men who composed more than half of the labor force that completed the transcontinental railroad’s western portion over the high Sierra Nevada mountains to Promontory, Utah, in 1869. In the campaign to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the American Federation of Labor argued in their publication, Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion, Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism: Which Shall Survive? (1902), that the Chinese male body differed radically from the American male body. The publication argued that the Chinese laborer could withstand physical deprivations that American and European laborers could not (American Federation of Labor et al. 5, 14, 16, 18). This constructed difference rationalized discriminatory policies against Chinese railroad workers. Meat vs. Rice did not argue the Chinese had particular technical skills that were valuable for constructing the transcontinental railroad. On the contrary, the publication claimed the Chinese body simply did not require the conditions of safety, sustenance, and shelter that bodies of European descendents required. Implicit in their argument is a threat to the superior European laborer’s way of life or culture by a kind of unfeeling superhuman antithetical to the West’s liberal humanist credo.

The U.S. techno-Orientalist imagination is thus rooted in this view of the Asian body as a form of expendable technology—a view that emerged in the discourse of early U.S. industrialization and continued to evolve in the twentieth century. In 1982, a twenty-seven-year-old Chinese American named Vincent Chin was beaten to death by two white men in Detroit. The attackers, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, were autoworkers in a U.S. auto industry that was losing market share to Japanese cars. Though Chin, a drafter, did not work in automobiles, Ebens and Nitz viewed him as representative—indeed, an embodiment—of Japanese auto manufacturing as they beat him with a baseball bat, reminiscent of Americans smashing Japanese-made cars in reaction to increasing auto imports in the early 1980s.9 The callous brutality of Chin’s death evinces something more than racial hatred; Chin not only was perceived as a convenient stand-in for the Japanese automotive industry, but embodied its traits—unfeeling, efficient, and inhuman. In Ebens and Nitz’s eyes, they were Luddites striking down the automatons that had been sent in to replace them. Techno-Orientalist discourse completed the project of dehumanizing Vincent Chin by rendering him as not only a racialized Other, but a factory machine that had to be dismantled by Ebens and Nitz to reclaim their personhood, subjectivity, and masculinity.10 The shock and outrage over Chin’s murder served as a critical rallying cry under which a coalition of ethnic-specific groups joined as Asian Americans.

In the twenty-first century, the perceived economic threat of Japan and its automobiles has given way to China. Despite the fact that China does not have a particularly strong reputation as a high-tech nation, techno-Orientalism’s robust flexibility allows for seamless transplantation to another national site. China’s rapid economic rise is largely credited to its vast manufacturing base, which, coupled with cheap labor and less regulation, has made it an attractive production location for many tech companies, including Apple and Dell. And although the vast majority of Chinese cannot afford the iPads and iPhones they produce, we see in U.S. media a representational shift, using techno-Orientalist conventions, transforming Chinese from mindless workers to sinister agents. For example, in October 2010, a U.S. PAC called Citizens Against Government Waste uploaded a commercial titled “Chinese Professor” on YouTube.

Set in Beijing, China a.d. 2030, the commercial depicts a male professor lecturing in a large hall accompanied by high-tech gadgets. The lecture consists of conservative talking points regarding the decline of the United States. As colorful images of fallen nations scroll behind him, the professor explains, “America tried to spend and tax itself out of a great recession. Enormous socalled ‘stimulus spending,’ massive changes to health care, government takeovers of private industries, and crushing debt.” He concludes, “Of course, we owned most of their debt, so now they work for us.” With echoes of Fu Manchu, the professor smiles directly into the camera, eliciting his students’ mirth. By presenting the Chinese professor, the students, and the lecture as moving seamlessly between the lecture hall technology and the tablet screens that students hold in their laps, this video implies that China now leads the world in technological production and consumption. The encoded secondary message of the commercial sidesteps the reality of China’s still developing technological penetration by projecting a present-day existential fear into a vision of the future, with technology supposedly rooted in U.S.-based innovation. It is an elegant solution that effectively alarms the uninformed viewer by using a panAsian technological conflation to elide reality and implicitly accuse China of stealing U.S. intellectual property. Thus, although the national actors and the details are quite different from the automobile industry of the 1980s, we have a similar techno-Orientalist narrative: U.S. jobs and manufacturing are being stolen by inorganic, technologically infused persons who threaten not only our economic but humanistic integrity.

SF’s techno-Orientalist tendencies have become so common as to merit incisive parody. The animated series Futurama takes place a thousand years in the future, and both skewers and pays homage to SF conventions. In an episode from the sixth season, Futurama depicts the launch of the new “EyePhone,” a jab at Apple’s handset, as a pillory of modern consumerism. The series’ white protagonist, Fry, asks a retail clerk of South Asian descent, “you’re from one of those ethnicities that knows about technology; why is it called an EyePhone?” (Sandoval). Depicted in the show as having an intelligence level on par with Homer Simpson, Fry is not meant to be taken seriously, and often acts as a vessel for twentieth-century ignorance in a progressive future. What is notable in this exchange is how the producers of Futurama have Fry explicitly verbalize a familiar techno-Orientalist trope—Asiatic bodies functioning as gatekeepers, facilitators, and purveyors of technology. In this episode, the South Asian clerk literally acts as the final node on the assembly line that has been largely produced by robotic arms—the clerk reaches through the drapes to pull an EyePhone from a pile and we see mechanical limbs swinging about the factory. He is an assembly line automaton with a human skin, and his affectless, bored intonation belies his true nature as a machine. A less self-aware show might leave it at that, but Fry’s graceless pronouncement underscores the techno-Orientalist trope, taking SF to task while simultaneously paying ironic homage to the genre.

This same technologizing convention that Futurama so sharply satirizes is found in numerous literary works, including David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas (2004). Mitchell’s six stories link together characters and narratives spanning past, present, and distant future. Consequently, Mitchell’s novel has the unenviable task of repeatedly establishing the framing for each separate story line. An economical method for quickly thrusting the reader into the speculative future is to use a technologized East Asia, as he does in the story “An Orison of Sonmi-451.” The setting of Nea So Copros, the “corpocracy” of what appears to be a unified Korea sometime after the twenty-second century, is where we are introduced to our enslaved narrator, Sonmi-451, a cloned “fabricant” designed to serve in a fast-food restaurant. Mitchell paints Korea as the setting for high technology, enforced consumption, and excessive advertising; and his larger social critique lies in the mirroring of the fabricants who must serve and the “purebloods” who must constantly consume, a master-slave dialectic that relies on cannibalism, erased from view, and technology, projected into high visibility. Sonmi-451 eventually gains self-awareness, knowledge, and power to create a declaration of rights for enslaved fabricants and oppressed classes, but only after she reads the classics of Western civilization (187, 193). Thus, Mitchell’s novel reinforces both the perception of Asia as the definitive site for technophilic and technophobic speculations of an oppressive future and the view that only a Western-coded subject can truly realize liberal humanism in such an environment.

Digital spaces abound with reinscribed racial tropes and stereotypes; these are sites in which racialization is more likely to be reinforced than challenged (Nakamura, Cybertypes 227). However, we argue that techno-Orientalist conventions in new media are complicated by the fact that the medium is closely associated with Asia on several levels—as a manufacturing base, as a source of technological innovation, and as a conduit for cultural exports. In new media, the Asian subject is perceived to be, simultaneously, producer (as cheapened labor), designer (as innovators), and fluent consumer (as subjects that are “one” with the apparatus). This has the effect of schizophrenic significations of the techno-Orientalized subject in the realm of new media—games in particular. In 2011, for instance, Blizzard Entertainment announced an expansion pack, called “The Mists of Pandaria,” for their immensely popular MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role playing game) World of Warcraft. MMORPGs generally have strong roots in the fantasy and SF genres, which grant room for characters and creatures with attributes that often reflect racial stereotypes.11 The Asian-themed world of Pandaria—described as “mysterious” and “ancient”—and its high-flying, kung-fu-fighting Pandaren—warriors in a nonthreatening form—continue in the tradition of portraying Asian culture and subjects as exotic realms to be explored and manipulated. Within the same game is a curious mirroring of globalization, in which first-world gamers looking to accrue in-game capital (gold) more quickly hire gamers—many of whom are young Chinese men—to “farm” gold, thereby miming offline conditions in which first-world consumers gain economically by cheapened high-tech labor. At the same time, an acceptance of the Asian subject’s reputed digital literacy brings about a sense of wonder and even admiration of their gaming skills—the global rankings of gamers are often dominated by Korean players, for instance. We question, however, whether that is not another symptom of the stereotyping of Orientalized cyborg bodies predicated on a presumed seamlessness with technology.

#### Techno-Orientalism is pathologizing, rendering Asian bodies as merely mortal engines of modernity and growth, less-than-human yet in need of constant surveillance.

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[Modified] for ~~gendered language~~

Techno-Orientalism, then, is not so much a narrow discourse marking the posthuman cybernetic body as distinctly Asian, nor is it about the latest bleeding-edge widget being assembled by dexterous, scarred fingers in Guangdong, China—these are instead signifiers of a larger project. Rather, we trace the “techno” in techno-Orientalism to techne, a process instead of literal tool, for “revealing” a technology’s true presence (wesen) and “enframing” of the world according to humankind’s vision (Heidegger 3–35). It is, in a sense, a doubling of Orientalism, a means of constructing and reifying an Occidentalist worldview in a more sophisticated way. Techno-Orientalism accounts for—and then dismisses—Eastern modernity as both process and product of dehumanization, of which the West is an economic and ontological beneficiary; but should that modernity ever transition to hypermodernity (and threat), its dehumanizing means and ends reaffirm the West’s monopoly over liberal humanism. The speculative narratives of textual and visual media are the vehicles through which this disciplinary process travels.

As the American empire wanes—or is reconfigured—in the West and China rises in the East, the logic of techno-Orientalism continues to exert its influence over emerging cultural productions. Recent examples abound: The 2012 remake of the Philip K. Dick–inspired film Total Recall (1990) redesigns the cityscape to resemble the Hong Kong skyline; Gary Shteyngart’s satirical Super Sad True Love Story (2010) envisions a future New York City placed at the precipice of the U.S. economy’s implosion and subsequent takeover by the Chinese; Junot Diaz’s postapocalyptic novel in progress, Monstro, projects the Chinese renminbi replacing the U.S. dollar as the dominant international currency—a phenomenon predicted by many economic prognosticators in recent years (Cox). The film Looper’s (2012) speculative sequence was set in Shanghai to signal its futurity; Daniel Wilson’s novel Robopocalypse (2011) contains an obligatory subplot involving a Japanese roboticist whose love for his android wife leads to the discovery of a critical component for humanity’s survival. These works continue on a well-trodden path—the technoOrientalized element is, at times, an alien environment, existential threat, economic competitor, or technological bridge and always, invariably, a vehicle through which the Western-encoded subject undertakes [their]~~his or her~~ journey. Likewise, this volume has identified and critiqued numerous examples of uncritical framing: Jason Crum’s scrutinizing of how early radio broadcasts programs underscored Asian premodernity (Chapter 2); Victor Bascara’s investigation into the erasure of Asian bodies integral in a nineteenth-century work about the twenty-first century (Chapter 3); Warren Liu’s racialization of temporality (Chapter 4); Abigail De Kosnik’s tracing of the sublimation of race in three techno-Orientalist films (Chapter 6); Jinny Huh’s analysis of the mixed-race imaginarium of Battlestar Galactica (Chapter 7); and Dylan Yeats’s exegesis of the historical rhetoric and politics of Orientalized enemy “bots” in video games (Chapter 9). The West desires Eastern machinery but resists recognizing the human toll or a humanistic center.

Still, there are wrinkles and complications, particularly when technoOrientalism is appropriated by spaces of counterdiscourse. For instance, Korean American filmmaker and comic book author Greg Pak exploits techno-Orientalist logic in Robot Stories (2003), an exploration of posthumanism, race, and relationships in the guise of a genre film. Pak’s series of vignettes superficially mime techno-Orientalist tropes—in this case, the dehumanized, machine-like Asian laborer represented at different points by a ruthless businesswoman, a software coder with Asperger syndrome, an android, a disembodied consciousness—and the film proceeds to deconstruct them by reinscribing the humanity behind each iteration. Robogeisha (2009), a Japanese film belonging to a subgenre equal parts grotesque and camp, takes the Western gaze to its logical conclusion. Completely self-aware and parodic in tone, the film’s loose plot centers on two orphaned sisters who grow up to become cyborg geisha assassins, one of whom ends up in the thrall of an evil conglomerate. The film’s strongly nationalist and absurdist denouement, in which a corporation plans the destruction of Mt. Fuji to unite Japan against its enemies, shows how techno-Orientalist aesthetics can be used for other ends.1 It is on this front that additional contributors to this volume also scrutinize deformations of techno-Orientalist discourse: Julie Ha Tran’s examination of William Gibson’s fictional geographies reveals an unexpected critical bidirectionality (Chapter 10); Kathryn Allan’s discussion of Maul and Salt Fish Girl shows how a new subgenre may recuperate the cybernetic Asian female figure (Chapter 11); Douglas Ishii’s exposition of Joss Whedon’s population of Asian artifacts and depopulation of Asian peoples in his universe creates room for his own critical intervention (Chapter 13); Tzarina Prater and Catherine Fung (Chapter 14) reveal how Larissa Lai’s Automaton Biographies grants Blade Runner’s Rachael a voice to “talk back” to Ridley Scott’s Asian-infused vision of dystopic Los Angeles; and media artist Nam June Paik’s work, expertly analyzed by Charles Park, operates a similar aesthetic through which the mechanisms of human creativity and activity are fetishized and critiqued (Chapter 15).

National and cultural authorship of the discourse notwithstanding, our historically conscious exegesis indicates that, thus far, techno-Orientalism is strongly tied to geopolitics, economics, and race, and we see no reason to suspect that will change. If compelled to speculate, we would first note the material consequences of a rising consumer class in China—partly a consequence of neoliberal trade agreements creating favorable manufacturing conditions— and how quickly the landscape changes in response. In some ways, very little work is required to translate Orientalist tropes: the invading horde of barbarians is replaced by a horde of robotic factory workers, kept at a distance by multinational corporations and shipping routes. They are uncreative, less than human (although complicated by reports of poor working conditions driving some to suicide), and always already mechanized—a narrative that persists even in the realm of leisure, as Steve Choe and Se Young Kim describe in their analysis of the disparity of rhetoric surrounding Eastern as opposed to Western gamers (Chapter 8). Still, on closer examination complications emerge, for while Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan were economic “miracles” of a hypercapitalist frenzy, the strong role of the communist state cannot be ignored in China’s rise. And lest we are accused of ignoring the rest of Asia, we note how the outsourcing of high-tech labor to South Asian nations via information networks may also complicate a techno-Orientalist logic that is nothing if not supple and elastic. One emerging commonality we detect—and we are curious to see how this will be integrated into cultural discourse that must discipline—is the role of pollution in developing nations as manufacturing booms. Already, news reports teem with stories of poor air quality over the largest metropolitan cities in China, Beijing in particular. It may be that the techno-Orientalized subject may take on an ecocritical slant, as we begin to move away from cyberspace-oriented discourse characterizing the future as ephemeral and diaphanous; instead, it may be polluted, riddled with the detritus of ex-gen technology, haunted by the specter of Asian manufacturing (indeed, already a hallmark of post-cyberpunk tropes). The message conveyed by the rhetoric of “pollution” is that even as Asia has finally reached modernity, it does so irresponsibly, without regard for the supposed lessons learned by the West during its periods of rapid industrialization over the course of the twentieth century. The final irony, then, is while the human toll in Asia can be effaced from Western consciousness, environmental pollutants traveling over wind and water currents more efficient than any shipping route will persist, leading to inescapable, catastrophic effects on a global scale. Asia’s major economies— Japan, China, South Korea, and India—are, in the eyes of the West, behaving like recalcitrant children, refusing to abide by its tutelage, insisting on growing up too quickly, and thus warranting its constant surveillance.

If Seo-Young Chu is correct in characterizing stereotypes as “a technology meant to facilitate mental shortcuts” (Chapter 5), then techno-Orientalism has become a technology that facilitates the containment of a perceived mass threat. “We all create images of things we fear or glorify,” writes Sander Gilman in his extended psychoanalytic study of stereotypes. But while some of us retain the capacity to recognize the distinction between the individual and the stereotyped class, Gilman explains, “[t]he pathological personality does not develop this ability, and sees the entire world in terms of the rigid lines of difference. The pathological personality’s mental representation of the world supports the need for the line of difference, whereas for the nonpathological individual the stereotype is a momentary coping mechanism, one that can be used and then discarded once anxiety is overcome. The former is consistently aggressive toward the real people and objects to which the stereotypical representations correspond; the latter is able to repress the aggression and deal with people as individuals” (18). The prospect that such “aggressions” will abate remains nil, however, partly because the “individual” is by now a quaint notion of a bygone American cultural mythology, and partly due to the West’s perception of Asia as historically and persistently collectivist. Drawing on Gilman’s formulation, then, techno-Orientalism is a form of pathology, necessitated by the “Rising East” rhetoric and rationalized by the neoliberal logic of (Asian) humans as mortal engines of modernity and economic growth. Thus, techno-Orientalist studies must be vigilantly developed and deployed as a critical countertechnology for negotiating the complex, taut lines of a discourse ensconced in racial and international politics.

#### Antagonized by the project of Western imperialism, Asian subjectivity is in a constant state of flux, pushed to the periphery of Empire in nonlinear spatiotemporalities under modernity’s anxious securitization.

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The ways in which techno-Orientalism manifests in Asia are predicated on Cold War logics, a kind of Western militarized violence. Jodi Kim (2010) finds in Ends of Empire that the Cold War brought spatial and temporal distinctions for racialized Asian bodies via proxy wars. The United States’ relationship with Asian nations is overdetermined by the events of that era: “The Cold War, as a geopolitical, cultural, and epistemological project of gendered racial formation and imperialism undergirding U.S. global hegemony” (Kim, 2010, p. 4). The United States’ investment in nations like South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam is predicated on Western interests in the geopolitical sphere. The United States rebuilt Japan after World War II as a means of gaining capital and hegemonic power, which is a neo-imperialist and gendered project that undergirds U.S.-Japan relations. Okinawa is a focal point for empires to collide—Japan’s settlement and the US military occupation—both of which have brought genderbased violence to indigenous Okinawans (Yoneyama, 2015). The racialized, gendered dynamic produces a taxonomy of Asian subjectivity in that Asians are tools for the West. Within hegemonic systems, Asian women are pushed to the periphery of Empire. Their subservience and domination are used to further neo-colonial, white, hegemonic, masculine interests, which is evident in the advent of comfort women and the military sex industry (Yoneyama, 2015). Western nations, specifically white men, are invested in Asia because they perceive themselves as “saving” Asian women from an Orientalized depiction of violent Asian men, which propagates a racialized and heteronormative notion of Asia (Park, 2012). The political and economic rise of Asian principalities such as China, Japan, and India transform Oriental epistemologies via a disruption of white hegemonic power. In the attempt of Asian nations to secure capital, security anxieties manifest from white fears of emasculation or the loss of power. In a discursive response to maintain international white supremacy, a new form of othering occurs (Park, 2012; Agathangelou, 2016).

Thus, Cold War logics spectrally transform, haunt, and underlie techno-Orientalism. Asian subjectivity is always within a state of flux or being and exists in nonlinear spatiotemporalities as a result of Western modernities:

the Cold War between capitalism and communism is actually a “civil war” within the selfsame Western modernity. As Odd Arne Westad argues, both the United States and the Soviet Union saw themselves as the successors of Western modernity and, the Cold War was waged over which one would be the sole rightful successor, and would thus be able to articulate its own conception of Western modernity and attempt to universalize it. (Kim, 2010, p. 24)

The spectral violence that manifests in Cold War logics, techno-Orientalism, and racial capitalism finds its origin in modernity itself. Thus, the Cold War is a lynchpin for the neoliberal era. The revitalization of specific Asian nations becomes a means of securing new means of neoliberal production. Asian countries, specifically in Southeast Asia, are locked in Cold War temporalities due to their history of colonization and neo-colonial geopolitical relationship with the West.5 Yet within new technologized nations, racial capitalism produces industries such as sweatshops and call centers, equating Asian subjectivity with technology (Roh et al., 2015).

#### Representations of Chinese cyberwar creates a false threat of a techno-Orientalized “Other” that cultivates stable, Americanized proponents of hegemony.

Yeats 15 (Dylan Yeats recently earned a doctorate in U.S. History from NYU. He works on how the politics of “culture war” have shaped Americans’ understandings of religion, race, class, gender, and sexuality from the Illuminati Controversy at the founding of the nation to the Islamophobia of today. Yeats co-edited Yellow Peril! An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear (Verso Press, 2014) with John Kuo Wei Tchen and is currently writing Benevolent Empire: Evangelical Politics in the Early Republic, 1790-1840, based on his dissertation. 2015, “Home Is Where the War Is: Remaking Techno-Orientalist Militarism on the Homefront,” Techno-Orientalism, <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.36019/9780813570655-011/html?lang=en>; accessed 7/18/2022) ng

Homefront illustrates the ongoing mass-market cultural work of reproducing and repackaging aggressive U.S. policy objectives into feel-good defenses of the “American Way.” Many analysts claim that wealthy, industrialized, and technologically innovative South Korea can protect itself, but that tensions with the North provide a convenient rationale for permanently stationing fifty thousand U.S. troops there (Cumings). Aggressive American war games in the Yellow Sea use the supposed threat of North Korea as a stand-in for China, the true target of such military posturing in the region. Homefront’s developers initially sought to cast China as its invading force (Totilo, “China Is Both Too Scary and Not Scary Enough”), but also found in North Korea an easy enemy against which players can justly, and safely, act out their aggression. However, Homefront is also a remake of the 1984 film Red Dawn, where a patriotic band of American teenagers rebel against an occupying Soviet army. MGM Studios literally remade Red Dawn in 2010 with the Chinese in place of the Soviets—but studio executives decided to shelve the project after it was filmed in order to digitally remake the Chinese invaders into North Koreans (Fritz and Horn), releasing a heavily reedited version in November 2012. The “original” Red Dawn was itself something of a remake as part of a broader campaign to fancifully revive the Cold War hysteria of the 1950s. By hailing the perpetual war-(re)making at the heart of the “America” they seem to celebrate, this family of texts expresses a deep ambivalence about the role of screen enemies in this process. Rather than distract from this ideological work, such ambivalence animates their cultural power and political resonance. Excavating the genealogy of Homefront and its imaginative reworking of U.S. foreign policy rhetoric can help elucidate the “techno” in the term “techno-Orientalism.” Techno-Orientalism describes texts that produce visions of the purportedly technologically sophisticated economies and peoples of East Asia as foils for Western anxieties about the digital or information age. Homefront and the 2012 remake of Red Dawn register these anxieties quite precisely. In both texts North Koreans use an electromagnetic pulse to disable the communication systems upon which the U.S. military depends, and the invaders quickly take much of America. This techno-Orientalist peril is reminiscent of James Hevia’s reading of the early twentieth-century Dr. Fu Manchu novels. Hevia argues that the “Devil Doctor’s” ability to repurpose the knowledge infrastructure underpinning the British Empire for his own nefarious plots is what makes the character so scary. Homefront and Red Dawn continue this tradition of reworking anxieties about the reliance on a fetishized notion of information dominance by fixating on Oriental villains who upset the fantasy of Western technological supremacy. In the context of mounting media fixation on cyber-security, driven in part by political projects to depict China (I mean, North Korea) as trying to hack America out of its role as military-technology leader (Singel), the fears expressed in the 2012 Red Dawn in particular illustrate the anxious stakes of techno-dominance. The occupying North Koreans have their own communications network, and the film’s plot is driven by a hunt to retrieve one of the invaders’ radios, so the forces regrouping in Free America can reverse engineer it. However, the film explores the ramifications of this technological upset through the ambivalent specter of the U.S. war in Iraq. Without computer guidance systems or satellite telecommunications, the occupied Americans are reduced to the status of Iraqis, dependent upon a technologically superior invading force that claims to be their friend. The invading North Koreans tout that they have come to liberate Americans from their own failed leaders, but they will not tolerate insurrection. This won’t do for the Wolverines who launch the resistance using the moniker of their high school mascot. Jed, a veteran who has just returned from Iraq, convinces his budding guerrilla troops that they have an advantage. The occupiers, he knows from experience, don’t really want to be there, whereas the Wolverines are fighting for their home and freedom. Jed claims that both the Viet Cong and America’s Founding Fathers knew that guerrilla tactics could drive imperialists away by wearing them down. In this way, the 2012 Red Dawn seems to suggest a deeply ambivalent circular logic. The North Koreans serve as a harbinger for America. Should American military technology fail, America will be occupied the way it has occupied others. But in the hands of the film’s enemy Orientals, America’s own strategy is revealed to be terrifying and immoral; and given the U.S. experience in Iraq (and Vietnam) we know that this occupying technology cannot succeed. The overlapping and contradictory identifications expressed in Red Dawn and Homefront between Iraqis, North Koreans, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Russians (and the list could, and does, go on) illustrate the polymorphous Orientalism at play in these texts. This displacement of enmity reflects a broader tradition of American war-gaming. Red Dawn (2012) producer Tripp Vinson stated he was interested in remaking the 1984 original because he had enjoyed it as a kid and thought “the idea of an invading army is something that speaks to the American psyche” (Hasan). However, the American psyche is not static, but continually reproduced, remade, and cultivated by image makers backed by the power of the state. Since World War II, politicians and pundits have used the specter of “Oriental” enemy invasions to scare Americans into defending themselves against a succession of intractable foes by embracing the emancipatory promise of military technology. Defenders and definers of America have replaced Soviet communism with new archenemies across East Asia and the Middle East. Cyberwar has replaced the Space Race. The ease of this transition suggests how the shifting goals of U.S. policy, not any overarching immutable cultural or geostrategic affinity across the “Orient,” shape how Americans understand the implicit “Eastern” threats to an imagined “West.” This complements Edward Said’s central contention that the Orient is not a real place that experts in the West analyze: the Orient is a fantasy, produced by analysts with the power to assert its existence. Adding “techno” to Orientalism registers the embeddedness of such civilizational logic within the sixty-year American struggle for military industrial techno-dominance in the supposedly epic contest over the fate of the world. As remakes, Red Dawn and Homefront hint at their participation in the ongoing reproduction of techno-Orientalist militarism at the heart of the U.S. political culture. These texts hail a tradition of attacking Americans in order to convince them they are, or could be, under attack from so-called Orientals. Key to this tradition of making and remaking techno-Orientalist militarism were a succession of groups named the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD). In 1950, a group of establishment elites founded the first CPD to promote the military to foster an “American Century” rooted in free trade by challenging Soviet attempts to close off global markets. To do so, this CPD depicted the Soviet threat to America as a zero-sum game. Behind closed doors in Washington, the CPD stewarded the adoption of the secret NSC-68 memoranda shortly before the Korean War. NSC-68 was the ultimate techno-Orientalist document, describing the Soviet Union as a “fanatical,” “intractable,” “inescapably militant” enemy “antithetical” to the existence of freedom and Western “civilization” (Pietz). NSC-68 advocated removing Cold War strategy from congressional oversight and placing it squarely in the charge of a vastly expanded military to develop a technological supremacy that could bolster freedom and counter communism any- and everywhere. Under the banner of anticommunism Americans launched a program of mutually assured destruction and the development of brutal countersubversive campaigns at home and abroad (Sanders 23–50).

But by the 1970s this techno-Orientalist vision began to crumble under its own weight (Englehardt). All the sophisticated surveillance and targeting seemed unable to win in Vietnam or America. Revelations about the existence of NSC-68 and the extra-legal activities it fostered provoked widespread distrust in the military establishment. The growing sense at that time that the desperate pursuit of anticommunism was neither possible nor healthy for American society led to the embrace of détente with first China and then the Soviet Union. However, hawkish politicians and defense analysts who were being pushed out of the military establishment founded a second CPD in 1976 to remake Orientalist fears, and revive the promise that technology could defend against them, in order to reassert their declining influence (Cahn). This is the all-too-real backstory to Homefront and the Red Dawns.

The second CPD sought to pathologize the movement away from technoOrientalist militarism by helping popularize a term supposedly coined by Henry Kissinger: the “Vietnam Syndrome.” In the fallout following the retreat from Vietnam, mainstream commenters began to argue that the zealous assault on communism had led analysts to misunderstand the situation in Vietnam and to wrongly imagine that ever escalating carpet bombing and computer-aided strategy could defeat a popular insurgency united against a foreign occupying power (Edwards 113–145). But advocates of the “Vietnam Syndrome” countered that this critique of techno-Orientalist truisms was naïve and even dangerous. Neoconservatives sought to refocus American fears on the Soviet Union to revive the imagined political and moral clarity of the anticommunist and militaristic 1950s. To this end, the second CPD argued that Soviet overtures for détente and arms reduction were in fact strategic deceptions. They claimed that by focusing on the Soviets’ “capabilities rather than his intentions, his weapons rather than his ideas, motives, and aspirations,” even the CIA vastly underestimated the Soviet threat to America (qtd. in Cahn 163). CPD Sovietologist Richard Pipes argued that the American tendency to “mirror image” blinded analysts and the public from realizing that the Soviet “totalitarian mindset” was not “guided merely by self-serving motives,” but instead dedicated to world domination by any means (6–7). Such rhetoric suggested that American obliviousness to the fundamental difference of their Eastern foes left the United States vulnerable to a surprise attack.

The second CPD’s remade Cold War sought to not only rollback Soviet communism but also challenge the various “countercultures” that emerged in response to the Vietnam War. The CPD argued that it was not flawed technoOrientalist policies that left sixty thousand American soldiers and one-fifth of the Vietnamese population dead with no strategic gain, but a fundamental weakness in American resolve. To this end the second CPD celebrated emerging presidential contender (and former CPD member) Ronald Reagan’s campaign pledge to “rearm America.” Reagan and the CPD relentlessly criticized President Jimmy Carter’s embrace of détente and arms reduction as epitomizing the dangerous malaise at the heart of the “Vietnam Syndrome,” and handily won the presidency in 1980. Once president, Reagan installed nearly fifty fellow CPD members into the White House. Reagan appointed Pipes to a staff position on the National Security Council where he argued that revolutionaries from Northern Ireland, Iran, Palestine, and across Africa and Latin America were not the products of local conflicts exacerbated by American and Soviet intervention but were instead all agents of a global conspiracy directed by Moscow. The renewed embrace of proxy wars and nuclear buildup that followed led to some of Reagan’s lowest approval ratings, but CPD-allied advisors encouraged Reagan to whip up excitement for a renewed Cold War (Sanders 277–342). To do so, Reagan delved even further into policies rooted in techno-Orientalist fantasy.

Reagan’s background as an actor and anticommunist crusader gave his administration a perceptive sensitivity to narrative that allowed him to revive the oppositional civilizational logic of Orientalism and the redeeming promise of military technology (Rogin). Speaking at Disney World’s future-oriented EPCOT theme park on March 8, 1983, the president stated, “[W]atch a 12-year-old take evasive action and score multiple hits while playing ‘Space Invaders,’ and you will appreciate the skills of tomorrow’s pilot.” That night, Reagan sought to paint the arms race as a moral act in an address to the National Association of Evangelicals. The president asserted that the world was divided between good and evil and that American disarmament would abandon Christianity to the threat of communism and reward “the aggressive impulses of an evil empire.” Two weeks later Reagan sought to make the revived prospect of nuclear war less terrifying by announcing on television, and without consulting the Defense Department, a billion-dollar Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) to build a computerized shield to protect Americans from Soviet missiles that might be launched in response to Reagan’s renewal of the arms race. The fantastic technology of the SDI would allow the United States to assert global military dominance without risking nuclear annihilation. Most analysts and academics considered SDI (or “Star Wars” as it was termed in the media) scientifically impossible. Many commentators noted that Reagan’s SDI proposals were eerily similar to the plot of one of the president’s earliest films, Murder in the Air (1940), about a weapon that “not only makes the United States invincible in war, but in so doing promises to be the greatest force for world peace ever discovered” (Boyer 205). But this did not stop the administration from opening nearly unlimited funding channels for developing the proposed military technology.

#### Thus, we engage the Asiatic Diaspora in a methodological praxis of refusal. Through diasporic melancholia, insurgent memories and counterknowledge, we find space for productive refusal against the Western hegemonic gaze that empowers transnational Asian solidarity.

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Kim (2010) articulates a methodological praxis to challenge these systems of domination through her theorization of Asian American cultural production:

Asian American culture as also engaging in a politics of refusal. In refusing the seductive will to total knowledge or revelation of the “truth” of the “Asian American experience,” what it means to be Asian American, or what the United States “really did” in Asia during the Cold War, Asian American culture enact what in anthropological term has been called “ethnographic refusal” (Kim, 2010, p. 6)

Although Kim’s (2010) work is germane to notions of America, it is also produced through a transnational lens. Applying her work to the Asiatic Diaspora as a whole, we begin to understand how we can collectively work to produce counter-hegemonic resistance. Additionally, as Asian scholars located within the United States, our frame of analysis cannot be separated from our positionality which begins these points of inquiry. Diaspora produces a condition of melancholia from loss which can be described as a process of subjectivization because loss is an overdetermined sense of self (Eng, 2010). Diasporic Asian cultural production thus rejects and critiques gendered and racialized quotidian violence. It is a refusal to become respectable and docile subjects. It is a refusal to have Asians be flattened and made into technocratic tools. It is a refusal to be integrated within liberal multicultural institutions. It is a refusal to be consumed by the white masculine hegemonic gaze. Furthermore, it attempts to bridge, build, and empower Asians across many geographic locations brought by diaspora. Diasporic Asian cultural production attempts to build transnational solidarity. Transnationality, here, comes from Lisa Yoneyama (2015) in Cold War in Ruins:

…transnationality means much more than mere movements across nation-states, borders, or exchanges among multiple national actors and locations. It comprises of insurgent memories, counterknowledge, and inauthentic identities that have been regimented by the discourse and institution center on nation-state. (p. 7)

Such cultural production is a “productive refusal.” Transnationalism is about producing radical connections within diaspora and across national borders through counter-hegemonic praxis; it is about the ability to produce new forms of sociality and liberatory visions for such a heterogeneous group. For Sawayama, transnationality is rooted in her production of “inauthentic” code which is scripted by Western modernity and diaspora.

#### Techno-Oriental speculations of Asian competition project a neoliberal future onto the East, colonizing Asian futurity under affective structures of investment.

Bahng 15 (Aimee Bahng is an American academic. She is a professor of gender and women's studies at Pomona College in Claremont, California. Her previous denial of tenure at Dartmouth College sparked widespread protests about discrimination against racial minorities in academia. 2015, Techno-Orientalism, p164-166, “The Cruel Optimism of Asian Futurity and the Reparative Practices of Sonny Liew’s Malinky Robot,” <https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.36019/9780813570655-014/html?lang=en>; accessed 7/20/2022) ng

Published amid the financial crisis of 2008, Mahbubani’s book, as well as his Financial Times declaration of a realizable Asian Century that serves as this essay’s epigraph, excite what Alan Greenspan once called “irrational exuberance.” Uttered in a speech Greenspan gave in 1996, in his capacity as chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve, the phrase characterized the “unduly escalated asset values” of Japan’s economic bubble. The next day, Tokyo’s stock market fell sharply, closing 3 percent down, and Greenspan’s speech largely presaged the Asian financial crash a year later. The extent to which economic projections hang on the words of figureheads like Alan Greenspan demonstrates how such speculations work as performative speech acts that call the future into being. Similarly, the optimism Mahbubani announces in forward-looking, prophetic tones (“optimism will deliver the Asian Century”), affectively structures speculative investment in Asian futures. This vision of the new Asian hemisphere, colonized by empty high-r­ises reaching toward limitless horizons and built by deterritorialized workers, projects a future of automated speculative building, fueled by investment hungry banks. If Greenspan and Mahbubani both grasp how their respective declarations of pessimism and optimism will affect the global economy, they do so with two different Asias in mind: Japan of the late 1990s and Singapore at the dawn of a “new Asia” in 2008. 2 The so-called Asian Century, toward which Mahbubani’s optimism strains, functions as a largescale speculative fiction spawned from neoliberal fantasies that capitalize on a literary genre’s already problematic investments in techno-Orientalism. In their 1995 examination of techno-Orientalism, David Morley and Kevin Robins call attention to U.S. and European fantasies of Japan and its shift in those imaginaries in the 1980s from an exotic playground to a land of emotionless automatons. Perhaps epitomized by Western dystopian cyberpunk such as Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner (1982) and William Gibson’s Neuromancer (1984), techno-Orientalism figures the Japanese as “unfeeling aliens; they are cyborgs and replicants. But there is also the sense that these mutants are now better adapted to survive in the future”(170). While Morley and Robins understand techno-Orientalism as primarily born out of Western anxieties about Japan’s challenge to U.S. economic hegemony, they also suggest more specifically how techno-Orientalism arises just as Japan emerges as “the largest creditor and the largest net investor in the world” (153). What Morley and Robins never fully develop, and what I want to explore in more depth here, is this coordinated turn toward Asian futures in both financial and cultural forms of speculation. Mathematical models of probability and investment strategies based on extrapolation are forms of speculative fiction that project finance capitalism’s visions of futurity onto the world. Interdisciplinary scholarship from the past two decades has pointed to the performative aspects of economic speculation (MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu), the sociological systems of financial markets (Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger), the impact on subjectivity of financial instruments such as derivatives and debt bundling (LiPuma and Lee), and the “financialization of daily life” (Martin). Because speculative economies rely ever more on rhetorical tools and narrative strategies to explain and market the practice of trading on futures and securities, financial speculation and speculative fiction both participate in the cultural production of futurity, and futurity becomes the arena in which new subject formations emerge. Does techno-Orientalism register anxieties about finance capitalism, or does finance capitalism use techno-Orientalism as a basis for its extrapolations of futurity? I emphasize the co-constitutive relationship between the cultural production and financial worlding of Asian futurity. A peculiar question arises then, when Asian economic and political architects themselves participate in the projection of Asian futurity, all the while drawing on a techno-Orientalist toolkit. I argue that critical analysis of the discursive site of Asian futurity reveals points of contradiction in American neoliberalism as it travels that have to do with earlier forms of racial and colonial subjugation providing the scaffolding for the architecture of neoliberalism itself.3 As Asia develops its own neoliberal rhetoric, articulating its own futurity poses certain problems that necessitate a disavowal of the racism of techno-Orientalism. What stands in to “smooth” that difficulty is the heteronormativity techno-Orientalism always espoused that Asian futurity posits anew as part of its road map, capitalizing on aspirational teleologies, valuations of privatized worth, and nationalisms consolidated through processes of racialization. I focus my investigation on techno-Orientalism’s role in the production ofa global neoliberal subject in contemporary Singapore, where a tech economy adopts and adapts localized versions of seemingly universalized notions of “the good life.” Building on Lauren Berlant’s theorization of “cruel optimism,” this essay levies a critique of “the Asian Century” as imagined by economists around the world. It argues that a revisionist Asian futurity needs to intervene in the neoliberal orientations of “the good life” and, in the face of foreclosed futures, open possibilities of what Eve Sedgwick has called “reparative practices.” For an inspiring glimpse of what reparative practice sin the context of techno-Orientalism might look like, I turn to Sonny Liew’s graphic story collection Malinky Robot (Figure12.1), which fabulates an alternative imagining of Asian futurity, as told from the perspective of the global South. Malinky Robot, a title that translated serendipitously from Russian as “odd jobs,” or “little work” (Villarica), depicts a multiethnic Asian futurity burdened with precarious living conditions, precipitous divides in wealth, and ecological as well as economic fallout propagated by global capitalist greed. Liew, born in Malaysia but working mostly out of Singapore, offers gritty, agitated aesthetics and sparse storylines that restore texture, abrasion, and friction to the slick, polished surfaces and epic narrative scales of techno-Orientalist futures. Liew’s personal trajectories map a complex history of Singapore as a site of multiple layers of European (Portuguese, Dutch, British) and Japanese imperialism. In its turn toward self-governance, Singapore has also been the scene of ethnic and class-based tensions among exploited Malaysian workers and a predominantly Chinese ethnic majority population who constitute the managerial class. With particular attention to Singapore’s own aspirations to become a “technopreneurial” city-state of the future (Ong, Neoliberalism 181), this essay looks to Malinky Robot as a crucial counternarrative to techno-Orientalism as it is deployed not only by Western fantasies of a docile East but also by Asian aspirations to challenge U.S. global hegemony.

#### Debate relies on a speculatory process to predict and predetermine Asian futures – only critical readings and alternative imaginings of Asian futurity can form ruptures in the smooth flow of oriental logics.

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Mathematical models of probability and investment strategies based on extrapolation are forms of speculative fiction that project finance capitalism’s visions of futurity onto the world. Interdisciplinary scholarship from the past two decades has pointed to the performative aspects of economic speculation (MacKenzie, Muniesa, and Siu), the sociological systems of financial markets (Knorr-Cetina and Bruegger), the impact on subjectivity of financial instruments such as derivatives and debt bundling (LiPuma and Lee), and the “financialization of daily life” (Martin). Because speculative economies rely ever more on rhetorical tools and narrative strategies to explain and market the practice of trading on futures and securities, financial speculation and speculative fiction both participate in the cultural production of futurity, and futurity becomes the arena in which new subject formations emerge. Does techno-Orientalism register anxieties about finance capitalism, or does finance capitalism use techno-Orientalism as a basis for its extrapolations of futurity? I emphasize the co-constitutive relationship between the cultural production and financial worlding of Asian futurity. A peculiar question arises then, when Asian economic and political architects themselves participate in the projection of Asian futurity, all the while drawing on a techno-Orientalist toolkit. I argue that critical analysis of the discursive site of Asian futurity reveals points of contradiction in American neoliberalism as it travels that have to do with earlier forms of racial and colonial subjugation providing the scaffolding for the architecture of neoliberalism itself.3 As Asia develops its own neoliberal rhetoric, articulating its own futurity poses certain problems that necessitate a disavowal of the racism of techno-Orientalism. What stands in to “smooth” that difficulty is the heteronormativity techno-Orientalism always espoused that Asian futurity posits anew as part of its road map, capitalizing on aspirational teleologies, valuations of privatized worth, and nationalisms consolidated through processes of racialization. I focus my investigation on techno-Orientalism’s role in the production ofa global neoliberal subject in contemporary Singapore, where a tech economy adopts and adapts localized versions of seemingly universalized notions of “the good life.” Building on Lauren Berlant’s theorization of “cruel optimism,” this essay levies a critique of “the Asian Century” as imagined by economists around the world. It argues that a revisionist Asian futurity needs to intervene in the neoliberal orientations of “the good life” and, in the face of foreclosed futures, open possibilities of what Eve Sedgwick has called “reparative practices.” For an inspiring glimpse of what reparative practice sin the context of techno-Orientalism might look like, I turn to Sonny Liew’s graphic story collection Malinky Robot (Figure12.1), which fabulates an alternative imagining of Asian futurity, as told from the perspective of the global South. Malinky Robot, a title that translated serendipitously from Russian as “odd jobs,” or “little work” (Villarica), depicts a multiethnic Asian futurity burdened with precarious living conditions, precipitous divides in wealth, and ecological as well as economic fallout propagated by global capitalist greed. Liew, born in Malaysia but working mostly out of Singapore, offers gritty, agitated aesthetics and sparse storylines that restore texture, abrasion, and friction to the slick, polished surfaces and epic narrative scales of techno-Orientalist futures. Liew’s personal trajectories map a complex history of Singapore as a site of multiple layers of European (Portuguese, Dutch, British) and Japanese imperialism. In its turn toward self-governance, Singapore has also been the scene of ethnic and class-based tensions among exploited Malaysian workers and a predominantly Chinese ethnic majority population who constitute the managerial class. With particular attention to Singapore’s own aspirations to become a “technopreneurial” city-state of the future (Ong, Neoliberalism 181), this essay looks to Malinky Robot as a crucial counternarrative to techno-Orientalism as it is deployed not only by Western fantasies of a docile East but also by Asian aspirations to challenge U.S. global hegemony.

#### The gamespace of debate is intertwined with late capitalism – assumptions of fair play and logistical mapping reinscribe the conditions that uphold the fantasy of perfecting space.

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In an essay called “Angels in Digital Armor: Technoculture and Terror Management” (2010), media scholar Marcel O’Gorman argues that notions of heroism in contemporary technoculture aim to satisfy two primary existential needs: the desire for recognition and the denial of death. Most video games interpellate players by reinforcing ideologies that underpin the sovereign subject, who believes herself to be immortal and master of the world represented on the computer screen. Gaming is one part of a broadly conceived digital technoculture for O’Gorman. Appropriating Bernard Stiegler’s thesis that the technologization of culture is linked to profound malaise and ontological indifference, O’Gorman argues that online heroism, constituted through attention garnered on Facebook, YouTube, and the news media, goes hand in hand with the disavowal of mortality and finitude. Toward this O’Gorman analyzes cases of gamer death in China and Korea, the Columbine High School shootings, and Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter, as “explicitly technological, or even ‘cyber,’ because they involve the perpetrators’ use of media to rehearse or to promote their exploits in a desperate plea for recognition” (O’Gorman). He does not discuss race explicitly but implies that all users of digital media are somehow implicated.

While we agree with O’Gorman’s diagnosis of the culture of online celebrity and the proliferation of technically induced malaise, his analysis runs the danger of overgeneralization with the blanket term “technoculture.” We would like to attend to the specificity of video gaming and its Orientalist figuration by isolating a mechanic of StarCraft that is common to most video games: the acquisition of capital. More specifically, for the remainder of the essay we further interrogate the relationship between work and play. While drawing from McKenzie Wark’s Gamer Theory and key game play mechanics from StarCraft, we argue that extreme video gaming may be read to challenge the presuppositions that deem it “unproductive” labor. In doing so, we argue that extreme gaming upends notions of capitalist time, pointing to ontological aporias that blur the distinction between Occidental and Oriental.

Playing StarCraft teaches its players about life outside of the game, a testament perhaps to its broader relevance, training them to become better capitalists. Because of the cutthroat level of competition and the constant influx of new talent, professional gamers in Korea mostly enjoy short careers that are abbreviated by mandatory military service. After being discharged from the military, pro gamer Lee Joong Heon was employed at a video game company. But after a five-year retirement, Lee, formerly a Warcraft III player, decided to return to eSports and made the transition to StarCraft II. In a 2009 interview, Lee relates that his return is temporary and that he will retire again in three years. A job in a trading company is lined up for him once he is done gaming professionally (Yong-woo Kim). In a parallel career move, pro gamer Seo Jihoon found a position as a sports marketer with the Korean conglomerate CJ Group once he retired from StarCraft. A book published in 2000 in the wake of the financial crisis called Starcnomics connects StarCraft and its game play mechanics to the business world (Tae-heung Kim; Hee-jong Kang). The parallel between the logic of gaming and business may be evidenced in the United States as well. The University of Florida has offered a class on “21st Century Skills in StarCraft,” while the University of California, Berkeley campus has competitive StarCraft courses. Playing StarCraft teaches one to become better at life within capitalism.

These examples illustrate that StarCraft is not merely a form of play; instead, much of the “play” within the game could be considered a form of work. Unlike many video games, the player does not control an avatar or an in-game virtual representative (usually the main character of a narrative). In StarCraft and many RTS games, the player assumes a godlike overseer/ manager position with an isometric view of the battlefield. At the start of a session, the player can see and control his or her base, with the rest of the map, in the bottom-left corner of the screen, obscured by a “fog of war.” If the player clicks on parts of the map past his or her base, the view is hidden in blackness until it is traversed by one of the player’s military units. The player knows only two things: how large the map is and that an enemy is located somewhere. As in cognitive mapping, the player wishes to lift the fog of war to chart out the playing area and master the space. The player does not engage the enemy immediately, for he or she must first build up forces in preparation for it. And in order to prepare, the player must acquire and manage resources, like the capitalist in life outside the game.

Thus despite its twenty-fifth-century settings, game play in StarCraft proceeds with twentieth-century late capitalistic assumptions. At the start of each game, the player is given a central base, four worker units, and start-up capital. With these resources, the player constructs more buildings such as barracks, factories, gateways, and spawning pools in order to recruit more workers, build new structures, and produce new military units. The worker units acquire vespene gas (a resource only found in the game) from geysers and harvest minerals from the environment. The barracks train an array of offensive and defensive military units, each with particular modes of movement and attack patterns. Oftentimes preparation for battle—and the battle itself—can take only minutes or an hour and more, and the player is forced to make most of these crucial moments by planning ahead, making quick decisions, and moving rapidly. The thrill of engaging the enemy must be preceded by this tedious labor, which is squandered when the player’s units are destroyed in combat. As such, the aim of producing only in order to destroy and be destroyed aligns StarCraft with something akin to building a sand castle. The pleasure of constructing a sand castle is embodied in the labor utilized to build something ephemeral. Within capitalism, this ephemerality is obscured by the ideological belief that tedious labor is productive labor, yet management within StarCraft brings the basic ephemerality of capital itself to the fore.

In Gamer Theory, McKenzie Wark breaks down the distinction between the real world and the illusory world of the video game. He coins the term “gamespace” to signify not the virtual realm depicted on a screen, but a physically placeless realm where the logic of gaming, including quantitative modes of human valuation such as the “lifebar,” indicated underneath each unit, underpins lived existence. In contrast to Johan Huizinga’s famous definition of play as “a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own,” for Wark playing video games is coextensive with the human operation of hardware and software in our contemporary postFordist economy (26). “Games are not representations of this world,” Wark writes, “they are more like allegories of a world made over as gamespace. They encode the abstract principles upon which decisions about the realness of this or that world are now decided” (20). Considered within the logic of late capitalism, gamespace quickly takes on a holistic aspect, for it also describes the total administration of human activity outside the video game, while perpetuating the ideology that the game is nevertheless predicated on the “fair fight” and the maintenance of a “level playing field.” Gamespace overlaps with the space of the neoliberal, global economy. For Wark, a critical theory of video games begins by taking outside reality not as the model to which games should aspire, but itself as “a gamespace that appears as an imperfect form of the computer game” (22).

As Wark dismantles the binary between reality and game, other distinctions are implicated. Specifically, if gamespace describes an existential condition in late capitalism, and if the mechanics of reward and punishment operative in video games allegorizes an identical mechanics in contemporary lived life, then Wark’s deconstruction necessarily carries similar implications for the distinction between work and play. While in an earlier era of capitalist development such a distinction structured what Marx called “species-being,” as well as productive and unproductive activity, in the age of video games work becomes another form of play, and vice versa. Gaming is a form of work, but as of yet not everyone is paid to play.

The rules of fair play in video games and the ideology of neoliberalism intersect: if the player works hard, the player’s efforts will be acknowledged and the work compensated. Most video games are motivated by this reward dynamic through the achievement of a high score or the acquisition of coveted items and money, both of which correspond to the acquisition of capital in the nonvirtual space. Endless acquisition in gamespace is particularly pronounced in the practice of “gold farming,” widespread in China. Gold farmers play for hours acquiring virtual capital in MMORPG games such as World of Warcraft in order to sell it for real capital (Vincent). Yet through this, traditional ontological distinctions between gaming and the actual world are radically confused. Approaching online RPGs as an economist, Edward Castronova describes the relatively banal “economics of fun” that underpin the synthetic world of games. “The economy is in fact an integral part of the fantasy,” Castronova writes. “Nothing makes a world feel more alive than an active market system” (172). Gold farming, the most laborious form of contemporary video gaming in the neoliberal economy, troubles Western capitalist notions of work and play by bringing tedium into play. It is thus perhaps not a surprise that certain journalists express disdain for professional video gaming and with the idea of eSports: for them, video games belong to the realm of leisure, sitting for hours being unproductive, and are not supposed to be laborious.

Yet in this, StarCraft offers peculiar problems. StarCraft provides abundant financial reward, especially for professional gamers, who are among the highest paid in Korean eSports, but its game play does not depend on conventional systems of reward. In-game capital provides player satisfaction in most games. However in StarCraft, since in-game capital is ephemeral, the player has only his or her professional record. This is contrary to other games where gamers have something “to show,” such as a powerful avatar with the capital, commodities, and experience to signify the labor and time put into the game. In StarCraft the only record of total labor time is the players’ IDs with their career wins and losses. The point of StarCraft is not to accumulate resources, but to use them as efficiently as possible before the match is over. In-game resources such as minerals and vespene gas imitate the exchange value of money in order to produce more buildings and units, but there is no long-term merit to the production of surplus value beyond the length of the individual match. Unlike in gold farming, accumulated capital retains no exchange value. Instead, resources have use value insofar as they become mobilized to defeat the enemy. Seen from the perspective of gamespace, the conditions of the professional StarCraft player imitate those of temporary capitalist labor, but the player’s activity also reveals the virtual ontology and short-term orientation of capital itself. The management of minerals and vespene gas in many ways allegorizes the management of virtual funds for short-term, liquid markets in the shadow banking system.

If games create environments where gamers, regardless of their identity, compete in “fair play,” then extreme gamers push its limits by playing harder than everyone else. The morbid fascination in gamers who play themselves to death then threatens to expose an older ideological assumption that underpins this very interest: that human activity may be divided cleanly between unproductive leisure and productive labor. Despite the claim that postindustrial economies have unilaterally dissolved the boundary between leisure and labor, within techno-Orientalism this ideological remnant of the industrial economy reinscribes the division. Asian gamer death then remains ambivalent, for it blurs the discursive boundaries that underpin the gamespace of contemporary capitalism while taking the logic of life in neoliberalism to its limit. The threatened subject of the neoliberal economy must subsequently underscore the real historical specificities that persist between cultures and reconstitute them on the level of ontology. The Western gamer then, like that depicted in Sony’s commercial, believes that he or she can stay on top without having to compete with the rising Asian economies. Such differences are all too often understood within the tropes of racism and technology: Asians are chained to their computers through their addiction to StarCraft, while the West remains essentially free, having a much more “healthy” relationship to video games. However, our analysis of gaming and capital suggests that all users are implicated in the logic of gamespace.

The dream of “never stop playing,” like the mystifications of Orientalism, reflects not the truth of the exotic Other, or the transgressive possibilities opened up by purchasing a PlayStation Vita, but the narcissism of the capitalist subject. The dream of gaming endlessly reflects the dream of the hip gamer who never has to work, while the Asian gamer, who dies from playing, points to a fundamental aporia that subtends the binary between work and play, and between self and exotic other. As Alexander R. Galloway puts it in his book The Interface Effect, “We are all gold farmers” (136). This thought troubles binaries of life in industrial capitalism by which we understand value and productivity in modernity. In this, the Asian gamer may be thought of as “ahead” of the West in terms of the development of the neoliberal economy. Reinstating racial binaries functions as a bulwark against the deconstruction of life (which should be productive in capitalism) and death (which is often considered unproductive), as well as against the anxiety this deconstruction produces. Fetishizing Asian gamer death and the Asian work ethic performs the work of disavowal, disavowal of the fundamental differences that persist between self and other, while attempting to mediate non-Western modes of capitalist productivity.

When Blizzard released StarCraft II in 2010, eAthletes immediately embraced the new installment. Professional leagues sprouted up, and in May 2012 both OnGameNet (the most prestigious StarCraft league) and the Korean eSports Association announced that they would be making the official transition to StarCraft II (TeamLiquid). Lim Yo-hwan, the player most synonymous with StarCraft, also retired from StarCraft: Brood War to begin playing StarCraft II, a move so significant that a documentary titled Lim Yo-hwan’s Wings was produced (Ho-kyung Choi). The industry was able to migrate quickly because of the similarity of the mechanics between StarCraft and StarCraft II. And thus like its predecessor, StarCraft II may be read to problematize the binary between work and play outside the game, as well as imaginations of Occident and Orient. It also makes apparent the quick turns in the cutthroat Internet gaming milieu that characterizes much of East Asia and brings to the fore the culmination of capitalist logic. This is the very same mechanism that cycles eAthletes, while leaving young men, and the occasional young woman, dead in PC bangs just as quickly as it promotes them to national heroes. While these gamers perish in their quest to never stop playing, the death of the Asian gamer will be appropriated within the geopolitics of labor in Asia—unless, of course, video gaming is allowed to transcend reified notions of play.

## Case

### Impact---TL

#### Warfare is the newest mode of Anti-Asian violence. From the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Transcontinental Railroad to Asian prostitution in the US military and national and economic security, the Asiatic Danger has been a threat perpetuated across time. It’s time to expand the scope of understanding to see the intersectional violence between Asians and other people of color as the stepping stool of white supremacy.

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In the late 19th century, white Americans faced the prospect that Chinese and other Asians might become a significant portion of the population of the United States. In response, they passed a series of laws excluding Chinese people from immigration and citizenship.

The justification for exclusion was that the Chinese were an “unassimilable” race and therefore could never become Americans. Exclusion soon extended to all Asians and remained in U.S. law until 1952. Its rationale—that Asians pose a racial danger to American society—has endured in our politics and culture to this day.

Imagine, for a moment, that there had been no exclusion laws, and Chinese and other Asians had continued to freely immigrate to the United States. California, the West, indeed, the whole country would look radically different today. Not all of Asia’s “teeming masses” would have inundated the U.S.; migration does not work that way. The poorest do not migrate, because they can’t afford to, and the wealthiest don’t need to. Migration sets patterns, or chains, from certain areas and not others. Still, by 1950, many millions of Asian Americans would have been building their lives in the United States, and, in the process, contributing to the country. Instead, that year there were a mere 320,000 Asian Americans, composing just two-tenths of 1 percent of the U.S. population. Since the immigration reforms of 1965, the number of Asian Americans has increased, but we are still barely 6 percent of the U.S. population. Yet too many Americans still believe that there are too many Asians in the U.S. and that we don’t belong here.

For many Asian Americans, the policy of exclusion looms as large as Jim Crow does for Black people. The association is more than a metaphor. In the late 19th century, Jim Crow and Chinese exclusion were related projects of white supremacy, one in the South and one in the West. After the Civil War, the old planter class and the new industrialists in the South responded to the prospect of equality for the formerly enslaved by relegating them to second-class status, stripped of the franchise and other civil rights. The dangers that white supremacists associated with Black citizenship provided an object lesson for why Chinese people should be excluded. A reactionary political alliance of the West and the South pushed the exclusion laws through Congress.

Asiatic exclusion and Jim Crow segregation were two modes of racial management necessary for white supremacy after the Civil War, when the West and the South were being integrated into a national economy based on corporate capital and a polity made up of white male voters. These policies relied on euphemisms and legal fictions—“aliens ineligible to citizenship” and “separate but equal”—to work around the Fourteenth Amendment’s promise of equal protection and due process for all. Indeed, in the late 19th century, the Supreme Court would interpret the Fourteenth Amendment to favor the rights of capital, and not those of formerly enslaved people or Asian immigrants.

Laws like these were not preordained, but resulted from a choice made between two competing visions: The nation could be built on the principle of white supremacy or on that of democracy. Frederick Douglass understood that the futures of the South and the West were entwined, and that together, they would determine the fate of the nation as a whole. “I want a home here not only for the Negro, the mulatto, and the Latin races,” he said in 1869, speaking out against Chinese exclusion, “but I want the Asiatic to find a home here in the United States, and feel at home here, both for his sake and for ours.”

Americans today are slowly beginning to appreciate the nature of systemic racism against Black people. We need to expand the scope of our understanding; different historical dynamics have produced different racisms. But although distinct, their histories are connected and their legacies overlap, sometimes chaotically. And if we don’t understand the history of exclusion, we cannot understand the racist hatred that continues to be directed against Asian Americans in the present.

Chinese people first came to the United States in large numbers during the California Gold Rush of 1848 and ’49, which crowned the continental expansion of the U.S. Under the sign of “manifest destiny”—the idea that the West was God’s gift to white Protestant Americans—the United States had gone to war with Mexico and annexed its northern half, including California. Westward expansion absorbed the sectional conflict over slavery and brought the genocide of Indigenous peoples across the Great Plains and the West.

The idea of manifest destiny might seem quaint to our ears today, but its core imperative of a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant nation continued to define the dominant vision of the United States for a century. When Euro-American settlers arrived at the edge of the continent, they celebrated their conquest of the West and their closing of the frontier. From there, they looked out across the Pacific Ocean—the next frontier—with both excitement at the prospect of new conquests and anxiety over the new peoples that might come.

The Gold Rush is often celebrated for the individual daring, ingenuity, and male camaraderie of the 49ers, engaged in a bold experiment in democratic self-government. Less well remembered, but no less true, is that it was also violent and racist. Gold seekers and the fledgling state government of California pursued the extermination of Indigenous peoples. White, native-born Americans agitated against foreign miners, weaponizing manifest destiny for competitive gain, and driving many European, Australian, Chilean, Sonoran, and Chinese miners from the diggings.

Hostility against the Chinese took on a special cast in 1852. California Governor John Bigler, facing a tight race for reelection, made an incendiary speech before the state legislature, claiming that the Chinese, a race of heathens and slaves, were invading the state and threatening its society of free producers. Leaflets printed by Bigler and newspaper accounts circulated copies of the speech around the state. Many miners were already anxious, because the easy gold in the rivers was being depleted and deep-pocketed capitalists were taking over the industry, replacing independent prospecting with wage labor in underground quartz mines. Bigler’s bigotry found a receptive audience. White miners passed resolutions to keep Chinese people out of their districts and provided the votes Bigler needed to win a second term. He operated from the classic nativist playbook: Tap into popular grievances, offer a theory that blames an outsider group, and weaponize resentment for partisan gain.

Chinese people in California were voluntary emigrants and independent prospectors, not indentured workers. Bigler claimed that “coolies … are being sent here under contract … at merely nominal wages … [and] their families have been retained as hostages for the faithful performance of the contracts.” His argument that these were not bona fide contracts but were rooted in “moral turpitude” and coercion invoked two contemporary anxieties. One was the use, mainly by the British, of Indian indentured labor in the Caribbean plantation colonies after the abolition of slavery. The other was the more proximate example of slavery in the American South. These two associations—colonialism and slavery—inspired the racist theories against Chinese immigrants, and have haunted Chinese Americans ever since.

Two Chinese American merchant leaders in San Francisco, Tong K. Achick and Hab Wa, wrote a letter to Bigler, refuting his claims. They explained that the Chinese in California included laborers, tradespeople, mechanics, gentry, and teachers; “none are ‘Coolies’ if by that word you mean bound men or contract slaves.” They added, “In the important matters we are good men; we honor our parents; we take care of our children; we are industrious and peaceable; we trade much; we are trusted for small and large sums; we pay our debts and are honest; and of course we tell the truth.” Finally, Tong and Hab asserted that there was a positive relationship between migration and trade, that they were mutually supporting elements of foreign contact and exchange. “If you want to check immigration from Asia,” they argued, “you will have to do it by checking Asiatic commerce.”

A resurgence of racism against the Chinese engulfed San Francisco in the 1870s, including mob violence, arson, and discriminatory municipal ordinances. This hatred emerged after completion of the transcontinental railroad, which brought unforeseen consequences to the West. California’s new connection to the East Coast encouraged domestic migration and the importation of cheap manufactured goods, resulting in falling wages and unemployment. Integration into the national market brought the long tail of economic recession from the East. The “coolie” trope was remarkably adaptive to new conditions. The philosopher Henry George gave it theoretical heft, using what was then referred to as the “Chinese question” to test his emerging views about labor and monopoly. He argued that, unlike European immigrants, whose wages eventually rose to the level of native-born workers, Chinese immigrants were a permanent source of cheap labor because they were unassimilable coolies. George imagined a class struggle between workers and capitalists, with the Chinese in the camp of the bosses.

Anti-coolieism also targeted Chinese women. There weren’t many Chinese immigrant women in California, but some were wives of merchants and workers, or wives of fishermen who worked alongside their husbands as partners, while others were servants of wealthy Chinese. They also included sex workers who offered services to both Chinese and white men, but the anti-Chinese movement stereotyped all Chinese women as prostitutes, dubbing them “slave girls,” female counterparts to male coolie laborers. These attacks portrayed them as diseased and immoral, but that rhetoric was also laced with exoticism and desire. San Francisco’s most famous madam, Ah Toy, was said to be so beautiful that men paid an ounce of gold just to look at her.

The Page Act of 1875, the first Chinese-exclusion law in the U.S., barred “Mongolian prostitutes” from entering the country. The law required all women to be interrogated upon entry to prove they were not a prostitute; unsurprisingly, Chinese female immigration plummeted. That satisfied the real motive behind the Page Act, the prevention of Chinese population growth through natural reproduction. The legislation left a legacy of separated families, and helped establish the enduring stereotype of “Oriental” women as dangerous and desirable.

The Page Act also barred foreign contract laborers, but it could not keep out Chinese men, because they were not indentured. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 took care of that—barring Chinese laborers from entering the United States, and all Chinese immigrants from naturalized citizenship. The exclusion laws codified the idea that the Chinese were racially unassimilable. They could never be anything but a coolie race, controlled by despotic masters, without individual personality or will, in no way independent in thought or action. The U.S. Supreme Court layered another theory onto coolieism: that Chinese exclusion was necessary for national security. In Chae Chan Ping v. U.S. in 1889, the Court wrote,

To preserve its independence, and give security against foreign aggression and encroachment, is the highest duty of every nation … If, therefore, the government of the United States … considers the presence of foreigners of a different race in this country, who will not assimilate with us, to be dangerous to its peace and security, their exclusion is not to be stayed because at the time there are no actual hostilities with the nation of which the foreigners are subjects. The existence of war would render the necessity of the proceeding only more obvious and pressing.

Previously, federal regulation of immigration had been justified under the commerce clause of the Constitution. In upholding Chinese exclusion, the Court invoked national security to justify racist legislation. But in the 1880s, it was not the Chinese but the racism they faced that had proved dangerous to peace and security, bringing worsening violence against Chinese communities. In 1885 alone, the entire Chinese population of Tacoma, Washington, was violently expelled, and 128 Chinese coal miners from Rock Springs, Wyoming, were massacred.

The Chinese-exclusion laws were subsequently extended to people from the Philippines, India, and Japan (indeed, an entire “barred Asiatic zone” was established in 1917), lumping different national-origin groups into a single racial category, the “Asiatic.”

Modern colonialism and global trade meant a greater integration of the global economy and, with it, mass migration, sparking struggles over race and immigration policy throughout the Anglophone world. As Tong and Hab, the Chinese merchants, pointed out in 1852, trade begets migration, and vice versa. Thus American policy makers constructed an “open door” to China that would swing one way, allowing American products, missionaries, and capital to enter China while keeping Chinese people out of the United States. For all its talk about the equality of nations and the open door, the American approach was typically colonial, treating China as an object of commercial and missionary desire but Chinese people as degraded and backward, undesirable as immigrants.

The settler colonies of the British empire followed the example of the United States. Canada mimicked America’s Chinese-exclusion law; Australia adopted an unapologetic “White Australia” policy in 1901. South Africa took inspiration from Jim Crow in the U.S. and from White Australia. In the early 20th century, American and British racists were publishing screeds such as “The Passing of the Great Race,” “The Asiatic Danger in the Colonies,” and “The Rising Tide of Color” to promote the idea that the temperate zones of the world should be reserved for the white race.

But not only white supremacists connected domestic and foreign policies. Anti-racists and anti-imperialists also found common cause and solidarities across the global color lines. The antislavery book Uncle Tom’s Cabin was a best seller in 1901, when it became the first American novel to be translated into Chinese. “The book is not really about the sufferings of the black race as it is about all races under the whites,” a book reviewer in Shanghai wrote. “The novel is a wake-up call to rouse us from a deep dream.”

Racisms, while originating in specific contexts, must be continually reproduced in order to remain potent, as the late Afro-British sociologist Stuart Hall and other cultural theorists have emphasized. Because the exclusion laws could not eliminate all Asians from the United States (though that was the intention of violent “driving out” campaigns), the western states erected a legal edifice to ensure their subordination and marginalization. Racist laws forbade Asians from marrying white people, attending white schools, testifying in court against white people, owning agricultural property, and holding commercial and professional licenses. Restrictive covenants barred the sale of real estate to “Negroes, Jews and Orientals.” Exclusion underwrote the popular understanding that Asian Americans born in the United States were not true citizens, despite their birthright. The presumption of foreign loyalties most famously led to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II on grounds that they were an “enemy race.”

Most racist laws against Asians remained in force until the late 1940s, when Black civil-rights activism defeated similar restrictions on African Americans. The Asiatic-exclusion laws themselves fell from 1943 to 1952, the result of wartime foreign-policy imperatives. When Congress repealed the laws, however, it imposed minuscule annual quotas on Asian countries. Nevertheless, immigration opened a bit, and Asian Americans made small steps in socioeconomic and residential mobility, gaining access to professions and suburbs.

During the Cold War, an ideological space emerged in which Asian Americans could declare opposition to communism in East Asia as a way to assert their loyalty to the United States, as the historian Ellen Wu writes in her book The Color of Success. They also cannily promoted stereotyped cultural qualities—that Asian Americans are quiet, good workers, good students, and respectful of their parents—to advocate for their social inclusion. Journalists and sociologists weaponized these ideas to discipline Black and Latino people, and some Asian Americans believed they were better, too. Through these complex dynamics, Wu argues, Asian Americans’ place on the racial landscape went from being “definitively not white” to “definitively not Black.”

But repeal of the exclusion laws, incremental socioeconomic mobility, and even the establishment of equal quotas in the 1965 immigration law were insufficient to eradicate racism against Asian Americans. That is, in part, because of the weight of history. But it’s also because racism found ample grounds for reproduction in the conduct of American colonialism and wars in the Asia-Pacific region, from the Opium Wars and gunboat diplomacy in the 19th century straight through the conflicts of the 20th century.

Although all wars entail the dehumanization of the enemy, the dehumanization of Asians is distinctive in its racial idiom and its persistence across time. It centers around the ideas that, for Asians, “life is cheap” and that, as uncivilized peoples, they do not engage in “civilized” warfare and therefore must be fought with like means. During the Philippine-American War, which ran from 1899 to 1902, the United States invented waterboarding to torture Filipino guerrilla fighters. The U.S. Army also burned villages and rounded up civilians into strategic hamlets, a practice it would later use in Vietnam. The United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki and napalm and Agent Orange on Vietnam. In truth, it was the U.S. military that considered Asian life cheap and engaged in barbaric warfare against Asian people.

The prostitution of Asian women for American servicemen is an enduring feature of the U.S. military experience in Asia. Sex markets have ringed U.S. Army and Navy bases, whether during wartime or Cold War occupation, in Vietnam, Korea, the Philippines, Okinawa, and Guam. The long history of military prostitution generated racist and misogynist stereotypes, in which Asian women were portrayed as exotic, subservient, and always available. As the Korean American author Marie Myong-Ok Lee writes, the “cultural attitudes and stereotypes about Asian women don’t end when a soldier returns home. They become incorporated into American culture … Just ask yourself, are these phrases familiar? ‘Me so horny.’ ‘Me love you long time.’”

Finally, to the hot and cold wars we must add the trade wars. In the 1980s, the introduction of Japanese electronics and automobiles into the U.S. market sparked a racially tinged protectionist movement. In the early 21st century, Americans’ anxiety about China’s rise as a global economic power has fueled a new round of “Yellow Peril” racism. The figure of the coolie has returned, embodied in factory assembly workers in China’s special economic zones and Chinese international and Chinese American university students in the United States. They are imagined to toil under slave-like conditions (ruled by the Communist Party or by tiger moms), their extreme labor posing unfair competition against white American workers and students. The stereotype of the high-achieving model minority, aside from obscuring major differences in socioeconomic status among different Asian groups, is a pathology, not a compliment.

Hall, the sociologist, famously wrote that we ought to understand “not racism in general but racisms.” According to Hall, racism might be everywhere a “deeply anti-human and anti-social practice,” but it is not “everywhere the same.” Specific histories, contexts, and environments produce particular racisms, he said. Hall understood, too, that there’s no such thing as “race” in a biological sense. Rather, racism is a way of thinking about social groups according to differences that are presumed to be natural and immutable.

Racism is more than a series of stereotypes. It is ideological—a way of looking at the world that justifies and explains material structures of inequality and frames, if not determines, the life chances of racialized groups. In the United States, there’s much to unpack to understand the racisms that are shot through our history and our present, and how each strand of experience is unique as well as related to that of others. In the American context, racisms uphold the logics and practices of white supremacy.

The Indigenous critic Jodi Byrd offers a useful approach that distinguishes between Native peoples, European settlers, and later “arrivants,” the latter a diverse category including enslaved people and immigrant workers. Byrd counsels us to recognize distinct racial formations, to acknowledge their respective historical weights and legacies, while resisting the impulse to create hierarchies or analogies of oppression.

In the aftermath of the recent murder of eight people in Atlanta, including six Korean and Chinese women—Soon Chung Park, Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Yong Ae Yue, Xiaojie Tan, and Daoyou Feng—which took place on top of a year of pandemic-related harassment and assaults against Asian Americans, I’ve been thinking about this country’s deep ignorance of Asian American communities. Why does it seem so difficult for many Americans to understand that racism is part of our experience, past and present? Some suggest that we remain invisible to Americans, perhaps because we’re perceived as quiet. But in fact, we’ve been speaking up and speaking out for a long time—it’s just that few people have been paying attention.

Americans are still struggling over competing ideas of what this nation should be. Sadly, that debate still includes whether Asians belong, or whether racism against them even exists. Although the white-supremacist vision of manifest destiny today animates Trumpism, we still have another choice. Frederick Douglass’s democratic vision offers us a path toward a more inclusive future, should we decide to stand in solidarity against all racisms.

### Thesis---Bio-Orientalism

#### The crisis in the imagined security of Western life produces the necessary threat of Yellow Life which transcends time and being. Yellow Life is the racialized disease that White society must become immunized to, even as Yellow life reproduces, expands, spreads and spills past the very cells of the Asian body.

Lester 21, Johns Hopkins University, Political Science, Graduate Student, (Quinn, “Bio-orientialism and the Yellow Peril of Yellow Life” *Catalyst: Feminism, Theory, Technoscience* ; 7(1), <https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/view/34382/27577>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

In this article, I argue that a process of orientalism constructs “Yellow Life“ as the antinomy and horizon of possibility for Western “life” as an unmarked category representing the white possessive individual as a distinct form of life. This process I term bio-orientalism for its emphasis on tropes and images of biological life to mark Yellow Life as forms of nonhuman life threatening to perpetually engulf, invade, and corrupt the West. Bio-orientalism has its origins in nineteenth-century Yellow Peril discourse, yet reappears whenever there is a crisis in the imagined security of Western life that must conjure the threat of Yellow Life as a causal agent of blame obscuring Western life’s own suicidal addiction to global white supremacy and racial capitalism. Bio-orientalism marks moments of crisis in the formation of Western life, from the twentieth-century rise of Japan, through the mid-century “loss of China” and rupture of decolonizations, to the contemporary resurgence of China threatening America’s superpower and civilizational status (Kim 2004; Prashad 2008). For over a century, Western countries conjured Asia as both the premodern that the West has decisively put behind it and the threatening future of an Asia that overwhelms and renders extinct Western life as we have come to know it. Climate-impacted crises like the COVID-19 pandemic increase the stakes and scope of bio-orientalist representations of Asia that create material consequences for Asian Americans and Asian populations globally.

Bio-orientalism plays a key role in the replication of anti-Asian racism over time and therefore calls attention to Asian American political efforts to deconstruct and fight orientalist stereotypes. While Asian American politics often responds to bio-orientalism by seeking inclusion in the unmarked life of white possessive individualism, I speculate upon an Asian Americanist response that abandons the Human for a diversity of ways of living (and life) otherwise (Lowe 1996; Okihiro 2014). My argument then contributes to putting Asian American studies in conversation with developments in the humanities and STS, particularly in understanding the mutual processes of defining and racializing what counts as life itself (Cardozo and Subramaniam 2013; Lee 2014; Huang 2017; Tran 2018). To make this argument, in this article I first define bio-orientalism through an attention to what makes it different from orientalisms that highlight Asia as a technological threat to the future and show how in early Yellow Peril literature images of biological threat predominate. I then turn to Bryan Thao Worra’s poetry collection Demonstra to highlight a different archive in the history of bio-orientalism and how Worra diagnoses bio-orientalism as the potential for embracing Yellow Life as life lived otherwise (Chuh 2003). Particularly, in contrast to Donna Haraway’s famous figure of the cyborg, I focus on Worra’s figure of the Zombuddha that plays with recent turns to depicting the zombie as a particularly Asian threat, revealing the Zombuddha as a unique entanglement of Caribbean history, Western horror, and Laotian cosmology that begins to map other ways of embracing the otherness of Yellow Life.

Defining Bio-orientalism

Arguing that bio-orientalism produces a distinction between Yellow Life and unmarked life already shows that “life“ itself never exists prior to racialization (Lee 2014; Weheliye 2014; Jackson 2015). Often unmarked life or the Human refers to the white liberal subject and the form of life they embody.[1](https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/download/34382/27577?inline=1#note1) Scientific and popular discourses take a very particular kind of situated body—often of the white, male, able, Western subject—and treat it as the universal of subjectivity itself. By “life” I also mean the ontology of life upon which such a subject is based; this is life as bounded to bodies, singular and irreducible, and based on a vision of nature as mechanical or inert and open to the active agency of human action (Bennett 2010). C.B. Macpherson (2010) calls this kind of life the possessive individual, whose “possessive quality is found in its conception of the individual as essentially the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them” (3). The possessive individual owns himself as property, and engages with other individuals to the degree that they can also be recognized as property owners, something often denied to racialized others. This is also inherently the gendered male body of the patriarch that imagines itself as both inviolable from outside penetration and as one with his property, which can include women, children, slaves, animals, and inanimate objects (Dubber 2005). White racial formation views the life of the possessive individual as one carefully bounded and aloof from the messiness of reality, while also master of all other forms of life (Lipsitz 2006).

This life of the possessive individual fears constantly the violation of his own boundaries through contagion and infection. Following Roberto Esposito's (2008) work on biopolitics, the possessive individual seeks immunity as “a temporary or definitive exemption on the part of the subject with regard to concrete obligations or responsibilities that under normal circumstances would bind one to others” (45). In Esposito's reading, community is the “obligation of reciprocal donation” (50) that threatens “risky contact” with otherness, so that the immunized individual seeks to restore “its own borders that were jeopardized by the common” (50). To speak of the Human, as a white liberal subject, then is to speak of this immunized possessive individual who sees his body as property, and seeks to maintain it as such, while also refusing to live in a common world with life that threatens his body as property. Through the process of bio-orientalism, Yellow Life appears as what threatens to overcome the immunized white life and the form of life against which the possessive individual comes into being. A necessary response to bio-orientalism therefore, I argue, is to dismantle the white possessive individual’s immunized response to otherness and risk exposure to other imagined forms of life.

By emphasizing the ontology of liveliness, bio-orientalism responds to transformations in anti-Asian racism that cannot be reduced to images of Asia as the threat of technological non-life or inhuman labor. Scholarship on Asiatic racial form argues that the figure of the Asian comes into being as a misplaced but concrete representation for the abstract violence of capitalism (Lye 2004; Day 2016). By paying attention to Asiatic racial form’s relationship to capitalism, what often receives the most attention are those representations that paint the Asian body as a form of inhuman technology and labor. Such representations fit under the label of techno-orientalism, which names “the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse” (Roh et al. 2015, 2). Techno-orientalism represents the linking of Asiatic racial form with technology to produce an inhuman non-life overcoming life itself, understood properly as the biologically bounded and autonomous white possessive individual. For STS, techno-orientalism helps draw attention to the ways that technology does not just produce race, but is itself already thoroughly saturated by racial categories and conceptions (Chun 2012; Benjamin 2019). Yet by the very nature of its focus, the examples and cases techno-orientalism highlights overwhelmingly favor the robotic and mechanical, losing sight of life itself as the category under contestation in anti-Asian racism.[2](https://catalystjournal.org/index.php/catalyst/article/download/34382/27577?inline=1#note2)

Distinct from yet working in tandem with techno-orientalism, which deploys technology to define the Asiatic inhuman, what I term bio-orientalism relies on biological and disease metaphors to characterize Asiatic racial form as nonhuman life, and supplements research on Asiatic racial form by drawing attention to that “bios” of life itself in biopolitics (Esposito 2008; Thacker 2011). Rachel Lee's work on theorizing the biological in Asian American studies provides a jumping off point for thinking through this bios of bio-orientalism. Lee (2014) opens her book The Exquisite Corpse of Asian America with the question of, when Asian American Studies orients itself around discursive and economic determinants of racial formations, why do “Asian American artists, authors, and performers keep scrutinizing their body parts?” (10). She answers the question by dismissing Asian American studies’ anxiety around the apparent “stolidity of the biological” (Lee 2014, 12) and instead focuses on the anxiety of “biological personhood not as fixed or singular but as multiform and distributed across time spans and spatial ecologies” (15). Lee’s project, like other work under the label of new materialism, seeks to recognize that nature and matter are not mechanical or inert, but instead lively and agentic actors in their own right (Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010; Shomura 2017). In recognizing the agency of matter, however, Lee also brings attention to how this matter is not socially blank but already racialized; even to speak of genes or microbes already carries the specter of Asian racialization. She argues then that contemporary racism functions at scales greater and lesser than the individual body, crafting immunized populations of what I call the white possessive individual through the extraction and disposability of racialized others. This form of racism “depends upon the ‘immune’ subject’s mystified property—bounded self-possession—in his/herself and in an array of planetary materials that in actuality remain, biologically speaking, habitats for countless others” (Lee 2014, 223). In disavowing his connection to lively matter, the white possessive individual also expresses the fear of expropriation by, in Esposito's (2008) terms, the munis, by what is both common and other to them. Through bio-orientalism, I argue that Yellow Life comes to stand in for this threat to white immunity, even as to fully imagine the life of the white possessive individual requires expropriation of Yellow Life.

Rather than an attention to the biological being a novel intervention to anti-Asian racism, bio-orientalism highlights how the biological threat of Yellow Life has been a longstanding hallmark of racializing Asia as a threat to white life and white futures. To modify the definition of techno-orientalism, I view bio-orientalism as the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hyperbiological terms in cultural productions and political discourse. In bio-orientalism Asiatic racial form appears as a particular form of life that questions the contours of the possessive individual conception of life itself. Yellow Life seems to always be reproducing itself, expanding, growing—in short, spreading beyond and spilling over what should be the proper boundaries of a life form. As in other forms of orientalism, there is the representation of Asians as a group-collective that denies the possibility of individuation, but here bio-orientalism imagines that collective through vitalist terms, as an aggregate or multiplicity of the barely differentiated whose singular undecidability appears through its constant transformations. In contrast to the problem often tackled within new materialism and STS of recognizing the creative agency of matter, rather than inert and mechanical Asiatic racial form appears as too lively and agentic. Yellow Life becomes impossible to pin down because it refuses to stay within the proper boundaries of life, invading both the tiniest cells of the body and entire nations in its expansive growth. Yellow Life becomes what must be immunized against, the munis that threatens dissolution, the loss of individuality, and death for the white possessive individual (Esposito 2008).

### Thesis---Biotech

#### Biotechnologies are intertwined with racial disparities, marking Asians as the model minority while marking Blackness as contamination. They unleash the slippery slope to the specter of eugenics.

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This is the outcome that may result if the reproductive desires like those of “Want to Be a Dad” are met—that our current state of color-blind ideology is one that may boast of multiculturalism but is still engrained with racist beliefs and desires. At a time when headlines include “The End of White America” (Hsu), perhaps it is not too surprising that the emergence of designer babies and reproductive technologies is a growing trend. In this light, we are currently witnessing the scientific and technological manipulation of the face of race.

I introduce the implications of ART here in order to illustrate how race oftentimes produces a power differentiation between technology and reproduction. In 2013, not only are the rates of nonwhite babies rising,3 but the parallel increase of biracial and multiracial birthrates has fostered an atmosphere of what author Danzy Senna has satirically referred to as the “Mulatto Millennium.” Alongside this change in demographics is our growing reliance on biotechnology through which a parent can now select not only a child’s skin/ hair/eye color but also gender, athletic abilities, weight, height, and susceptibility to certain diseases. In terms of race selection, then, a white couple can have either their genetic white baby (via a white or nonwhite gestational carrier) or a nonwhite baby using an embryo adopted from a domestic or international agency. Despite not sharing any genetic link, a white woman can birth a nonwhite baby and nonwhite women can birth white babies.

Parents-to-be as well as ART practitioners place restrictions upon certain mixings that mirror centuries-old racial paradigms. For example, during her ethnographic research in the San Francisco Bay area, Gillian Goslinga-Roy uncovered racist ideologies where white surrogates refused to gestate a black baby but welcomed an Asian baby. As “Julie,” a white surrogate, explains, “It feels foreign to me. Different. I could carry a Japanese baby or a Chinese baby because they are white to me. Society sees them as white. But a Black child is more difficult. I’m already surrounded by controversy: I married a man thirtytwo years older than me. I work in a late-term, problem-pregnancy abortion facility. And I’m a surrogate. To give birth to a Black child would add one more controversial aspect to my life and I’m not ready to be on the front page of the National Enquirer” (116). Here, gestating blackness is a contamination too taboo to warrant consideration. As Goslinga-Roy points out, what is telling is “how carrying someone else’s (white) child provoked no gut reaction in her whatsoever. . . . But the mere thought of carrying someone else’s Black child immediately made her experience the surrogacy as a very intimate and at once very public violation of her bodily and moral boundaries” (116). In contrast, it is important to point out that gestating a Japanese or Chinese baby is not considered National Enquirer material. In other words, Asian-white mixes have overcome societal prohibition, symptomatic of broader perceptions of Asians as the model minority.

The fear of racial contamination is illustrated throughout the fertility treatment process in what Foucault would call the “biopower” of ART or the “techniques [used] for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations” (140), such as population control and selective reproduction. By managing and manipulating racial mixings, ART practitioners become arbiters of heredity and the future look of race. In her study of fertility technology, Seline Szkupinski Quiroga reveals how racial borders are policed and maintained during each step of the fertility treatment process. For example, in describing the matching process between sperm donor and recipient, she writes, “The goal of matching is threefold: (1) to increase the probability that the child’s physical characteristics will be similar enough to suggest that the social parent could have contributed his own genetic material; (2) to mimic the physical attributes of what white Americans perceive as a biological family; and (3) to maintain secrecy about the use of a donor by ensuring that the child could ‘pass’ as a genetic child and not be mistaken as a product of the mother’s sexual infidelity” (150). Szkupinski Quiroga explains that while the first two goals are reflective of biologism or the need to “look” like a natural family, the last goal reflects the “raced and gendered nature of the heteropatriarchal family model” (150). In other words, the child cannot be interpreted as the visual evidence of the mother’s infidelity. Here, the child’s racial visibility/ decipherability is the physical evidence of his/her mother’s loyalty not only to her husband but to the family’s genetics via the erasure of (her) infertility.4 In the ART process, the mother’s infidelity is achieved only hypothetically via a mixed-race sexual union. In order to prevent this, donor semen is “categorized racially, and sperm banks rely on donor self-identification and physiognomy to assess the validity of a donor’s claim to whiteness” (150). Oftentimes, sperm vials are, in fact, color-coded to match the donor’s racial identification (black/ brown caps for African Americans, yellow caps for Asians, white caps for Caucasians, and red caps for those with “unique ancestry” such as East Indians, American Indians, Latinos, and mixed race individuals). Sperm banks play race managers through careful cataloguing of various physical characteristics in order to choose the “appropriate” donor. This catalogue serves “as a proxy for proof of a donor’s racial pedigree” (150).

In contrast to the racist taboos and anxieties that black bodies, blood, and genes still signify in ART, it is interesting to note that Asian genetics and bodies are in high demand in both ART and adoption. With all factors being equal (health of infant, age, the adoption budget, the type of agency employed, etc.), white babies demand higher costs and longer wait periods in domestic adoption because they are the most desired. In contrast, black or multiracial babies are the least in demand, thus the cost and waiting period for them are considerably lower, especially if one adopts via the foster care program. One adoption agency, Wide Horizons for Children, states on their website that “[f ]amilies are especially needed for children of African American heritage and children who may have a health risk or concern.” Here, blackness and disease and/or disability are on par. On the contrary, Asian adoptions compose about 60 percent of all international adoptions according to the Department of Health and Human Services. Domestically, Asian American adoption composes such a small number that reliable estimates could not be generated; this disparity may be explained by the fact that very few Asian American babies are placed in adoptions due to cultural or religious taboos. Interestingly, however, Asian eggs are a hot commodity and demand as much as two or three times the price of other eggs (and, as noted in a recent Los Angeles Times article, up to a hundred thousand dollars). “asian egg donors needed” signs can be found all over Ivy League college campuses, for if the donor boasts an Ivy League pedigree with high SAT scores, she can command a higher price. Demand is so high that some egg donor agencies, such as the Asian Egg Donor Agency in New Jersey, specialize in Asian eggs. As Stanford bioethics professor David Magnus writes, “What we have is the beginnings of the specter of eugenics . . . the makings of a super-race and a slippery slope. What we have is an actual egg selling, not egg donation” (“Eggs from Young Asian Women in High Demand”).

### Thesis---Ornamentalism

#### Western imaginations produce an Asiatic figure that is not only racialized, but gendered. The technological bounds between Being and Thing produce exclusionary binaries where Asiatic femininity is subjected to the ornament of Western fantasy. Only reimagining subject-object ontology can create space for the Asian woman’s cybernetic ontological entanglement.

Lu 21, Vanderbilt University, (Melanie, “Gendering the Techno-Orient: The Asian Woman in Speculative Fiction”, English & Asian Studies Honors Thesis, <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/bitstream/handle/1803/16493/LuMelanie_VUIRSubmission.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

According to Cheng, fully understanding the unique nature of western constructions of Asiatic femininity demands a radical reconfiguration of the binaries between personhood and thingness. She offers the term Ornamentalism as a critical lens to examine the relations between objectification, aestheticization, and racialization in articulating a distinct ontology of and for the Asian woman: contrary to autonomous modes of being that arise from natural bodies, the racialization of the Asian woman involves “a process whereby personhood is conceived and suggested (legally, materially, and imaginatively) through ornamental gestures [...] that speak through the minute, the sartorial, the prosthetic, and the decorative” (Cheng 429). The western concept of the Person—which Cheng traces to Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke and William Blackstone—and its idealization of the organic and integral body as designed by God is thus radically challenged, since the demarcations between personhood and objecthood are violently collapsed in the process (Cheng 436). It is not (yellow) flesh that constitutes a racialized body, but ornament. There is no Person, in the natural, embodied sense, to begin with, and one must imagine an alternative ontology for a being that exists in a realm of thingness.

For the Asian woman who is constructed this way, it is not the case that she is transformed into object, that is, objectified, but rather that she already exists as object; flesh and ornament amalgamate in representations of this racialized figure. To make her case, Cheng draws on a range of texts from Euro-American visual and literary culture, while focusing heavily on the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s dazzling 2015 exhibition entitled China: Through the Looking Glass. Indeed, the latter case, which featured more than 140 examples of haute couture and avant-garde wear from renowned western designers such as Yves Saint Laurent and John Galliano, was notable as it epitomizes precisely the kind of lavish ornamental stylization typically used to characterize Asian aesthetics. Looking at the clothing for female models that are supposedly inspired by “a pastiche of Chinese aesthetic and cultural traditions,” one senses a recurring conflation between materiality and organicity (“Exhibition Overview”). As highlighted by Cheng, flesh and ornament are often synonymous in these sumptuous pieces, as porcelain shards are laced into bodices and calligraphy script becomes sartorial prints. Through the exotic vessel of Chineseness and Asiatic femininity, the material ambiguity of the garments effectively racializes the Asian woman as a being that is defined by the ornamental. If this ontological formulation of the Asian woman as object is true, we come to further realize how noteworthy it is that the artificiality of Kyoko is signified in such a way as to contrast the humanness of Ava; the objecthood of her being as yellow woman overlaps with and extends the narrative of the Asian alien as human simulacra, culminating in her racialized figure as uncannily human-like but nonetheless inherently devoid of organic life.

Cheng’s theory of Ornamentalism is useful and highly relevant to our discussion for multiple reasons. In addition to examining the intersections between gender and race in Orientalizing the Asian woman, it highlights the importance of aesthetic style in the formal construction of racial narratives, thereby effectively refuting attempts such as those in Ex Machina to trivialize the role of racial signifiers in seemingly apolitical or post-racial contexts. The aforementioned exhibition, for instance, reclaims “postmodernism as a cure to Orientalism” by suggesting that the artistic value of the displayed pieces should be disaggregated from politics (Cheng 427). Such rhetoric is abundant in the museum’s gallery webpages, where China is designated as a “land of free-floating symbols” that invites postmodern reinterpretation and reconstruction (“Exhibition Galleries”). Indeed, even the exhibition title’s use of the notion of “looking glass,” repeatedly referenced elsewhere as the collection’s unifying theme, suggests an exculpatory self-awareness of the distorting effects of the western gaze. Under the guise of artistic creativity, the exhibition thus attempts to completely shed the burden of cultural authenticity by asserting that aesthetic style is innocuous and distinct from broader cultural or political narratives that more explicitly reflect ideologies of race.

China: Through the Looking Glass is not alone in exemplifying such Orientalist practices; thus, while Said’s critique of western portrayals of a decadent Asia as Other remains valid, it does not as adequately emphasize the specific processes by which such aesthetic style itself is a gendered mechanism of racialization. Under the framework of Ornamentalism, we are not only able to recognize the gendered nature of the ethnic-cultural fetishization reflected by these garments, but to also understand why the west is persistently driven to denote Asia and Asiatic femininity with particular ornamental styles we see among this “land of free-floating symbols.” This enduring figure of the faceless female mannequin, always garnished with breathtakingly extravagant fabrics, textures, and appendages found throughout the collection, thus signifies for the western imagination a particular kind of person of desire. Instead of arbitrarily curating a pastiche of signs for aesthetic pleasure, the west has constructed a specific constellation of traits that racialize a being that is already characterized as an object. Looking back to our survey on the typology of western techno-Orientalist texts, we further see how this narrative of aesthetic style as seemingly raceless is similarly at play, as the mystifying Chinese character signboards typical in various SF settings are not inconsequential backgrounds but instead constitute a particular style that is inherently Orientalizing, even as these texts aim to prophesize a future that is less concerned with race than the fundamental biologies of human and machine.

Ultimately, Ornamentalism also presents a unique avenue to examine the figure of the cyborg as it encapsulates the challenges of (re)defining subjectivity within the techno-Orientalist narrative. Looking at the exhibition pieces on display in Looking Glass, which were assembled in juxtaposition to physical artifacts such as ceramics and paintings while using the same patterns on these objects for their design, we not only get the sense that they are meant to enact a particular mechanism of racialization for the Asian woman, but also that they subvert the notions of objecthood itself. Cheng suggests that what is ultimately at play is a foregrounding of the object’s primacy that is only made legible through the racial significations of the ornamental Asian woman (Cheng 435). This unique ontological entanglement with objecthood is significant in questioning subject-object relations not only as they pertain to perceptions of female Asian bodies, but also to the viewer’s own understanding of their human condition, as Ornamentalism facilitates the recognition that objecthood is part of being human. As Cheng explains eloquently, “while Orientalism is about turning persons into things that can be possessed and dominated, ornamentalism is about a fantasy of turning things into persons through the conduit of racial meaning in order, paradoxically, to allow us to abandon our humanness” (Cheng 435). Thus, as a concept, Ornamentalism spotlights the crisis of modern life that Asiatic femininity personifies, where it seems increasingly difficult to reconcile ideals of the purely organic body with visions of a technology-driven future. More broadly, Ornamentalism challenges the long-standing western traditions that view the object as a subordinate byproduct of the natural subject within the subject-object dichotomy, prompting us to radically reimagine more diverse modes of personhood and being.

We now see how Ornamentalism as an extension of Saidian Orientalism has immense potential in initiating conversations on alternative forms of being that challenge the categories of human and artificial, especially those pertaining to cyberspace and cyborg bodies. If the Asian woman has always been a product of the synthetic, then she is in a sense “the original cyborg,” compelling us to rethink the desires and anxieties surrounding materiality and artificiality (Cheng 433). In Donna Haraway’s 1985 Cyborg Manifesto, the notion of the cyborg—an abstract fusion between machine and organic matter—offers a utopian promise of a postmodern, genderless world that rejects essentialist and naturalist identity politics rooted in western heteropatriarchy (Haraway 7). The limitations of Haraway’s cyborg become especially clear now as we consider the figure of the Asian woman, who needs no bodily enhancement or modification to deprive her of organicity. Her cybernetic genealogy as traced through the western imagination predates what Haraway sees as technologically-aided liberation in the late twentieth century, since she has always existed ambiguously along the boundaries of Person and thing. She is thus crucial to understanding the expressions of modern personhood and life, where ideals of the natural, integrated individual are threatened not only by the potential fusion between technology, ornament, and flesh, but also by the emerging desires we hold towards confronting our own humanness as modern subjects.

### Thesis---Security

#### Techno-Orientalism is literally hardwired into American politics and security discourse.

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The defense of techno-Orientalist militarism has become literally hardwired into American political institutions. The cultivated need for enemies for Americans to define themselves against was complicated when the supposedly intractable Soviet Union crumbled under its own weight to everyone’s surprise in 1991. Think tanks such as the Center for Security Policy, founded by Reagan’s former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (and CPD member) Frank Gaffney in 1988, and the Middle East Forum, founded in 1990 by Pipes’s son Daniel Pipes, scrambled to find new spectral enemies endangering the world’s largest military in order to maintain their political influence. These think tanks repurposed and remade security discourse rooted in the idea of an intractable civilizational clash between the West and communism into one between the West and the rest—simply recasting new actors into the well-established roles of American strategic drama (Little 226–266). The neoconservative Project for a New American Century (PNAC) outlined the necessity for a more aggressive stance against China and Iraq under the title Present Dangers, edited by Robert Kagan and William Kristol (vii) in its bid to revive a “Reaganite policy of military strength and moral clarity.” When PNAC-supported George W. Bush assumed the presidency later that year, his advisors (including former CPD member Paul Wolfowitz) immediately began strategizing about how to scare the American people and Congress into another round of war against intractable Oriental enemies. However, even the pursuit of this techno-Orientalist fantasy betrayed its own ambivalence. The U.S. military named the December 2003 hunt for deposed Iraqi leader (and former U.S. ally) Saddam Hussein “Operation Red Dawn,” and code named his two suspected hiding places “Wolverine 1” and “Wolverine 2”—as if to suggest that the United States was the overpowering evil occupying force in “Indian country,” and Hussein an Iraqi hiding in the hills to lead a patriotic resistance (Sirota 139–169). Nonetheless, as Americans increasingly equated the mounting failures in Iraq to the failures in Vietnam three decades before, hawkish politicians sought to remake and refocus the war’s goals by founding a short-lived third CPD in 2004 dedicated to channeling American fears of government manipulation toward the threat radical Islamic terrorists pose to the safety of the world (Barry).

### Thesis---Simulacra

#### The language and code of the Western project produce an Asianized future, where the Asian Techno-Orient supplants the aspirations and anxieties of modern info capitalism, justifying Western dominance. In this state, the Asian body accelerates past the present and becomes the mirror of Western futural fears.

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These examples perfectly illustrate our definition of techno-Orientalism: the phenomenon of imagining Asia and Asians in hypo- or hypertechnological terms in cultural productions and political discourse.4 Techno-Orientalist imaginations are infused with the languages and codes of the technological and the futuristic. These developed alongside industrial advances in the West and have become part of the West’s project of securing dominance as architects of the future, a project that requires configurations of the East as the very technology with which to shape it. Techno-Orientalist speculations of an Asianized future have become ever more prevalent in the wake of neoliberal trade policies that enabled greater flow of information and capital between the East and the West. Substantial criticism of techno-Orientalism emerged in the mid-1990s when cultural theorists began to trace its manifestations and theorize its causes and implications. Kevin Morley and David Robins, Toshiya Ueno, and Kumiko Sato, principal trailblazers of the field, laid much of the valuable groundwork. Morley and Robins’s Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes, and Cultural Boundaries (Routledge, 1995), in which a definition of “techno-Orientalism” first saw print, remains the most cited in critical assessments of technological and Orientalist discourses; however, Ueno has probably written most extensively about techno-Orientalism as a discursive cultural phenomenon in the era of what he identifies as the “post-Fordist social environment of globalization” (223). “The basis of Orientalism and xenophobia is the subordination of Others through a sort of ‘mirror of cultural conceit,’” Ueno explains. “The Orient exists in so far as the West needs it, because it brings the project of the West into focus” (223).

Whereas Orientalism, as a strategy of representational containment, arrests Asia in traditional, and often premodern imagery, techno-Orientalism presents a broader, dynamic, and often contradictory spectrum of images, constructed by the East and West alike, of an “Orient” undergoing rapid economic and cultural transformations. Techno-Orientalism, like Orientalism, places great emphasis on the project of modernity—cultures privilege modernity and fear losing their perceived “edge” over others. Stretching beyond Orientalism’s premise of a hegemonic West’s representational authority over the East, techno-Orientalism’s scope is much more expansive and bidirectional, its discourses mutually constituted by the flow of trade and capital across the hemispheres. As Ueno observes, techno-Orientalism is first and foremost an effect of globalism. “If the Orient was invented by the West,” he writes, “then the Techno-Orient was also invented by the world of information capitalism” (228). Technological developments, driven by the imperial aspirations and the appetites of consumerist societies on both sides of the Pacific, propel the engines of invention and production. In its wake, Western nations vying for cultural and economic dominance with Asian nations find in technoOrientalism an expressive vehicle for their aspirations and fears. Our volume, Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media, documents past and current constructions of the role of Asia in a technologized future and critically examines this proliferating phenomenon.

Dr. Fu Manchu illustrates just one way in which techno-Orientalist imagery pervades Western cultural productions in the early twentieth century. The principal locales of techno-Orientalist projects as they developed in the late twentieth century have primarily been Japan and China. Ueno, whose influential analyses of “Japanimation” in the mid-1990s seeded the field of technoOrientalist studies, observes, “In Techno-Orientalism, Japan is not only located geographically, but is also projected chronologically. Jean Baudrillard once called Japan a satellite in orbit. Now Japan has been located in the future of technology” (228). Morley and Robins put a finer point on the temporal dimension of the spatial construction: “If the future is technological, and if technology has become ‘Japanised,’ then the syllogism would suggest that the future is now Japanese, too. The postmodern era will be the Pacific era. Japan is the future, and it is a future that seems to be transcending and displacing Western modernity” (168).

Whereas Japan’s dubious honor as the original techno-Orient was bestowed in the eighties with the help of the cyberpunk movement, the techno-Orientalizing of China occurred roughly a decade later.5 China was not yet a competitor in the global economy in the 1980s, when the West focused its wary gaze on what it saw as an invasion of Japanese capital investments and imports into Western economies. When China was recognized as a newly industrialized country (NIC) in the 1990s and its influence in the global economy increased, it, too, became once again a target of techno-Orientalist fashioning. The discourse on China’s “rise” in the U.S. context, consistent with techno-Orientalist contradictions, has focused on constructing its people as a vast, subaltern-like labor force and as a giant consumer market whose appetite for Western cultural products, if nurtured, could secure U.S. global cultural and economic dominance. This dual image of China as both developing-world producers and firstworld consumers presents a representational challenge for the West: Is China a human factory? Or is it a consumerist society, like the United States, whose enormous purchasing power dictates the future of technological innovations and economies?

Japan and China are thus signified differently in the techno-Orientalist vocabulary. Both are constructed as competitors and therefore threats to the U.S. economy; but while Japan competes with the United States for dominance in technological innovation, China competes with the United States in labor and production. To put it in starker terms, Japan creates technology, but China is the technology. In the eyes of the West, both are crucial engines of the future: Japan innovates and China manufactures. And as Asia, writ large, becomes a greater consumerist force than the West,6 its threat/value dualism commensurately increases. These differences in the technological signification of Japan and China manifest themselves in the fictive forecasts of the Asiantinged future. If Japan is a screen on which the West has projected its technological fantasies, then China is a screen on which the West projects its fears of being colonized, mechanized, and instrumentalized in its own pursuit of technological dominance.

India, another NIC, has also found itself under the techno-Orientalist gaze as a consequence of U.S. outsourcing practices. As a much maligned business strategy, outsourcing has provoked extremely negative public sentiments in the United States. These opinions find expression in a particular strand of techno-Orientalist discourse that consolidates China and India as the chief threats to the U.S. service and labor sectors. These Asian nations serve as the scapegoats for corporate decisions to move service and manufacturing jobs abroad and bear the brunt of the resulting xenophobic antipathies. Chinese and Indian workers, for instance, are routinely portrayed in techno-Orientalist and technophobic vocabularies; call center employees in India adopt Western Christian names and mimic the linguistic and idiomatic style of Americans, a practice so ubiquitous as to be parodied cinematically in romantic comedies such as Outsourced (2006), conjuring images of Dickian androids (or Blade Runner’s “replicants”) who simulate human behavior and threaten the distinction between “real” and “fake” Americans. Glossy spreads of endless rows of Chinese workers in corporate factories and towns in mainstream magazines such as Time and Wired seal the visual vocabulary of Asians as the cogs of hyperproduction. In the NIC contexts, techno-Orientalist discourse constructs Asians as mere simulacra and maintains a prevailing sense of the inhumanity of Asian labor—the very antithesis of Western liberal humanism.

#### In hypermodernity, the technological Other becomes more West than West, removing the Trans-Pacific encounter. Only by critically embracing our signifier-as-futurity can we circumvent Western modernity.

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While Orientalism as a critical lens describes how Western discourse discursively catalogues or frames the East, it has always been trained on domestic— that is, Western or U.S.—configurations against the Orientalized Other. Edward Said notes his “real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world” (12). Techno-Orientalism, with a vision of the future that is global in scope and reach, adds a wrinkle to the critical commonplace that Orientalism actively produces and reproduces an oppositional East to cement Western hegemony. Particularly within the realm of SF, techno-Orientalist tropes have been absorbed, reenvisioned, and replicated by other sites of cultural production, with interesting geopolitical implications.8 For example, Sato writes that Japan’s entry into cyberpunk SF reinvigorates nihonjinron, the idea of an essentialist Japanese superiority that was integral to its imperialist project. With Japan’s surrender in 1945, however, the idea of nihonjinron lost currency— that is, until it was reenabled by cyberpunk fiction in the 1980s. Sato observes that it was cyberpunk that resurrected the idea of Japanese essentialism: “This proud announcement of revived Japaneseness requited through the cutting edge of American culture means that the two separate histories of the West and Japan—the former modernizing, the latter behind—coincide in the discovery of Japan in American cyberpunk” (346). That proves troublesome, she argues, because it assumes Japanese essentialism as the primary reason for Japan’s economic and technological achievements. For example, two paradigmatic cyberpunk works, Ghost in the Shell (1995) and Chōhei Kambayashi’s novel Yukikaze (1985), have strong female cyborg leads paired with weaker, male companions. While Western cyberpunk seeks to claim liberal humanist subjectivity and modernity, having a female cyborg subject allows Japan to circumvent the question of subjectivity and modernity altogether. In both works, the male (Western) subject is deflated and removed from the center, while the cybernetic female embraces technology over humanity, allowing the insertion of Japan-as-signifier of futurity based on the constructed image of the West’s Othering of technology and Asia. In other words, a Japan manufactured by the West can further ethnocentric or nationalist projects on both fronts. Techno-Orientalist discourse, in this case, has been reified in another nationalist context, further demonstrating its discursive hegemony as it serves a site other than its point of origin.

The Western fixation on Asian futurism indicates just how important it is to approach techno-Orientalism from several vantages. William Gibson is perhaps the most renowned exemplar of the West’s fascination with the technologized Asian subject, evident in his unapologetic rhapsodizing in a 2001 issue of Wired, but even he merits a second look: “Dining late, in a plasticdraped gypsy noodle stall in Shinjuku, the classic cliché better-than-Blade Runner Tokyo street set, I scope my neighbor’s phone as he checks his text messages. Wafer-thin, Kandy Kolor pearlescent white, complexly curvilinear, totally ephemeral looking, its screen seethes with a miniature version of Shinjuku’s neon light show. . . . Tokyo has been my handiest prop shop for as long as I’ve been writing: sheer eye candy” (Gibson, “My Own Private Tokyo”). Gibson’s meditation touches upon the multipronged reach of techno-Orientalist discourse—he references the dystopic, Asianized cinematic vision of Los Angeles; he admits drawing upon Tokyo’s luminescence for his literary well; and it is the “ephemeral looking” mobile phone that inspires him to imagine new media, as he did with cyberspace in Neuromancer. Essentially, Gibson admits that the futurism he reads in Tokyo is largely superficial (“sheer eye candy”); the phone appears to be futuristic simply because of its alien surroundings, and his own somewhat tautological belief in Tokyo as his futuristic “prop shop.”

But more interestingly, Gibson credits Japan’s encounters with the West as the central reason for its present status as a site of the future. He explains, “[T]he nation of Japan [swallowed] whole the entirety of the Industrial Revolution. The resulting spasms were violent, painful, and probably inconceivably disorienting. The Japanese bought the entire train-set: clock-time, steam railroads, electric telegraphy, Western medical advances. . . . The result of this stupendous triple-whammy (catastrophic industrialisation, the war, the American occupation) is the Japan that delights, disturbs and fascinates us today” (Gibson, “Modern Boys and Mobile Girls”). That is, to understand Japan as the site of the future, one must first read its historical introduction to technology by (and, to the Western eye, its embrace of ) the West. In a wonderfully circular way, Gibson touches upon the tautological aspect of techno-Orientalism: the Japanese are technologically advanced and therefore culturally fascinating now because of past Western modernizing interventions in the Eastern sphere. In Gibson’s history, the West has created a hyperfuturistic Japan; and in this vision, Japan is now, in a sense, more West than the West, a simulacrum that threatens the foundational fiction of the West as Future.

It would be easy to dismiss Gibson’s liberties with Japanese culture as a symptom of his misreading of his muse, but our instinct tells us that would be too simple. Instead, we are interested in the potentials for contrapuntal dialogism in such engagements. Parodic and reciprocal appropriations of technoOrientalism in Asian cultural productions, for example, have opened up spaces for artistic and intellectual critique. Yet some remain skeptical of the effects of such appropriations. Ueno regards techno-Orientalism as a metanarrative that has become “an epistemological apparatus for Japanese to misunderstand themselves, and for Westerners to misunderstand others” (qtd. in Oda 250). Elaborating on Ueno’s skepticism, artist and cultural anthropologist Masanori Oda observes in an essay on what he calls “the present Post-Orientalist moment,” “Japanese anime, manga, and games are becoming a kind of ‘contact zone’ for the West to meet the latest Japan/ese. What is different from the old Orientalism is that both parties ( Japanese and Occidental) hold a kind of reciprocity. This means that the Japan/ese often appear as ‘as you like,’ selffashioned figures to the West, not only to satisfy their own gaze, but to disguise the real portrayal of their own nature or desires, as if to say, ‘This figure is not so bad for me’” (250). Oda’s skepticism rests chiefly with the mediatory capacity of techno-Orientalist discourses. “There may be a contact between both parties,” he cautions, “but there is never an encounter, much less an uncanny experience. Thus, mutual misconceptions accumulate” (251). Indeed, numerous examples of Oda’s notion of “contact without encounter” are identified and critiqued in the essays collected in this volume. It is this effect of “contact without encounter” produced by techno-Orientalist discourses that our volume seeks to call out and counteract. If technology has come to mediate “contact” between East and West through techno-Orientalist discourses, how, then, might we fashion representational technologies that engender “encounter” rather than empty contact?

#### Techno-Orientalism is locked in a mirror stage of reflecting anxieties onto the Asian other. *Real* Asian Americans only exist in the future, not the present, and alternative realities, not this one.

Chan 16, Art Forum (Dawn, “ASIA-FUTURISM”, Art Forum, <https://www.artforum.com/print/201606/asia-futurism-60088>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

IS IT POSSIBLE to be othered across time? For almost a century already, the myth of an Asian-inflected future has infiltrated imaginations worldwide. Vivid tableaux of the continent’s cities in hyperdrive, fueled by tech-enabled consumerism, come to mind with ease: Think of the vertical neon signs, the sleep-deprived gamers, the flesh-meets-machine of conveyor-belt sushi. Meanwhile, recent art history serves up examples of Asian artists (and East Asian artists in particular) whose pieces lay ground for even more fantastic futures to come: narratives populated by cyborg love and virtual-reality metropolises. In previous decades there were, of course, Nam June Paik’s televisions and robots, then Lee Bul’s cyborgs; now one finds the trippy digital self-portraits of Lu Yang, and Transmedia Lab’s robot arm programmed to duplicate Buddhist scripture.

In 1986, describing the United States, Jean Baudrillard touched on what the country was not: Japan. Specifically, a Japan that had managed “an unintelligible paradox, to transform the power of territoriality and feudalism into that of deterritoriality and weightlessness.” “Japan,” he continued, “is already a satellite of the planet Earth.” Taking up where he left off, David Morley and Kevin Robins laid out an articulation of techno-Orientalism a few years later, observing that Japan’s path to modernization had become a crucial aspect of its exoticized image as an Oriental other, an image construed to reflect the same Western anxieties that drove the historical violence of colonialism, racism, and exclusion. Yet even as their words set the stage for many a conversation about the formation and transformation of Asian identity through the channels of diaspora and distance, ever-newer avatars of techno-Orientalism continue to be reflected in both high art and low culture. Perhaps, critic Toshiya Ueno suggested, techno-Orientalism loops back on itself or serves as “a kind of mirror stage or an image machine” whose effects ultimately touch everyone. Focusing on Japan, Ueno wrote, “It is through this mirror stage and its cultural apparatus that Western or other people misunderstand and fail to recognize an always illusory Japanese culture, but it also is the mechanism through which Japanese misunderstand themselves.”

As the worldwide preoccupation in the 1980s with Japan’s unassailably ascendant technological dominance has given way to worldwide consternation over the still-unfolding effects of neoliberal globalization on an array of Pacific Rim nations, the idea that East Asian countries have any exceptional claim to futurity has grown more complex. But if the nuances of techno-Orientalism evolve with the times, visions of Asia-futurism continue to be mirrored, magnified, and distorted in the Western world toward complicated ends, with complicated effects on both contemporary art production and an already troubled construction of Asian American identity.

Amid the contentious identity politics of this year’s Academy Awards, host Chris Rock introduced three children of Asian descent to the stage as accountants and smartphone makers. If stereotypes were writ large (child laborers! Numbers savants!), what went virtually unnoticed was the fact that these children were, on some level, embodied archetypes of Asia-futurity: The only truly visible Asian people at the Dolby Theatre that night, they will reach their prime in coming decades. This, in turn, seemed to reflect a larger fact of Hollywood casting. Putting aside the more prominent discussions around the mass media’s outright erasure of actors of color (exemplified by Scarlett Johansson’s casting as the protagonist of the upcoming Ghost in the Shell remake), the TV narratives that consistently cast Asian actors are still primarily science fiction and fantasy. When real Asian Americans—by which I mean people and not stereotypes—appear in media, we do so in the future, but not the present; in alternate realities, but not this one. As underscored by many critics of techno-Orientalism, Joss Whedon’s early-aughts cult television show Firefly imagined a world in which China and the US had evolved into one empire, with not a single Asian actor in a major role. Whedon’s more recent portrayal of a sci-fi universe—the ongoing (and highly entertaining) Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.—demonstrates some progress: It includes a Chinese American actress and another of mixed-race Chinese heritage as leads. The latter character turns out to be a sort of special egg: a member of the Inhumans, a genetically advanced race whose full powers must be triggered by the Terrigen Mists. She is someone who, much like the Asian children at the Oscars, is awaiting Life, Phase Two.

#### Techno-Orientalism is the height of artifice. What is shown is not the truth, but imaginative fictions in the face of futural anxiety.

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Both technology and Orientalism shared a common investment in realizing a sustainable future. They converged at efforts to turn the problems of difference into nonissues or even perhaps the very rationale for expansion and development. In making cases for or against these futures, utopian/dystopian texts are test balloons for measuring possible destinies for the present.1 Is that envisioned future one of, say, the orderly liberation of the oppressed and benighted or a chaotic hegemony of inequality and exploitation? The place of Asia in that future becomes an index of success or failure. Is the West’s future more Asian or less Asian, and which is preferable?

Both technology and Orientalism have fueled engines of economic growth. A key difference is that technology still tends to be celebrated as innovative and life-saving, and Orientalism is a relic of racist and exploitative imperialism. On the power of technology, Martin Heidegger, for example, in “The Question Concerning Technology,” suggestively writes, “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where aletheia, truth, happens” (13). Technology has also been the site of profound anxieties about the future, particularly the eclipsing of such quaint notions as discernible reality. Writing in 1936 about the emergent medium of cinema, Walter Benjamin, for example, in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” observes, “The equipment-free aspect of reality has become the height of artifice; the sight of immediate reality has become an orchid in the land of technology.” As technology becomes more advanced, it develops a deft capacity to conceal or otherwise normalize its apparatuses, which can ironically be increasingly equipment-laden.

Orientalism can be understood as a once-normalized apparatus for grasping reality. With the rise of decolonization, the ills of Orientalism are now more readily identifiable. What was once a sleek system for civilizing the world is revealed as a clunky ethnocentrism of the so-called West needing an incorporable alterity to be its frontier, materially and ideologically.

### Thesis---Stereotypes

#### Racist stereotypes aesthetically detain Asianness in the uncanny valley, reproducing revulsion and phobia at the yellow body.

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Like their fellow humanoid artifacts, stereotypes can elicit a spectrum of human responses. Just as not all robots are uncanny, not all stereotypes are uncanny. There is nothing inherently uncanny, for example, about stereotypes such as “dog lover,” “Sox fan,” “vegan,” “science fiction enthusiast,” and so on. Problems arise, however, when stereotypes are engineered to fabricate, automate, and mechanically reproduce uncanny feelings in response to certain “types” of people. An uncanny stereotype elicits intellectual uncertainty over whether a “type” of person is genuinely human and alive. The uncanniest stereotypes elicit revulsion and profound phobia in response to the person(s) stereotyped as uncanny. Often the manufacture of such uncanny stereotypes happens in the context of war and colonialism. Just as individual members of ethnic groups have found themselves detained in prisons and internment camps, ethnic stereotypes have often found themselves aesthetically detained in the uncanny valley.

Indeed, the detention of “yellow peril” stereotypes in the uncanny valley during World War II corresponded to the detention by the U.S. government of thousands of Japanese Americans in the wake of Pearl Harbor. This correspondence is substantiated by an infamous December 1941 article in LIFE titled “How to Tell Japs from the Chinese: Angry Citizens Victimize Allies with Emotional Outburst at Enemy.” Occupying less than two pages, this article claims the scholarly authority of “physical anthropologists” and “adduces a rule-of-thumb from the anthropometric conformations that distinguish friendly Chinese from enemy alien Japs” (81). Such authority, however, falls apart under scrutiny. Almost all of the article’s rhetorical impact is generated not by logical argumentation but by the illogical interaction between the verbal text and the accompanying visual images. While the annotated photographs of Ong Wen-hao and Hideki Tojo might seem to convey an aura of scientific fact, in truth the diagrams constitute an exercise in Orientalist physiognomic fantasy. The annotations are riddled with anatomical errors and misinformation. For example, the foremost detail noted in each diagram— “yellow complexion”—is inaccurate, whether such yellowness is specified as “parchment” (upper diagram) or “earthy” (lower diagram). As Michael Keevak demonstrates in Becoming Yellow: A Short History of Racial Thinking (2011), the misattribution of yellow skin to East Asians originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Moreover, the annotation “epicanthic fold” draws the viewer’s attention to the wrong part of the eye. The term actually refers to a fold of skin over the eye’s inner angle. (The prefix “epi-” means “upon” or “over,” while “canthus” refers to any angle formed by the intersection of the upper and lower eyelids.) In the diagram, however, the phrase “epicanthic fold” is shown as pointing to a crease in the upper eyelid. Perhaps most important, contrary to the article’s claims, no individual can be characterized as “representative” of an entire “anthropological group.”

### Thesis---Technological Sublime

#### The resolution invokes the technological sublime, where we become obsessed with violent imagery of modern warfare. This imagery is an aesthetic imagination that props up Western heroic narratives against the savage Orientalized enemy, securing anxieties of White masculinity.

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While Japan’s march toward world power status was generally celebrated in America, it was also filtered through the West’s complex emotional response to race and emergent technologies, and infused with trepidation over an Asian power dominating a white one. Some Americans found this turn of events inspiring. “White supremacy is getting a terrible black eye in and about Manchuria and Mukden,” wrote the Seattle Republican in March 1905, one of many African American newspapers that saw Japanese victory as a subversively powerful triumph for racial equality in an age of Jim Crow and lynching (qtd. in Kearney 35). Even W.E.B. Du Bois became a “Japanophile” approving the “fear of colored revolt against white exploitation” that Japanese victories produced (Kearney 19, 30, 38, 168).

White Americans’ assessment of Japan’s rise was more ambivalent. Concerns about “race decadence” bumped against the technological sublime, a state of awe attached to the creations of modern science. Enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke had posited that confrontations with terror in the form of great natural forces could elevate observers to a “heightened awareness of reason.” With the advent of the Machine Age, some felt that a similar astonishment from encounters with emerging technologies might lead to society’s betterment. In fact, David Nye sees American culture’s celebration of nature-controlling technologies, in awe-inspiring shared experiences like the completion of the transcontinental railroad, as central to the narrative of American greatness from the nineteenth century onward, forming unities across political, religious, regional, and class divides (3, 6–9, 22, 27).

War was another fraught activity that could potentially unify Americans in purpose, and the experience of modern warfare at the turn of the twentieth century supplanted nature as “the exemplary object or trigger of the sublime” (Ray 134). Likening the horrors of war to the “cunning of nature,” Kant acknowledged that “war has something sublime about it” and experiencing its surprises and cruelties might spur humanity toward transcendence. Alleging that both savage and civilized peoples held “superior esteem for the warrior” whose heroism “does not yield to danger but promptly sets to work with vigor and full deliberation,” Kant also allowed that the sublime experience of battle could forge national or racial unities as well as strengthen a nation’s commitment to moral freedom (Neculau 36–38; Licht 23–25)

The harnessing of the war sublime (which complements and exhibits aspects of the technological sublime) for ideological purposes has been an enduring factor in American history. Looking at the recent war in Iraq, François Debrix notes how Orientalism and confrontation with violent imagery continue in America’s “aesthetic imagination” of war as mobilizing factors in the quest for public approval: “This sublime aesthetic of war, relayed by contemporary media and popular cultural forms . . . consists of producing spectacular, violent and shocking images of ‘others’ in distress or harm’s way in places where America’s wars are being fought. . . . [I]t is an ideology that postulates that only Americans (even if they are soldiers) are equipped to provide hope, morality, and humanity to the Middle East” (767). Moreover, Debrix sees the imagination of war-borne terror as essential to America’s heroic narrative: “An ideology of America at war is enabled through a visual experience that consists of forcing the spectator’s imagination not only to go through unbearable and shocking images but also to transcend this initial painful experience by discovering beyond it readily available reasons and larger-than-life truths than can make sense of it all and justify those horrific scenes . . . towards some ideas that supposedly can provide solace, understanding, and ultimately pleasure to the spectator” (771).

This ideology epitomized American conflicts waged a century before the Iraq War’s technological “shock and awe,” and the view that combat with a savage, Orientalized enemy would “help democracy and peace and justice rise in a troubled and violent region” (Bush). Both the Spanish-American War (1898) and the subsequent Philippine-American War (1899–1902) were technologydriven events, fought with Gatling guns, Krag-Jørgensen rifles, steel battleships, and American soldiers, whom Secretary of War Elihu Root appreciated as part of the “great machine which we call military organization” (Simon 47). Beyond proving American ability in battle, and its industrial strength and capacity to make war, proponents felt these wars were essential markers of American modernity. Theodore Roosevelt reasoned their prosecution was “one of the great tasks set modern civilization,” bringing blessings of American democracy to the world’s backward peoples, and benefiting the domestic sphere by inoculating white manhood against the decline of civilization and alleviating residual sectionalism (Roosevelt 11; Bederman 187; Ninkovich 18–19).

With an ideology that combined technology, war, and race under the banner of civilizing imperialism, the United States entered the twentieth century seeking a “new international identity” (Ninkovich 47, 91–92). New liberating technologies, like wireless transmission and air travel, supported this identity and fostered America’s transnational connections. Yet, technology acted as a double-edged sword, increasing encounters with global dangers, and giving rise to a host of new worries about American power. This included the Japanese invasion sublime, a hybrid of the technological and war sublime, and America’s agitated view of Asians in the early twentieth century; this fear exaggerated the threat of Japanese militarism and concluded that a conquest of the United States was its ultimate goal. By envisioning Japanese ascendency primarily through a military domination of the Pacific, the Japanese invasion sublime operated as an early form of techno-Orientalism. Embedded within the sublime was also a drive to find a Western technological solution to the menace of Japanese military supremacy.

The Russo-Japanese War was the genesis event because it introduced a modern vision of the East effectively wielding technology against the West. After the war grew a suspicion that Japan, emboldened by its victory over Russia, would strike the United States with a Port Arthur–like sneak attack. The panic was enough to derail the U.S. Navy’s plans for a “great western base” in the Philippines, with Japan’s hard-won siege of Port Arthur still burning in the minds of American leaders (Challener 182; Edward Miller 79).

Yet, the Japanese invasion sublime was not merely a hopeless resignation to Japanese aggression. Prodded by the outcome of the Russo-Japanese War to confront the unpleasant image of Japanese hegemony, the American military slowly constructed a path around its immobilizing fears: War Plan Orange, America’s first and most detailed official imagination of future war prior to World War II. From its genesis in 1907, Plan Orange’s many authors “never wavered in their innermost minds” that a complete and utter destruction of Japan was the ultimate goal. Though the plan was endlessly revised, its basic structure yielded the strategy with which the United States triumphed in Pacific War of 1941 to 1945. Yet, no matter how triumphantly it imagined a final victory over Japan, the Orange Plan in each version assumed the Americans would suffer some form of catastrophic defeat to Japan at the conflict’s onset (Edward Miller, 347, 363).

The Japanese invasion sublime, fueled by fearful images of Japanese domination powerful enough to undermine American security and triumphalism, shared the yellow peril’s “kaleidoscope of apprehensions” that concurrently bedeviled the Western mind (Richard Thompson ii; Sharp 6). Both projected nightmarish images of Asians and fear that “the West could be overpowered and enveloped . . . by the forces of the East” (Marchetti 2). Unique, however, is the origin of the Japanese invasion sublime in a specific context and event. Unlike yellow peril’s representation of Asian acrimony toward the West as being ancient, occultish, immortal, and divorced from definite grievances, it was the high-tech modernity exhibited by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War that launched the Japanese invasion sublime and gave it potency (Iriye 7).

Rotem Kowner contends that a “historiographic amnesia” erased Western memories of the Russo-Japanese War within a few years of its conclusion, yet the Japanese invasion sublime served as the West’s anamnestic repository for the war—it was mythologized as a prelude to a U.S.-Japanese conflict, and exemplified as a warning of Japanese technological aggression for succeeding generations (Impact 2–3). Almost immediately after Russia’s defeat, a menacing, technologically adept Japan became the focus of yellow peril media, until the end of World War II (Franklin, War Stars 36, 39).

The perception of the Russo-Japanese War as watershed moment was synchronous with the Victorian and Edwardian fixation on race, gender, and national strength. As the United States pondered its vulnerabilities, it developed an incongruous image of Japan: technologically adept, modern, chivalrous, and civilized, yet savage and ultimately an existential threat to the West. This knotty conception largely projected anxieties over decaying white masculinity, through nervous disorders like neurasthenia and declining birth rates, which Roosevelt termed “race suicide” (Bederman 199–200). Such worries underscored “silent invasion” rhetoric about Japanese immigrants; when Los Angeles’s Japanese Chrysanthemum Club began raising donations for Japan’s war effort, the Los Angeles Times accused them (and by implication all Japanese Americans) of being clandestine soldiers disguised as gardeners: “Under this euphonious name, which suggests quaint tea gardens, dancing Geisha girls, and flower bedecked booths and jinrikishas, there creeps the dominant idea of grim visaged War. . . . [U]ntil all the Japanese on the Pacific Coast have been brought within its influence and placed in readiness to respond to any call for aid from their island home” (“War Spirit in Sweet Names” 1). Nourishing these suspicions were reports of Japanese soldiers masquerading as Chinese peasants to elude the Russians in Manchuria (“Plays Waiting Game” 1). Scuttlebutt that secret Japanese armies existed on American soil awaiting instructions from Tokyo gained traction after the war. In 1907 William Randolph Hearst’s San Francisco Examiner claimed “Japanese troops in the guise of coolies” were covertly maneuvering throughout California (qtd. in Daniels 110). This bogey had a surprising longevity, and suspicions of a Japanese American fifth column undergirded the drive for internment more than three decades later.

Existing apprehensions of white male deterioration coalesced around the Russo-Japanese War’s disturbing visuals of modern war and Asian ascendency, giving rise to the Japanese invasion sublime. However, just as Roosevelt and other imperialists believed brutal race wars could strengthen American civilization, the sublime of an exaggerated Japanese menace might also be “a healthy shock, a temporary dislocation of the sensibilities that forced the observer into mental action” (Nye 6). Processed through this perspective, Japan’s combination of technology, civilization, and primitive savagery to defeat a decrepit Russia served as a unifying call to arms and a potential solution to perceived American weakness.

### Thesis---Techno-Orientalism

#### The Asian body is rendered not as human, but as an exploitable technology. The death of Vincent Chin is an embodiment of schizophrenic Western hatred that must dismantle the Oriental factory machine to reclaim its personhood, subjectivity, and masculinity.

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From the earliest era of Asian peoples in the United States, their technical abilities were both lauded and erased. An exemplar is the Chinese men who composed more than half of the labor force that completed the transcontinental railroad’s western portion over the high Sierra Nevada mountains to Promontory, Utah, in 1869. In the campaign to extend the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, the American Federation of Labor argued in their publication, Some Reasons for Chinese Exclusion, Meat vs. Rice, American Manhood against Asiatic Coolieism: Which Shall Survive? (1902), that the Chinese male body differed radically from the American male body. The publication argued that the Chinese laborer could withstand physical deprivations that American and European laborers could not (American Federation of Labor et al. 5, 14, 16, 18). This constructed difference rationalized discriminatory policies against Chinese railroad workers. Meat vs. Rice did not argue the Chinese had particular technical skills that were valuable for constructing the transcontinental railroad. On the contrary, the publication claimed the Chinese body simply did not require the conditions of safety, sustenance, and shelter that bodies of European descendents required. Implicit in their argument is a threat to the superior European laborer’s way of life or culture by a kind of unfeeling superhuman antithetical to the West’s liberal humanist credo.

The U.S. techno-Orientalist imagination is thus rooted in this view of the Asian body as a form of expendable technology—a view that emerged in the discourse of early U.S. industrialization and continued to evolve in the twentieth century. In 1982, a twenty-seven-year-old Chinese American named Vincent Chin was beaten to death by two white men in Detroit. The attackers, Ronald Ebens and Michael Nitz, were autoworkers in a U.S. auto industry that was losing market share to Japanese cars. Though Chin, a drafter, did not work in automobiles, Ebens and Nitz viewed him as representative—indeed, an embodiment—of Japanese auto manufacturing as they beat him with a baseball bat, reminiscent of Americans smashing Japanese-made cars in reaction to increasing auto imports in the early 1980s.9 The callous brutality of Chin’s death evinces something more than racial hatred; Chin not only was perceived as a convenient stand-in for the Japanese automotive industry, but embodied its traits—unfeeling, efficient, and inhuman. In Ebens and Nitz’s eyes, they were Luddites striking down the automatons that had been sent in to replace them. Techno-Orientalist discourse completed the project of dehumanizing Vincent Chin by rendering him as not only a racialized Other, but a factory machine that had to be dismantled by Ebens and Nitz to reclaim their personhood, subjectivity, and masculinity.10 The shock and outrage over Chin’s murder served as a critical rallying cry under which a coalition of ethnic-specific groups joined as Asian Americans.

In the twenty-first century, the perceived economic threat of Japan and its automobiles has given way to China. Despite the fact that China does not have a particularly strong reputation as a high-tech nation, techno-Orientalism’s robust flexibility allows for seamless transplantation to another national site. China’s rapid economic rise is largely credited to its vast manufacturing base, which, coupled with cheap labor and less regulation, has made it an attractive production location for many tech companies, including Apple and Dell. And although the vast majority of Chinese cannot afford the iPads and iPhones they produce, we see in U.S. media a representational shift, using techno-Orientalist conventions, transforming Chinese from mindless workers to sinister agents. For example, in October 2010, a U.S. PAC called Citizens Against Government Waste uploaded a commercial titled “Chinese Professor” on YouTube.

Set in Beijing, China a.d. 2030, the commercial depicts a male professor lecturing in a large hall accompanied by high-tech gadgets. The lecture consists of conservative talking points regarding the decline of the United States. As colorful images of fallen nations scroll behind him, the professor explains, “America tried to spend and tax itself out of a great recession. Enormous socalled ‘stimulus spending,’ massive changes to health care, government takeovers of private industries, and crushing debt.” He concludes, “Of course, we owned most of their debt, so now they work for us.” With echoes of Fu Manchu, the professor smiles directly into the camera, eliciting his students’ mirth. By presenting the Chinese professor, the students, and the lecture as moving seamlessly between the lecture hall technology and the tablet screens that students hold in their laps, this video implies that China now leads the world in technological production and consumption. The encoded secondary message of the commercial sidesteps the reality of China’s still developing technological penetration by projecting a present-day existential fear into a vision of the future, with technology supposedly rooted in U.S.-based innovation. It is an elegant solution that effectively alarms the uninformed viewer by using a panAsian technological conflation to elide reality and implicitly accuse China of stealing U.S. intellectual property. Thus, although the national actors and the details are quite different from the automobile industry of the 1980s, we have a similar techno-Orientalist narrative: U.S. jobs and manufacturing are being stolen by inorganic, technologically infused persons who threaten not only our economic but humanistic integrity.

SF’s techno-Orientalist tendencies have become so common as to merit incisive parody. The animated series Futurama takes place a thousand years in the future, and both skewers and pays homage to SF conventions. In an episode from the sixth season, Futurama depicts the launch of the new “EyePhone,” a jab at Apple’s handset, as a pillory of modern consumerism. The series’ white protagonist, Fry, asks a retail clerk of South Asian descent, “you’re from one of those ethnicities that knows about technology; why is it called an EyePhone?” (Sandoval). Depicted in the show as having an intelligence level on par with Homer Simpson, Fry is not meant to be taken seriously, and often acts as a vessel for twentieth-century ignorance in a progressive future. What is notable in this exchange is how the producers of Futurama have Fry explicitly verbalize a familiar techno-Orientalist trope—Asiatic bodies functioning as gatekeepers, facilitators, and purveyors of technology. In this episode, the South Asian clerk literally acts as the final node on the assembly line that has been largely produced by robotic arms—the clerk reaches through the drapes to pull an EyePhone from a pile and we see mechanical limbs swinging about the factory. He is an assembly line automaton with a human skin, and his affectless, bored intonation belies his true nature as a machine. A less self-aware show might leave it at that, but Fry’s graceless pronouncement underscores the techno-Orientalist trope, taking SF to task while simultaneously paying ironic homage to the genre.

This same technologizing convention that Futurama so sharply satirizes is found in numerous literary works, including David Mitchell’s Cloud Atlas (2004). Mitchell’s six stories link together characters and narratives spanning past, present, and distant future. Consequently, Mitchell’s novel has the unenviable task of repeatedly establishing the framing for each separate story line. An economical method for quickly thrusting the reader into the speculative future is to use a technologized East Asia, as he does in the story “An Orison of Sonmi-451.” The setting of Nea So Copros, the “corpocracy” of what appears to be a unified Korea sometime after the twenty-second century, is where we are introduced to our enslaved narrator, Sonmi-451, a cloned “fabricant” designed to serve in a fast-food restaurant. Mitchell paints Korea as the setting for high technology, enforced consumption, and excessive advertising; and his larger social critique lies in the mirroring of the fabricants who must serve and the “purebloods” who must constantly consume, a master-slave dialectic that relies on cannibalism, erased from view, and technology, projected into high visibility. Sonmi-451 eventually gains self-awareness, knowledge, and power to create a declaration of rights for enslaved fabricants and oppressed classes, but only after she reads the classics of Western civilization (187, 193). Thus, Mitchell’s novel reinforces both the perception of Asia as the definitive site for technophilic and technophobic speculations of an oppressive future and the view that only a Western-coded subject can truly realize liberal humanism in such an environment.

Digital spaces abound with reinscribed racial tropes and stereotypes; these are sites in which racialization is more likely to be reinforced than challenged (Nakamura, Cybertypes 227). However, we argue that techno-Orientalist conventions in new media are complicated by the fact that the medium is closely associated with Asia on several levels—as a manufacturing base, as a source of technological innovation, and as a conduit for cultural exports. In new media, the Asian subject is perceived to be, simultaneously, producer (as cheapened labor), designer (as innovators), and fluent consumer (as subjects that are “one” with the apparatus). This has the effect of schizophrenic significations of the techno-Orientalized subject in the realm of new media—games in particular. In 2011, for instance, Blizzard Entertainment announced an expansion pack, called “The Mists of Pandaria,” for their immensely popular MMORPG (massively multiplayer online role playing game) World of Warcraft. MMORPGs generally have strong roots in the fantasy and SF genres, which grant room for characters and creatures with attributes that often reflect racial stereotypes.11 The Asian-themed world of Pandaria—described as “mysterious” and “ancient”—and its high-flying, kung-fu-fighting Pandaren—warriors in a nonthreatening form—continue in the tradition of portraying Asian culture and subjects as exotic realms to be explored and manipulated. Within the same game is a curious mirroring of globalization, in which first-world gamers looking to accrue in-game capital (gold) more quickly hire gamers—many of whom are young Chinese men—to “farm” gold, thereby miming offline conditions in which first-world consumers gain economically by cheapened high-tech labor. At the same time, an acceptance of the Asian subject’s reputed digital literacy brings about a sense of wonder and even admiration of their gaming skills—the global rankings of gamers are often dominated by Korean players, for instance. We question, however, whether that is not another symptom of the stereotyping of Orientalized cyborg bodies predicated on a presumed seamlessness with technology.

#### Techno-Orientalism is pathologizing, rendering Asian bodies as merely mortal engines of modernity and growth, less-than-human yet in need of constant surveillance.

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[Modified] for ~~gendered language~~

Techno-Orientalism, then, is not so much a narrow discourse marking the posthuman cybernetic body as distinctly Asian, nor is it about the latest bleeding-edge widget being assembled by dexterous, scarred fingers in Guangdong, China—these are instead signifiers of a larger project. Rather, we trace the “techno” in techno-Orientalism to techne, a process instead of literal tool, for “revealing” a technology’s true presence (wesen) and “enframing” of the world according to humankind’s vision (Heidegger 3–35). It is, in a sense, a doubling of Orientalism, a means of constructing and reifying an Occidentalist worldview in a more sophisticated way. Techno-Orientalism accounts for—and then dismisses—Eastern modernity as both process and product of dehumanization, of which the West is an economic and ontological beneficiary; but should that modernity ever transition to hypermodernity (and threat), its dehumanizing means and ends reaffirm the West’s monopoly over liberal humanism. The speculative narratives of textual and visual media are the vehicles through which this disciplinary process travels.

As the American empire wanes—or is reconfigured—in the West and China rises in the East, the logic of techno-Orientalism continues to exert its influence over emerging cultural productions. Recent examples abound: The 2012 remake of the Philip K. Dick–inspired film Total Recall (1990) redesigns the cityscape to resemble the Hong Kong skyline; Gary Shteyngart’s satirical Super Sad True Love Story (2010) envisions a future New York City placed at the precipice of the U.S. economy’s implosion and subsequent takeover by the Chinese; Junot Diaz’s postapocalyptic novel in progress, Monstro, projects the Chinese renminbi replacing the U.S. dollar as the dominant international currency—a phenomenon predicted by many economic prognosticators in recent years (Cox). The film Looper’s (2012) speculative sequence was set in Shanghai to signal its futurity; Daniel Wilson’s novel Robopocalypse (2011) contains an obligatory subplot involving a Japanese roboticist whose love for his android wife leads to the discovery of a critical component for humanity’s survival. These works continue on a well-trodden path—the technoOrientalized element is, at times, an alien environment, existential threat, economic competitor, or technological bridge and always, invariably, a vehicle through which the Western-encoded subject undertakes [their]~~his or her~~ journey. Likewise, this volume has identified and critiqued numerous examples of uncritical framing: Jason Crum’s scrutinizing of how early radio broadcasts programs underscored Asian premodernity (Chapter 2); Victor Bascara’s investigation into the erasure of Asian bodies integral in a nineteenth-century work about the twenty-first century (Chapter 3); Warren Liu’s racialization of temporality (Chapter 4); Abigail De Kosnik’s tracing of the sublimation of race in three techno-Orientalist films (Chapter 6); Jinny Huh’s analysis of the mixed-race imaginarium of Battlestar Galactica (Chapter 7); and Dylan Yeats’s exegesis of the historical rhetoric and politics of Orientalized enemy “bots” in video games (Chapter 9). The West desires Eastern machinery but resists recognizing the human toll or a humanistic center.

Still, there are wrinkles and complications, particularly when technoOrientalism is appropriated by spaces of counterdiscourse. For instance, Korean American filmmaker and comic book author Greg Pak exploits techno-Orientalist logic in Robot Stories (2003), an exploration of posthumanism, race, and relationships in the guise of a genre film. Pak’s series of vignettes superficially mime techno-Orientalist tropes—in this case, the dehumanized, machine-like Asian laborer represented at different points by a ruthless businesswoman, a software coder with Asperger syndrome, an android, a disembodied consciousness—and the film proceeds to deconstruct them by reinscribing the humanity behind each iteration. Robogeisha (2009), a Japanese film belonging to a subgenre equal parts grotesque and camp, takes the Western gaze to its logical conclusion. Completely self-aware and parodic in tone, the film’s loose plot centers on two orphaned sisters who grow up to become cyborg geisha assassins, one of whom ends up in the thrall of an evil conglomerate. The film’s strongly nationalist and absurdist denouement, in which a corporation plans the destruction of Mt. Fuji to unite Japan against its enemies, shows how techno-Orientalist aesthetics can be used for other ends.1 It is on this front that additional contributors to this volume also scrutinize deformations of techno-Orientalist discourse: Julie Ha Tran’s examination of William Gibson’s fictional geographies reveals an unexpected critical bidirectionality (Chapter 10); Kathryn Allan’s discussion of Maul and Salt Fish Girl shows how a new subgenre may recuperate the cybernetic Asian female figure (Chapter 11); Douglas Ishii’s exposition of Joss Whedon’s population of Asian artifacts and depopulation of Asian peoples in his universe creates room for his own critical intervention (Chapter 13); Tzarina Prater and Catherine Fung (Chapter 14) reveal how Larissa Lai’s Automaton Biographies grants Blade Runner’s Rachael a voice to “talk back” to Ridley Scott’s Asian-infused vision of dystopic Los Angeles; and media artist Nam June Paik’s work, expertly analyzed by Charles Park, operates a similar aesthetic through which the mechanisms of human creativity and activity are fetishized and critiqued (Chapter 15).

National and cultural authorship of the discourse notwithstanding, our historically conscious exegesis indicates that, thus far, techno-Orientalism is strongly tied to geopolitics, economics, and race, and we see no reason to suspect that will change. If compelled to speculate, we would first note the material consequences of a rising consumer class in China—partly a consequence of neoliberal trade agreements creating favorable manufacturing conditions— and how quickly the landscape changes in response. In some ways, very little work is required to translate Orientalist tropes: the invading horde of barbarians is replaced by a horde of robotic factory workers, kept at a distance by multinational corporations and shipping routes. They are uncreative, less than human (although complicated by reports of poor working conditions driving some to suicide), and always already mechanized—a narrative that persists even in the realm of leisure, as Steve Choe and Se Young Kim describe in their analysis of the disparity of rhetoric surrounding Eastern as opposed to Western gamers (Chapter 8). Still, on closer examination complications emerge, for while Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan were economic “miracles” of a hypercapitalist frenzy, the strong role of the communist state cannot be ignored in China’s rise. And lest we are accused of ignoring the rest of Asia, we note how the outsourcing of high-tech labor to South Asian nations via information networks may also complicate a techno-Orientalist logic that is nothing if not supple and elastic. One emerging commonality we detect—and we are curious to see how this will be integrated into cultural discourse that must discipline—is the role of pollution in developing nations as manufacturing booms. Already, news reports teem with stories of poor air quality over the largest metropolitan cities in China, Beijing in particular. It may be that the techno-Orientalized subject may take on an ecocritical slant, as we begin to move away from cyberspace-oriented discourse characterizing the future as ephemeral and diaphanous; instead, it may be polluted, riddled with the detritus of ex-gen technology, haunted by the specter of Asian manufacturing (indeed, already a hallmark of post-cyberpunk tropes). The message conveyed by the rhetoric of “pollution” is that even as Asia has finally reached modernity, it does so irresponsibly, without regard for the supposed lessons learned by the West during its periods of rapid industrialization over the course of the twentieth century. The final irony, then, is while the human toll in Asia can be effaced from Western consciousness, environmental pollutants traveling over wind and water currents more efficient than any shipping route will persist, leading to inescapable, catastrophic effects on a global scale. Asia’s major economies— Japan, China, South Korea, and India—are, in the eyes of the West, behaving like recalcitrant children, refusing to abide by its tutelage, insisting on growing up too quickly, and thus warranting its constant surveillance.

If Seo-Young Chu is correct in characterizing stereotypes as “a technology meant to facilitate mental shortcuts” (Chapter 5), then techno-Orientalism has become a technology that facilitates the containment of a perceived mass threat. “We all create images of things we fear or glorify,” writes Sander Gilman in his extended psychoanalytic study of stereotypes. But while some of us retain the capacity to recognize the distinction between the individual and the stereotyped class, Gilman explains, “[t]he pathological personality does not develop this ability, and sees the entire world in terms of the rigid lines of difference. The pathological personality’s mental representation of the world supports the need for the line of difference, whereas for the nonpathological individual the stereotype is a momentary coping mechanism, one that can be used and then discarded once anxiety is overcome. The former is consistently aggressive toward the real people and objects to which the stereotypical representations correspond; the latter is able to repress the aggression and deal with people as individuals” (18). The prospect that such “aggressions” will abate remains nil, however, partly because the “individual” is by now a quaint notion of a bygone American cultural mythology, and partly due to the West’s perception of Asia as historically and persistently collectivist. Drawing on Gilman’s formulation, then, techno-Orientalism is a form of pathology, necessitated by the “Rising East” rhetoric and rationalized by the neoliberal logic of (Asian) humans as mortal engines of modernity and economic growth. Thus, techno-Orientalist studies must be vigilantly developed and deployed as a critical countertechnology for negotiating the complex, taut lines of a discourse ensconced in racial and international politics.

### Thesis---Uncanny Valley

#### The Asian body becomes locked in the uncanny valley, marked as simultaneously human and racially subhuman. Yellow life in the US is not natural, but an invasive parody of White liveliness.

Shi 21, University of Pennsylvania, (Vicki, “WHERE IS THE ASIAN BODY? THE PROBLEM OF ERASURE IN WESTERN VISUAL CULTURE”, Thesis in Visual Studies, <https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/web.sas.upenn.edu/dist/6/736/files/2021/05/Shi_Vicky_Thesis.pdf>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

In 1970, Japanese scientist Masahiro Mori published an article on what he coined the “uncanny valley,” or his theory of human reactions to objects that are humanistic. On the graph, the y-axis represents human affinity while the y-axis represents the degree of realistic portrayal. Mori explains that as things go further along the x-axis, people start feeling a negative affinity to those objects. For example, a toy robot will vaguely represent a human, but is not frightening because they are not made to look realistic. The toy robot retains features that make it undeniably inhuman. However, something like a prosthetic hand or a corpse may bring about a feeling of unease to a healthy human being, since they resemble something human but are not, or no longer, human. This reaction is represented by the deep plunge at the bottom of the graph, where the curve goes south in measurements of human affinity.7 Mori’s uncanny valley is often used in android design in an autonomous future to describe the unease that occurs when looking at objects that mimic humanity. The response is perhaps even instinctual as androids are a clear example of what could replace humans altogether. It is only natural for people to ostracize that which can destroy them; therefore, the crux of the uncanny valley lies in the innate fear of human mortality.8 In this vein of thought, the uncanny valley can also be applied through a racial context in Western societies, especially in Europe and the United States. Revealed on a microscopic level, “research on immigrant students of color reveals that students undergo a process of racialization as they are incorporated into the existing racial hierarchy of the United States—one that places White people at the top and defines them as the only true Americans.”9 Furthermore, “participants in both of our studies internalized these notions of Americanness, evidenced strongly in their reserving the term ‘American’ to refer to White people, while using ethnically or racially specific language to identify themselves or other people of color.”10 When enlarged to a national scale and enforced by systematic ostracization, compared to the white majority or “true Americans,” the racial Other seems to invade the United States or exists in it unnaturally in the eyes of both parties. Since these “Others” do not resemble the white majority, their existence becomes a parody of white livelihood and their humanity comes into question.

This racial division in the U.S. is further perpetrated by the stereotypes and biases the white majority forces on these Others. By creating these exaggerations, the white majority can control how the racial Other is portrayed. These caricatures are the start of the systematic dehumanization, with different archetypes assigned to different racial group. With East Asians, alienation peaked with the spread of the Yellow Peril ideology. Throughout the late 19th and the early 20th century, mass immigration brought an increase of Asian population in the United States as a direct result of Western military and imperialistic influences on Asia. However, this influx brought fear that these so-called “foreigners” would disrupt or potentially overtake the white majority. As a response, British author Sax Rohmer created Fu Manchu, a crafty Chinese mastermind plotting to overthrow the white, Eurocentric world, at the height of the Yellow Peril. While Fu Manchu himself represented the white man’s fear of the Chinese invasion, his army of minions that carried out his orders had traits that paralleled with what people believed of the Chinese laborers at that time. They were seen as “‘instruments’—that is, as ‘exploitable, containable, and inhuman,’ and as ‘the perfect ‘laboring machine[s]’—a swarm of mindless coolies who could be easily ‘programmed.’”11 The Chinese were seen as unintelligent and robotic; they were “beings that appear human and behave in human-like ways, but that are really subhuman on the ‘inside.’”12 Yet the white man still feels anxiety in regards to the Chinese because they are a “contradiction between [the] thing's appearance and the essence that one has attributed to it.”13 To the white man, the Chinaman is “felt to be both human and subhuman— and therefore as an uncanny entity”14 because he is simultaneously both Fu Manchu and his faceless, mechanical minions.

Needless to say, Fu Manchu did not only represent the Chinese, but the looming threat of the East and Asian bodies to white society. Unsurprisingly, the character of Fu Manchu has always been represented onscreen by a white man in costume; even his description in Rhomer’s books contained Anglo-Saxon features such as “[a] brow like Shakespeare” and “shimmering green irises.”15 As the embodiment of the Yellow Peril, Rhomer created the Chinese mastermind with intelligence and agency; to the white majority, these traits cannot be separated from whiteness as evident in the appearance of Fu Manchu as they are understood as human traits. Therefore, by imposing Asian features on a white man while trying to maintain that the danger he embodies in fact resides in the East, Rhomer created a truly uncanny and inhuman monster as it forces his audience to think about racial implications.16 If Fu Manchu is an intelligent mastermind, then he must be white. But his role of representing the Yellow Peril categorizes him as a racial Other. The racial contradiction of Fu Manchu reflects the unease of white audience as they are confronted with the possibility of humanity residing in the racial Other. One of the solutions to ameliorate this anxiety is not only by marking the Asian body as uncanny but destroying the Asian body altogether.

### Thesis---Western Imperialism

#### Antagonized by the project of Western imperialism, Asian subjectivity is in a constant state of flux, pushed to the periphery of Empire in nonlinear spatiotemporalities under modernity’s anxious securitization.

Kouch and Wang 18, \*June Kuoch is a queer and trans Southeast Asian American. They are a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Sociology with a focus in policy analysis and minoring in Asian American Studies, Gender Women and Sexuality Studies, and Comparative Race and Ethnicity in the United States. Kuoch is a local community organizer focusing on abolition through a queer and trans of color lens. Their work has been inspired the activist Yuri Kochiyama. Their current research focuses on haunting brought by United States empire building as it intersects with critical refugee studies, Asian American studies, critical archival studies, and queer of color critic. \*\*Allegro Wang is a queer, trans Chinese-American and an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. They are currently a sophomore in the U of MN’s College of Science and Engineering and double-majoring in Computer Sciences and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies. Allegro’s primary area of interest in research is in how technology emerges as a site of both subjugation and resistance in its intersection with whiteness, queerness, and transness., (June and Allegro, “Cyber Fantasies: Rina Sawayama, Asian Feminism, and TechnoOrientalism in the Age of Neoliberalism” in Sprinkle: An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies, Vol. 11, <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=sprinkle>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

The ways in which techno-Orientalism manifests in Asia are predicated on Cold War logics, a kind of Western militarized violence. Jodi Kim (2010) finds in Ends of Empire that the Cold War brought spatial and temporal distinctions for racialized Asian bodies via proxy wars. The United States’ relationship with Asian nations is overdetermined by the events of that era: “The Cold War, as a geopolitical, cultural, and epistemological project of gendered racial formation and imperialism undergirding U.S. global hegemony” (Kim, 2010, p. 4). The United States’ investment in nations like South Korea, Japan, and Vietnam is predicated on Western interests in the geopolitical sphere. The United States rebuilt Japan after World War II as a means of gaining capital and hegemonic power, which is a neo-imperialist and gendered project that undergirds U.S.-Japan relations. Okinawa is a focal point for empires to collide—Japan’s settlement and the US military occupation—both of which have brought genderbased violence to indigenous Okinawans (Yoneyama, 2015). The racialized, gendered dynamic produces a taxonomy of Asian subjectivity in that Asians are tools for the West. Within hegemonic systems, Asian women are pushed to the periphery of Empire. Their subservience and domination are used to further neo-colonial, white, hegemonic, masculine interests, which is evident in the advent of comfort women and the military sex industry (Yoneyama, 2015). Western nations, specifically white men, are invested in Asia because they perceive themselves as “saving” Asian women from an Orientalized depiction of violent Asian men, which propagates a racialized and heteronormative notion of Asia (Park, 2012). The political and economic rise of Asian principalities such as China, Japan, and India transform Oriental epistemologies via a disruption of white hegemonic power. In the attempt of Asian nations to secure capital, security anxieties manifest from white fears of emasculation or the loss of power. In a discursive response to maintain international white supremacy, a new form of othering occurs (Park, 2012; Agathangelou, 2016).

Thus, Cold War logics spectrally transform, haunt, and underlie techno-Orientalism. Asian subjectivity is always within a state of flux or being and exists in nonlinear spatiotemporalities as a result of Western modernities:

the Cold War between capitalism and communism is actually a “civil war” within the selfsame Western modernity. As Odd Arne Westad argues, both the United States and the Soviet Union saw themselves as the successors of Western modernity and, the Cold War was waged over which one would be the sole rightful successor, and would thus be able to articulate its own conception of Western modernity and attempt to universalize it. (Kim, 2010, p. 24)

The spectral violence that manifests in Cold War logics, techno-Orientalism, and racial capitalism finds its origin in modernity itself. Thus, the Cold War is a lynchpin for the neoliberal era. The revitalization of specific Asian nations becomes a means of securing new means of neoliberal production. Asian countries, specifically in Southeast Asia, are locked in Cold War temporalities due to their history of colonization and neo-colonial geopolitical relationship with the West.5 Yet within new technologized nations, racial capitalism produces industries such as sweatshops and call centers, equating Asian subjectivity with technology (Roh et al., 2015).

### Advocacy---Art

#### In 1956, Atsuko Tanaka donned a kimono-style garment made entirely out of colored incandescent light bulbs of different sizes and electrical cords tangled together. When displayed in galleries and exhibitions, the dress hung on its own, decorative and immobile like a sort of postmodern Christmas tree. When worn in performances, Electric Dress came to life and covered Tanaka’s body from head to toe, leaving only her face and hands exposed. The effect was the fusing of technology and flesh, transforming her into a glowing symbol of post-war Japan.

#### …By breaking away from the past, Tanaka chose to re-envision Japan as the center of modernization, rapidly changing and growing as if undisturbed by war and the horrors of recent history. Electric Dress signifies a rebirth of industry and consumerism in a country that had previously suffered. During Tanaka’s performances, the complex network of pulsating lights flickered on and off; tangled wires mimicked the body’s own circuitry of nerves and veins; and her hybrid body, composed of luminous techno-skin, became emblematic of the lights of a modern Asian city.

#### In Electric Dress, Tanaka looks straight ahead towards an imagined Asian future.

A picture containing text

Description automatically generated

Tanaka appears in her electric dress. Photo courtesy of Nakanoshima Museum of Art, Osaka.

Hsu 20, Allison Hsu is a performance curator, writer, and arts administrator from Connecticut, currently based in Brooklyn, NY. Her research interests include bridging Asian American studies and feminist and queer theory. She is currently an assistant to performing artist Eiko Otake, and she works with a number of arts organizations in New York, including the Museum of Chinese in America, Movement Research, and the Asian American International Film Festival. Allison received her MA in Performance Studies from NYU and BA from Wesleyan University in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. (Allison, “Imagining Asian Futurity: History, Multiplicity, and Racial Solidarity”, Color Bloq, <https://www.colorbloq.org/article/imagining-asian-futurity-history-multiplicity-and-racial-solidarity>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

#### Detained in the uncanny valley, we engage in artwork to reimagine our character and refuse the techno-Orientalist lens.

\*this card doesn’t have to be read with the electric dress

Roh et al. 15, David Roh is Professor of English at the University of Utah. He holds a BA in English from the University of California, Los Angeles, an Ed.M in Educational Technology from Harvard University, and an MA and Ph.D in English from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is author of Minor Transpacific: Triangulating American, Japanese, and Korean Fictions (Stanford University Press, 2021), Illegal Literature (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), and coeditor of Techno-Orientalism (Rutgers University Press, 2015). His work has appeared in Law & Literature, MELUS, Journal of Narrative Theory, and Verge., (“Chapter 5: I, Stereotype”, *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*, Rutgers University Press) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

If a stereotype is a technology meant to facilitate mental shortcuts, then I have been misusing this technology. More specifically, I have been dwelling on stereotypes of yellow peril—thinking about them at length, spending time with them, treating them as though they were more than two-dimensional, and (unintentionally?) turning them inside out. In doing so, I have come to wonder whether the phenomenon of the stereotype will eventually grow obsolete. A stereotype is a human-shaped technology. Technologies are constantly changing, and they are constantly changing the way humans are shaped—as well as the ways in which human shapes are perceived. (Consider technologies such as Photoshop, cosmetic surgery, and CGI.) What would happen to stereotypes in a world where Zao’s face is universally perceived not as uncanny but as aesthetically ideal? Moreover, what would happen to stereotypes in a world where anthropomorphic shapes are obsolete? Would a posthuman world be a post-stereotype world? Or would stereotypes look posthuman?

Insofar as the phenomenon of stereotyping does exist, there need to be ethical principles guiding the conscientious employment and construction of stereotypes. In his science fiction, Isaac Asimov famously devised three Laws of Robotics that govern the behavior of his robot and human characters:

1 A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

2 A robot must obey the orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

3 A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws. (485)

As a species of humanoid artifact not unlike Asimov’s robots, stereotypes can be understood in terms of the three Laws of Robotics. Let me conclude this essay by delineating a corollary to Asimov’s laws, namely, three Laws of Stereotypes:

1 A stereotype must not (be constructed or employed to) injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. For instance, the technology of stereotyping may be employed, mindfully and helpfully, to describe a single facet of an individual person, but a stereotype must never be employed to reduce any individual person to a grotesque racial caricature.

2 A stereotype must (be constructed or employed to) comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

3 Humans who find themselves harmed by uncanny stereotypes have an obligation to protect themselves from such harm (as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws).

This last obligation can be fulfilled in a number of ways, including through education (e.g., in the classroom), through the creation of artwork in which uncanny stereotypes are reworked and reimagined as richly realized human characters, and through the act of refusing to perceive oneself through the lens of a destructive stereotype. To frame the matter in more concrete and practical terms: as long as Asian Americans find themselves—find ourselves—detained in the uncanny valley by harmful stereotypes, Asian American educators have an obligation to teach Asian American literature, history, and culture in ways that are complexly humanizing. Asian American artists have an obligation to create works of art in which uncanny stereotypes are reworked and reimagined as richly realized human characters. (This process of reimagining is already taking place through fictional characters as diverse as the narrator of Chang-rae Lee’s 1995 novel Native Speaker, the Guide in Cathy Park Hong’s 2006 science-fictional poem “Dance Dance Revolution,” and the heroes who populate the lively pages of the 2009 volume Secret Identities: The Asian American Superhero Anthology.) Finally, and most important, Asian Americans have an obligation to refuse to perceive ourselves through the lens of destructive stereotypes.

### Advocacy---Asian Futurity

#### We should decenter Whiteness in the debate space and recenter narratives of the Asian American experience. Orienting to the margins allows us to question our position the present, lost in time and space, everywhere and nowhere simultaneously.

Hsu 20, Allison Hsu is a performance curator, writer, and arts administrator from Connecticut, currently based in Brooklyn, NY. Her research interests include bridging Asian American studies and feminist and queer theory. She is currently an assistant to performing artist Eiko Otake, and she works with a number of arts organizations in New York, including the Museum of Chinese in America, Movement Research, and the Asian American International Film Festival. Allison received her MA in Performance Studies from NYU and BA from Wesleyan University in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. (Allison, “Imagining Asian Futurity: History, Multiplicity, and Racial Solidarity”, Color Bloq, <https://www.colorbloq.org/article/imagining-asian-futurity-history-multiplicity-and-racial-solidarity>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

I look to this image to theorize how this performance of Asian futurity breaks away from the techno-Orientalist stereotypes present in contemporary art and performance, as well as in science fiction literature and film. Techno-Orientalism imagines Asia as a futuristic dystopia. It dehumanizes Asian people by presenting them as robot-like technological objects in order to ease Western anxieties about being surpassed by the rise of Asia. This paranoid imagination places a Western protagonist, often as the figure of the space cowboy, at the center of the narrative and relegates Asian subjects to the background. As machines, they are suspended between life and death, marked as both super-human and sub-human, unable to materialize as fully-formed. The Western protagonist must exhibit his superiority over technology (and over race) through exploitation and control. These techno-Orientalist stereotypes make their way into popular narratives, from Blade Runner to Cloud Atlas. More recently, these tropes appear in the third season of Westworld, where scenes set in a futuristic version of Los Angeles were filmed in different locations across Singapore. This suggests that the future will be Asian, but the heroes will never be.

Asian futurism, on the other hand, recasts these technology-driven visions of the future to create speculative worlds in which Asian thinkers and artists are not exoticized as Oriental others. Instead they are at the center of narratives rather than dotting the margins. Asian futurism asks not how future imaginings of Asia and Asian identity are built from the West looking East, but instead, how they emerge from the East looking forward.

In this preoccupation with imagining a hypothetical future, we have to re-orient ourselves to see how we are situated in the present and ask the question “Where do we go from here?” While contemporary artists attempt to rework tropes of techno-Orientalism and reposition Asia in the future, we question our own position in the present and begin to feel even more disconnected from the past. There is a gap between this abstract futuristic conception of Asia, the actual experiences of Asians today, and those of our predecessors.

Where, and When, Do We Go From Here?

I return again to the image of Tanaka in Electric Dress to develop my own theory on Asian futurity as that which is inseparable from history. The presence of Tanaka’s human body in her 1956 performance of Electric Dress evoked a feeling of horror rooted in historical memory that resonates with both the audience and the performer in a way that the lone object cannot. Audience members worried about the amount of heat that emanated from the incandescent bulbs and feared that the dress would electrocute her. In a postwar context, the excessive light covering her body becomes reminiscent of the light of the atomic bombs and their devastating technological power. Tanaka even confessed to having a fleeting thought of death by electrocution when she flipped the switch on the console and turned the power on: “Is this how a death-row inmate would feel?” The fear and anxiety that came along with this sense of hope, of looking forward, suggest how intertwined the past, the present, and the future are. While we speak about Asia in the future tense, the past still tightly grips our social reality in the present.

We live in a moment where minimalism, or rather a kind of affective minimalism, is a virtue, deeply informing our lives and the ways that we build our archives looking forward; we are told by tidying expert Marie Kondo to only keep items that we have sentimental relationships with and discard items that no longer “spark joy.” In looking to the past, we might find more moments of sadness and confusion than of joy — memories that we would rather suppress and forget but that deeply inform our present moment nonetheless. The Chinese sociologist Fei Xiaotong noted the following upon visiting the United States in 1944: “American children hear no stories about ghosts. They spend a dime at the drugstore to buy a Superman comic book…Superman represents actual capabilities or future potential, while ghosts symbolize belief in and reverence for the accumulated past." Despite being born and raised in the United States, I never cared much for superheroes, but I very much believe in ghosts. As I continuously ask myself “What now?” and “What next?” I find myself being drawn into the past and realizing that the “actual capabilities or future potential” that Fei saw in Superman might be found instead within and through ghosts, through history.

Performances of Asian futurism are still primarily responding to place, imagining alternate realities through constructing or subverting images of landscapes like the hyper-technological Asian metropolis that Tanaka embodies in Electric Dress. When futurity is linked to place and not the lives of the people who inhabit those places, I fail to envision myself in it. Dawn Chan writes, “…the Asian American experience continues to grapple with the unease that comes with sitelessness and the ongoing threat of encountering the phrase go home.” The Asian American experience, in this sense, is lost in time as well as in space.

I have never lived or spent much time in Asia, and my status as an American citizen is one that is constantly being contested. I have never been able to locate myself anywhere within Asia nor within the United States, so I identify with the term Asian American because it encompasses everywhere and nowhere simultaneously. While my identification with the term in the present is one of ambivalence, I look through the lens of history and recognize how the term emerged not from one particular place but from a collective movement — the Black Power Movement. It is therefore necessary to parse through our vastly different experiences as racial minorities in order to recognize rather than to equate oppressions in Asian racialization’s relationship to white supremacy and anti-blackness.

Attention to intersectionality in approaching multiply-marginalized identities is not divisive but conducive to kinship. This multiplicity is irreducible and cannot be situated within one specific place or one particular time. The divisions between then/now, and here/there, highlighted by Asian futurism become blurred by movement.

An alternative approach to performing Asian futurity, I believe, relies on an acknowledgement of history and of multiplicity to build interracial solidarity with attention to the specificity of racialization. Asian futurism, after all, draws inspiration from Afrofuturism, yet there has been very little discourse amongst and between the two futuristic imaginings. David Xu Borgonjon suggests that if there’s a place for art that reflects the concrete experiences of Asians today, “it must be collective in process, focused on action, and oriented to the margins.” This art asks not only how we can develop a theoretical futurism but emphasizes how we can utilize that theory to act in envisioning a real future for real people. An orientation towards the margins allows us to decenter whiteness and consider multiply-marginalized identities in relation to each other rather than to whiteness alone.

In order to look to a future where we can really see ourselves, we need to look backwards. A theory of Asian futurity can only work towards more generative ends through an acknowledgment of history and of multiplicity, looking not at where we are situated but how we move together.

#### insert other reading card I found

Posadas 21 (Baryon Tensor Posadas is an associate professor in the Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Minnesota. He is the author of Double Visions, Double Fictions: The Doppelganger in Japanese Film and Fiction (2018) and the translator of Aramaki Yoshio’s The Sacred Era: A Novel (2017). University of Minnesota Press, Volume 14, Number 1, Fall 2021, pp. 185-200, “Hidden Histories, Traveling Time: Science Fiction Translation as Cognitive Estrangement,” <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/805954>; accessed 7/23/2022) ng \*SF = science fiction

At this juncture then, wherein the question that demands addressing becomes what, exactly, might be at stake in thinking of translation as a technique of cognitive estrangement? To speak this point, let me turn to another text, Kawamata Chiaki’s Death Sentences, which also offers a meta-science-fictional exploration that parallels Aramaki’s project in many respects, albeit with more explicit historical commentary that facilitates a more cogent discussion of the politics of New Wave SF in Japan, and the stakes of its subsequent translation. Like Aramaki, Kawamata made his literary debut in the 1970s and also quickly became involved in SF criticism. While Kawamata is perhaps more well known for his space opera and military SF writings in more recent years, his novel Death Sentences is an exception, veering closer to a kind of post-New-Wave meta-SF work. The story of Death Sentences revolves around the discovery of a set of surrealist poems by an enigmatic French-Chinese man named only “Who May” (Hu Mei), whose writings seemingly have the deadly power to transport their readers across space, time, and human consciousness. The text of the novel is divided into three major sections. One part of the novel tells the story of the origin of the poems in an encounter between Who May and French surrealist author Andre Breton in New York during the 1930s, subsequent to which Breton and several other figures in the surrealist movement die (often by suicide) one after another. Another section covers the period when Who May’s lost manuscripts resurface in 1980s Japan following their discovery and publication amid a series of mysterious deaths among the translators and publishing staff. The final section details the aftermath of the mass circulation of Who May’s poems, which have developed a cult following in Japan (and subsequently, the rest of the world), leading to the formation of a Secret Police unit that hunts down and executes those identified as afflicted with the addictive powers of these poems. In the end, the alternate history created by the discovery of Who May’s writings culminates in a vision of a dystopian future wherein resource depletion has led to the settlement of Mars. There, a Martian Guard serves as a private death squad that enforces productivity and ensures corporate profits, even when it involves the extermination of whole communities of colonists who have come into contact with the poems in question. Like Aramaki’s The Sacred Era, Kawamata’s Death Sentences is, strictly speaking, less an SF text per se than it is a novel that is metafictionally about the SF genre, despite the fact that Kawamata’s novel received the 1984 Japanese SF Grand Prize (Nihon SF Taishō). For one thing, with the exception of the final section featuring the Martian Guard acting within a dystopic future scenario, much of its narrative is resolutely low-tech with little attention to issues of technological change that are typical in the genre. For another, its primary plot conceits—specifically, the addictive and almost narcotic quality of the magic poems of Who May, or the travels across space and time that these same poems make possible at the end of the novel—are given barely any attempt (even at the level of techno- babble) at a rational or scientific explanation. That said, regardless of whether or not one includes the text within the category of SF, what is perhaps more interesting about Death Sentences is how its narrative effectively presents a theory and critical account of science fiction as a genre and broader cultural formation. In other words, if Death Sentences is indeed an SF text, it is because the novel is precisely about SF itself. This manifests most visibly in scenes that comment on the history and intellectual genealogy of the SF genre. For example, at one point in the novel, Andre Breton and David Hare— both major figures within the Surrealist movement— discuss a poem of Who May’s titled “Another World.” In their conversation, Hare suggests to Breton that perhaps it would be more apt for the poem to appear in an SF magazine instead of their surrealist publication. “I would wait another fifteen years and bring it out in a science fiction magazine.” “What! Fifteen years?” To his dismay, Breton hadn’t the slightest idea what Hare was trying to say. “Science fiction?” “Today, it isn’t feasible. Readers haven’t matured enough yet. There are some, but this is too avant-garde. This fantasy world called ‘another world’ is quite attractive. It is truly beautiful. It is full of an otherworldly sense of wonder. Unfortunately, however, it doesn’t have a principal hero or heroine. Moreover, the vocabulary is too specialized. The absence of a hero is a fatal flaw in this genre. At least the editors who currently work in this genre in America think so . . . but in another fifteen years or so . . .”20 At first glance, Hare’s declaration seems to imply a stark demarcation between SF and surrealism. Indeed, he explicitly states that he “doesn’t see any connection between this ‘Another World’ and surrealism.”21 Whereas surrealism operates on the principle of “imagination aims to become reality,” Who May’s poems (and, by implication, SF) are an attempt to “leave reality behind, or to otherwise obliterate it completely.”22 However, Hare’s declaration is subsequently undercut by Breton’s unspoken parenthetical comment of “Dogma!,” which hints at not only his disagreement with Hare’s diagnosis, but also Hare’s own seeming hesitation and anxiety with his pronouncements.23 In the end, what this exchange between Hare and Breton highlights is the hypothesis that SF may very well be understood as genre that operates under parallel principles to that of surrealism. Indeed, the end of the subsequent chapter only further underscores this kinship between them when, in the aftermath of the end of the Second World War, several surrealist artists and authors die in quick succession following some form of contact with Who May’s poems. The last name the novel includes in this series is the influential SF author Philip K. Dick. To assert an alliance between surrealism and SF is not an altogether novel move to make. As early as 1976, critic David Ketterer already pointed out “the considerable affinity which exists between surrealism and SF.”24 In particular, Ketterer notes the similarities in their respective projects of expanding and transforming the conception of the real by way of procedures of defamiliarization. Put another way, surrealism arguably operates on a principle that parallels Darko Suvin’s pioneering conceptualization of SF as a “literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition.”25 Indeed, given Suvin’s own alignment of SF with the radical politics of utopian imagination, one could perhaps be forgiven for suspecting that his conception of the genre might owe a debt to ideas drawn from the revolutionary politics of Breton’s surrealist manifestos and the broader surrealist movement’s collective attempt to imagine an idealized world in the spaces of the impossible, that is, in the literalized no-place of utopia.26 With Kawamata’s novel though, what is interesting is how it takes this purported alliance between surrealism and SF as a point of departure from which to launch into an exploration of the failure of their utopian politics. The scenes subsequent to Breton’s encounter with Who May describe the sense of impasse within the surrealist movement after the end of the Second World War, with Breton lamenting its “terrible reality” with the words “the birth of the atomic bomb cast a cloud over humanity, darkening the end of the Great War. . . . His former comrades had split into various factions, some hostile and some friendly.”27 Put simply, the tenor of this sequence is less one of revolutionary hope and more one of disappointment over the failure of revolution. As if to punctuate this sense of failure further, once the novel shifts to the events of 1980s Japan when Who May’s poems resurface, there is a clear suggestion that the once lofty ambitions of the surrealist movement have since been domesticated, reduced to little more than a brand label for a cultural commodity. Sakakibara, the focalizing character in this section of the novel, first comes into contact with Who May’s poetry when his small publishing company is contracted by the Seito Group, a corporate department store chain, to assist them in one of their “cultural ventures,” namely the translation and preparation for publication of a recently discovered collection of unpublished surrealist manuscripts and artwork. The goal of this project is, in the words of the novel, “to draw on the vitality of these previously unknown materials, tapping into them as a new source for fashions and lifestyles.”28 The implication here is that not only has surrealism (and its renewal and revival) taken on a signaling function indicative of the possession of cultural capital, perhaps more fundamentally, its utopian potentiality had become little more than a set of empty gestures, a set of recognizable tropes and aesthetic techniques ready to be commercially repurposed. This takes on greater significance in light of the novel’s attempt to posit an affinity between surrealism and SF, for what is SF if not precisely the massmarket codification of the utopian project into the set of iconographies and plot formulae that constitute a genre’s megatext? With this in mind, if indeed Death Sentences can be apprehended as a kind of meta-SF text that speaks to the genre’s historical genealogy and political charge, then it would appear that what it brings to the foreground are precisely the limits of SF as a site of radical critical practice. Specifically, it stages what Tom Moylan has identified as an important historical turn toward the dystopian within the genre of SF during the 1980s in the face of economic restructuring and the resurgence of right- wing politics. For Moylan, this dystopian turn should not be read as simply the negation of utopia, but rather a refashioning of the utopian impulse in the face of its new historical conditions—what has since gone by such names as postmodernity, globalization, and neoliberalism—which are characterized precisely by the dominance of a broader anti- utopian sentiment. In his words: In the face of a powerful anti-utopian campaign, dystopia’s potential for exploring utopian possibilities . . . confronted the devaluation of Utopia by an official neoliberal discourse that proclaimed the end of history and celebrated simultaneously the end of radical social dreaming . . . These works carry out an intertextual intervention that negates the 1980s negation of the critical utopian moment and thus makes room for a new expression of the utopian imagination.29 Put simply, the critical dystopian writings appearing since the 1980s have attempted to address the question of the politics of SF after the end of futurity. While Death Sentences certainly stages these questions, it cannot be said to offer an unambiguous solution to the problem. Its finale presents a vision of a dystopic future of a Martian colony policed with private military contractors whose primary function is the deployment of violence to ensure the smooth flow of the circulation of capital. As the text puts it: “The raison d’être of the Martian Guard lay in maintaining this felicitous relation between supply and demand, and, if possible, enhancing it. In a word, it was a matter of population adjustment through extermination.”30 On the one hand, these scenes present a vision of the world that anticipates the disaster capitalism of the present conjuncture marked by the use of preemptive violence as a mechanism of capital accumulation. Yet on the other hand, the only way out of this world it offers is through a deus ex machina in the form of time travel that allows for a return to the past to ensure that Who May never writes his killer poems such that this world presumably never comes to pass. On its face, this appears like less of an attempt at articulating a site, a struggle, and more of a retreat, a nostalgic lament. In this respect, it provokes a reminder of Fredric Jameson’s claim that in the present conjuncture, “the deepest vocation [of SF] is over and over again to demonstrate and to dramatize our incapacity to imagine the future, to body forth, through apparently full representation, which prove on closer inspection to be structurally and constitutively impoverished.”31 But there is also more to it than just that, for in undoing the writing of the poems and changing the subsequent course of history, it renders the text of the novel into a document of a history that never came to pass. In effect, it leaves the reader with the memory of a history that never happened. Could the SF genre in its totality be thought of as an archive of such unrealized histories and futurities? After all, it provides a record of what Ernst Bloch has called the “cultural surplus” of utopian desire, unrealized futurities that exist as potentialities but do not materialize in actuality.32 This record serves as a reminder of the existence of different horizons of possibility, different horizons of futurity whose affective potential may not be already exhausted or rendered inert in the actualization of history. Viewed in these terms, the practice of translation turns out to be a potential technology for activating a desire for these yet unknown and unrealized utopias. If, indeed, as Lawrence Venuti has suggested, translation offers the potential to draw attention to historical difference, then perhaps it is not too much of a stretch to approach translation in science-fictional terms as a kind of time-travel.33 It operates, as Takayuki Tatsumi once put it in another context, as a “soft time machine” that facilitates “a creative dialogue between two decades and two cultures.”34 In doing so, it cannot help but also participate in the modes of ideological interrogation that the time travel narrative is known for, be it in the form of, to use the terminology of William Burling, the “temporal dislocation” that focuses largely on the mechanics of time travel and the paradoxes it generates, or the “temporal contrast” that places its attention on the differences between two time periods and worlds.35 In Burling’s view, the essential issue at the heart of time travel stories is not their specific manifest contents (the various past and future worlds these texts visit in their narratives) but the very fact of time travel stories, the more fundamental question of “Why are there so many time travel stories?” (italics in original).36 For Burling, this proliferation is indicative of a lack in the present, and a desire to do something about it. When it is framed in these terms, the surge in interest in translated SF in more recent years, amply documented by Rachel Cordasco through her website “Speculative Fiction in Translation,” might be understood symptomatically as themselves science-fictional eruptions of this latent sense of lack, and with it a concomitant desire for something other than the here and now.37 But to fully realize this potential will entail taking seriously SFs from other languages and locations as proper sites of extrapolative potentiality and not mere predictable possibility. In other words, if they are to become a space for the imagination of a radical futurity that can break open the historical limits of the present, other SFs cannot be reduced to mere extensions of an already fixed conception of the form, to little more peripheral traditions derivative of the center in line with more Eurocentric diffusionist models of world literature.38 Instead, they must be encountered in properly science-fictional terms as potential spaces for transformative difference, as sites for the cognitive estrangement of our understanding of the history of the genre itself.

### Advocacy---Asian Gamer Death

#### The death of the Asian gamer ruptures Western fantasies of virtual escapism and challenges the sacredness of life and leisure in capitalism. Don’t deny death.

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In this essay, we show how the Asian gamer may be understood within the discursive powers of techno-Orientalism that make the Asian Other knowable and controllable. This understanding reveals Western fantasies of virtual escapism, while the death of the Asian gamer ruptures precisely these fantasies—of never working while video gaming constantly, and of eternal life without death. In order to put forward this argument, we will look closely at the popular sci-fi RTS game StarCraft, released in 1998, and the cultural trends surrounding it. Our reading of StarCraft gestures toward attitudes around video gaming that do not celebrate playing without end, while challenging the sacredness of life and guaranteed leisure time in capitalism.

The first reported instance of online gamer death in Asia was in October 2002, when twenty-four-year-old Kim Kyung-jae played nonstop for eightysix hours until he collapsed and died in an Internet café in Kwangju, South Korea (Gluck). Just ten days later, Lien Wen-cheng died in a café in Fengyuan, Taiwan. The twenty-seven-year-old had been playing for thirty-two hours straight; he was found in the restroom bleeding from the nose and foaming at the mouth (Farrell). On August 5, 2005, Lee Seungseob went into cardiac arrest following a fifty-hour marathon session of StarCraft in Taegu, South Korea (Zimbardo). According to the psychiatrist at the hospital where Lee was taken, he had neglected to eat and sleep while playing. In 2005, Xinhua Online reported that a young woman, identified only as “Snowly,” died after playing World of Warcraft “for several continuous days during the national day holiday.” An online, in-game funeral was held in her memory by fellow gamers (“Death of Net Addict”). A twenty-six-year-old man identified only by his surname “Zhang” died in the Liaoning province of China on February 24, 2007. During the Spring Festival, Zhang had spent most of the seven-day holiday playing online computer games (Yong Wu). Also in 2007, a thirty-year-old man died of exhaustion after gaming for three days straight in Guangzhou, China (“Chinese Man Drops Dead”). On December 27, 2010, a nineteen-yearold college student, identified by his surname “Moon,” collapsed in a café in Ulsan, South Korea, after playing first-person shooter (FPS) games for twelve hours (Cho). A thirty-year-old man died in a cybercafé outside of Beijing, China, on February 22, 2011, after playing online games for three days (Goswami).

A Kotaku article from 2007 opens with the headline “Another Chinese Man Dies from Gaming” and comments on this proliferation of gamer death in Asia. Referring to the player from Guangzhou, journalist Mike Fahey begins with a glib suggestion: “Someone really needs to tell the people in East Asian countries to stop gaming before they die.” He wryly notes, “Watching a person die from lack of common sense always makes me thirsty,” and proposes “a free latte policy” to encourage gamers to stop playing. Fahey then concludes, “I know the loss of a human life is not a laughing matter, but I just cannot fathom gaming to death. Back in 2001, there were weeks when I would spend every waking hour playing EQ, but I at least took chair naps and tried my very best not to die. Worked for me. \*sigh\*” (Fahey). Fahey characterizes Asian gamers as obsessive, easily manipulated, and lacking in “common sense,” while his own gaming experience worked for him. His position of healthy self-control draws a hard line between himself and the inferior Other, allowing the Western journalist, as Edward Said writes, “a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand” (7). Reinstating the difference between reality and simulation, Fahey knows that he must not lose himself to the game. But the assertion of difference betrays anxieties around the fantasy of excessive gaming and the fine line between excessive fun and death, anxieties that are quickly projected back onto the seemingly less grievable other. The Asian gamer dies because of his immaturity and inability to moderate his own pleasures. Meanwhile, Fahey discursively constructs himself as self-possessed much like the Vita player from the Sony commercial, while the possibility of his own potential death is deflected and disavowed.

### Advocacy---Cyborg Politics

#### Thus, we endorse cyborg politics, the illegitimate offspring of militarism and capitalism that embraces illegibility in the metaphoric Asian American cyborg. By expressing the lived modes of racialized bodies, we reframe politics towards new affective connections that subvert systemic violence.

Song 12, University of California Riverside, (Mary, *Cyborg Dreams in Asian American Transnationality: Transgression, Myth, Simulation, Coalition*, University of California Riverside, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53d2x7nd>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

A particularly salient feature of Haraway’s cyborg politics is its Althusserian ethos to recognize the mythology of identity from both sides of the ideological coin: myth-making on the part of the nation-state as grand narratives as well as myth-making on the part of the individual in how we desire to be hailed within those grand narratives. In her manifesto, she states: “The boundary is permeable between tool and myth, instrument and concept, historical systems of social relations and historical anatomies of possible bodies, including objects of knowledge. Indeed, myth and tool mutually constitute each other.” (Haraway 165) In order to deploy critical studies as the “tool” by which we seek sociopolitical equity, Haraway asserts that we are inseparable from the “historical systems of social relations” that we seek to recalibrate. Cyborg politics does not allow hegemonic constructs to be wholly responsible for the obstructions to a more just and equitable society. Rather, it demands that we fully acknowledge how all participate in the coalescing of power: “Innocence, and the corollary insistence on victimhood as the only ground for insight, has done enough damage.” (Haraway 158) Even the disenfranchised constitute the organization of hegemony ! if that were not so, centralized power could not exist. In other words, Asian American subjectivity is just as much constructed by Asian Americans in that we are also participating in the racialization of the Asian American body. If the nation-state has historically sought to corporealize the Asian American body in order to disenfranchise it from dominant white culture, striving to substantiate the racialized Asian American body does not mitigate the centralizing power of dominant white culture.

Kandice Chuh addresses the paradox of identity and ideology in that the Asian American body is just as effectively decorporealized in the name of the abstracted universal citizen as it is celebrated in national multiculturalism. Yet, she points out, the nation-state ultimately remains firmly invested in the ideology of a subject in that “As the uniquely authorized discourse of the nation, and in contrast to the postulation of the modern are that subjects (to monarchal power) have transformed into consensual citizens (of a nation-state), law requires subjection/ subjectification. [my emphases].” (Chuh 10) Subsequently, what Chuh proposes is an Asian American “subjectless” discourse. In line with Haraway’s idea of transgressing the boundary between myth and reality, Chuh proposes that we recognize the mythology that surrounds the Asian American subject as constructed by the U.S. nation-state. Moreover, Chuh aks us to recognize our own mythmaking participation in the construction of this Asian American subject: “Recognition of the subject as epistemological object cautions against failing endlessly to put into question both “Asian American” as the subject/ object of Asian Americanist discourse and of U.S. nationalist ideology, and Asian American studies as the subject/ object of dominant paradigms of the U.S. university. (Chuh 10)

Chuh argues for an approach to Asian American studies as subjectless in order to sidestep the trap of wondering who constitutes being “authentically” Asian American. Recalling the controversy over Lois Ann Yamanaka’s Blu’s Hanging for its award for Best Fiction by the Association for Asian American Studies, Chuh observes how the incident limns the contested grounds for who, what and how the term “Asian American” is constituted. Stepping back and recognizing this contested ground reveals how much the Asian American subject is inadvertently redefined within the rubrics of U.S. nation state ideologies. Chuh proposes that we refocus from representation and to the investigation of the unjust material conditions associated with the racialized Asian American body:

If we accept a priori that Asian American studies is subjectless, then rather than looking to complete the category “Asian American,” to actualize it by such methods as enumerating various components of differences (gender, class, sexuality, religion, and so on), we are positioned to critique the effects of the various configurations of power and knowledge through which the term comes to have meaning. Thinking in terms of subjectlessness does not occlude the possibility of political action. Rather, it augurs a redefinition of the political, an investigation into what “justice” might mean and what (whose) “justice” is being pursued. (Chuh 10-11)

Haraway’s cyborg politics contributes to Asian American literary studies by formulating a language that is both self-reflexive of its complicity with hegemonic power and at once resistive of that complicity in productive ways. Although Asian Americans identify with and are identified via racializing modes of nation-state technologies, it is the material conditions that surround such bodies that we can focus on. Acknowledging that the cyborg is the offspring of hegemonic power, then, is precisely what imparts its power to subvert that system: “The main trouble with cyborgs, of course, is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.” (Haraway 152) Haraway encourages us to embrace illegitimacy, to abandon notions of authenticity and origin, in order to challenge the authority of nation-state grand narratives. By approaching Asian American subjectivity as a myth, parented by both the U.S. nation-state as well as Asian American racialized bodies themselves, we may re- imagine an entirely new creature, one I’d like to offer is the Asian American transnational as metaphoric cyborg.

If the cyborg is all about transgressing boundaries, the Asian American transnational demonstrates the material and lived modes by which the racialized body transgresses boundaries every day. By transgressing national boundaries, the Asian American transnational body reveals how so many other hegemonic ideologies are deeply imbricated into the notion of national identity. In Theresa Hak Kyung Cha’s Dictee, Cha illustrates the tortured boundaries over which nation-state apparatuses colonize what we might arbitrarily label the Korean American body. Revealing the permeability between the myth of the “Korean American” label and the tools needed to recognize the lived realities of those labeled, Dictee defies any sedimentation of representative identity at every angle possible. Cha challenges her readers to strive to recognize her Korean American identity through the wreckage of elided history and multiply-colonizing technologies if only to prove that indeed no such identity can be recognized. At every turn, she crosses the line between what is myth and what is “real” precisely in order to limn that very line.

Read through the lens of cyborg politics, it is this crossing between myth and reality that highlights the hegemonic machinations that work to sustain systems of centralized power. Cha’s text is all about revealing myth in order to highlight both how powerful the tools of the state are as well as to sharpen the critical tools we seek to deploy in the name of justice. Three key mythologies in Dictee will be examined in this chapter: the myth of natural language, the myth of historical veracity, and the myth of the coherent subject. In the midst of all these myths, what is consistent throughout Cha’s text is the insistence on the very real presence of a body. Cha never lets her reader forget that although she tears down every other façade of a coherent subject possible, somewhere, there is always a body involved. Without a body, the technologies of nationstate apparatuses would be inert. With a Korean American transnational body, Cha deploys the tool of the affective body in order to underscore the various mythologies that seek to undermine and colonize that body.

By the affective body, I mean one that remains firmly linked to its material conditions but delinked from its grand narratives and over-determined image-based representation. Relying on the body as fulcrum to Asian American identity politics will be a nuanced critical task. Chuh’s subjectless discourse demonstrates how we can move away from a representational politics of the image and towards a politics of indeterminate identity. The concern with indeterminacy is its power to dissolve materiality in a sea of endless difference. Haraway addresses this concern when she states: “But in the consciousness of our failures, we risk lapsing into boundless difference and giving up on the confusing task of making partial, real connection. Some differences are playful; some are poles of world historical systems of domination. ‘Epistemology’ is about knowing the difference.” (Haraway 161-2) Dictee seizes Asian American critical literary attention in that it is at once an aesthetically ground-breaking text as well as one that remains intensely focused on the Korean American body. Cha accomplishes what Haraway suggests: Cha demolishes the binary and opts for the nebulous grainy terrain of difference. Nevertheless, Dictee never departs from the task of making partial, real connections through what I critically deploy as affect.

In Parables of the Virtual, Brian Massumi disagrees with Fredric Jameson’s pronouncement that a key feature of the postmodern age is a “waning of affect” (Massumi 27). Massumi argues that “If anything, our [postmodern] condition is characterized by a surfeit of [affect].” (ibid) Massumi’s main point here is that affect is indeed a tool critical studies should utilize in order to shed better light on the paradox of the postmodern condition. Posited in the tension between Jameson’s “death of the subject” (Jameson 5) and Massumi’s “surfeit of affect”, Dictee searches for a subject in a surfeit of affect. However, Cha never seeks to resuscitate the liberal humanist subject back to life. Instead, Cha’s text affectively conveys the specific struggle to seek subjectivity. Formalistically, although the textuality of Dictee is a postmodern landscape, it is an intensity of affect that defines Cha’s exploration of what is myth and what is real in the realm of identity. Coupling intensity to affect, Massumi proposes that critical light emerges in the movement of an expression-event such as Dictee:

Much could be gained by integrating the dimension of intensity into cultural theory. …. It is the collapse of structured distinction into intensity, or rules into paradox. …. The expression-event is the system of the inexplicable: emergence, into and against regeneration (the reproduction of a structure). …. Intensity is the unassimilable. (Massumi 26-7)

Just as Massumi locates emergence within the collapse of structure ! “of rules into paradox” ! Dictee demonstrates how debunking the myths of language, historicity, and subjectivity reveals more about identity than finding a subject itself. The event in Dictee is precisely the participation by Cha’s reader that the text demands of her reader through its words. Dictee ignites a search for the subject that is never delivered in order to reveal the mythologies that surround our affective desires for that subject.

As Massumi describes it, affect is located somewhere between the material conditions of the body and the body’s trajectory path towards emergence. Closing his chapter on “The Autonomy of Affect”, Massumi describes affect as such: “The ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory.” (Massumi 45) The title to his chapter alongside his final statement reveal the simultaneously metaphysical and physical nature of affect as also found in Dictee. Massumi offers the anchor that resists the dematerialization of the body in unbounded indeterminacy. By asserting the autonomy of affect, Massumi argues that its “disconnection between form/content and intensity/effect is not just negative: it enables a different connectivity, a different difference, in parallel.” (Massumi 25) In other words, Massumi suggests that we disconnect the intense effects of political inequity from the materiality of the body such that we reframe our politics towards new and partial connections that reflect the technological permutations of a re-ordered hegemonic system ! as described by Haraway in her “informatics of domination”: “Simultaneously material and ideological, the dichotomies may be expressed [as] transitions from the comfortable old hierarchical dominations to the scary new networks I have called the informatics of domination” (Haraway 162).

### Advocacy---Diaspora

#### Thus, we engage the Asiatic Diaspora in a methodological praxis of refusal. Through diasporic melancholia, insurgent memories and counterknowledge, we find space for productive refusal against the Western hegemonic gaze that empowers transnational Asian solidarity.

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Kim (2010) articulates a methodological praxis to challenge these systems of domination through her theorization of Asian American cultural production:

Asian American culture as also engaging in a politics of refusal. In refusing the seductive will to total knowledge or revelation of the “truth” of the “Asian American experience,” what it means to be Asian American, or what the United States “really did” in Asia during the Cold War, Asian American culture enact what in anthropological term has been called “ethnographic refusal” (Kim, 2010, p. 6)

Although Kim’s (2010) work is germane to notions of America, it is also produced through a transnational lens. Applying her work to the Asiatic Diaspora as a whole, we begin to understand how we can collectively work to produce counter-hegemonic resistance. Additionally, as Asian scholars located within the United States, our frame of analysis cannot be separated from our positionality which begins these points of inquiry. Diaspora produces a condition of melancholia from loss which can be described as a process of subjectivization because loss is an overdetermined sense of self (Eng, 2010). Diasporic Asian cultural production thus rejects and critiques gendered and racialized quotidian violence. It is a refusal to become respectable and docile subjects. It is a refusal to have Asians be flattened and made into technocratic tools. It is a refusal to be integrated within liberal multicultural institutions. It is a refusal to be consumed by the white masculine hegemonic gaze. Furthermore, it attempts to bridge, build, and empower Asians across many geographic locations brought by diaspora. Diasporic Asian cultural production attempts to build transnational solidarity. Transnationality, here, comes from Lisa Yoneyama (2015) in Cold War in Ruins:

…transnationality means much more than mere movements across nation-states, borders, or exchanges among multiple national actors and locations. It comprises of insurgent memories, counterknowledge, and inauthentic identities that have been regimented by the discourse and institution center on nation-state. (p. 7)

Such cultural production is a “productive refusal.” Transnationalism is about producing radical connections within diaspora and across national borders through counter-hegemonic praxis; it is about the ability to produce new forms of sociality and liberatory visions for such a heterogeneous group. For Sawayama, transnationality is rooted in her production of “inauthentic” code which is scripted by Western modernity and diaspora.

### Advocacy---Feminist Post-Cyberpunk

#### We adopt feminist post-cyberpunk as a means to disrupt White male desire.

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Much has been written about cyberpunk’s depiction of the gendered, sexualized, and, to a lesser extent, raced body. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, in “Race and Software,” points out the use of “high-tech orientalism” in “foundational cyberpunk previsions, from William Gibson’s 1984 Neuromancer to Neal Stephenson’s 1993 Snow Crash, [that] use ‘Asian,’ ‘African,’ and ‘half-breed’ characters to create seductively dystopian near futures” (306). The “high-tech orientalism” of which Chun writes has often been located in female bodies. While the female characters in classic cyberpunk are imbued with high-tech gadgetry—like Neuromancer’s Molly’s mirror shades and nail blades—they are also “Orientalized,” rendered as “meat” and objects of white, Western male desire. Chun argues that, as a way to know and make the Other accessible and open to the user/reader, “high-tech orientalism offers the pleasure of exploring, the pleasure of being somewhat overwhelmed but ultimately ‘jackedin’” (306–307). In this chapter, I take up two feminist revisions of technoOrientalist cyberpunk tropes (the “pleasure” and real-world consequences of technological exploration) in Tricia Sullivan’s Maul (first published in 2003) and Larissa Lai’s Salt Fish Girl (first published in 2002).

Feminist Post-cyberpunk and the Raced Body

Before I discuss Maul and Salt Fish Girl, it is important to situate these texts in their generic context: cyberpunk and feminist speculative fiction (SF). In Rewired, James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel trace the ways in which 1980s cyberpunk has matured into today’s post-cyberpunk: “Originally ‘the street’ in CP [cyberpunk] meant the shadowy world of those who had set themselves against the norms of the dominant culture, hackers, thieves, spies, scam artists, and drug users. But for PCP [post-cyberpunk] writers the street leads to other parts of the world. Their futures have become more diverse, and richer for it. Asians and Africans and Latinos are no longer just sprinkled into stories as supporting characters, as if they are some sort of exotic seasoning. PCP writers attempt to bring them and their unique concerns to the centre of their stories” (xi). Post-cyberpunk retains the original “adversarial relationship to consensus reality” (xii), but opens up the ranks of its characters (and writers) to include all of those who make up the global underclass. Feminist SF, following a similar generic trajectory, began moving away from its utopian-centric narratives of the 1960s and 1970s into stories that incorporated substantial technological themes and tropes (many of which were reminiscent of those characteristic of the cyberpunk movement) during the 1980s and the 1990s.

One of the great sticking points for feminist scholars when reading cyberpunk has been the centrality of the cyberspace (or console) cowboy, usually a young man who plugs into the feminized cyberspace matrix to become the idealized hacker-hero. Focusing on the foundational work of William Gibson’s Neuromancer series, Nicola Nixon argues, “The political (or even revolutionary) potential for SF, realized so strongly in ’70s feminist SF, is relegated in Gibson’s cyberpunk to a form of scary feminized software; his fiction creates an alternative, attractive, but hallucinatory world which allows not only a reassertion of male mastery but a virtual celebration of a kind of primal masculinity” (204). A good deal of this “primal masculinity” relies on technoOrientalist tropes to provide the settings and peoples that support this hallucinatory world of male mastery for Western white men and their technological toys (e.g., Neuromancer’s Case and his Japanese-made “Ono-Sendai Cyberspace 7” cyberdeck and goggles).

With their critiques of capitalism and globalization, the latest generation of feminist SF novels echo cyberpunk’s concerns with commerce and power as they continue to address issues of gender and racialized identity. I classify this coming together of the two subgenres as feminist post-cyberpunk, exemplified by texts such as Sullivan’s Maul and Lai’s Salt Fish Girl. I suggest that feminist post-cyberpunk takes the most intriguing parts of cyberpunk—cyberspace, biotechnological engagement, urban dystopia, and global networks—while rejecting its white (heterosexual) masculine claims on both the subject and technology. Feminist post-cyberpunk takes in a broader consideration of what it means to be gendered and raced in an age when technology transcends geopolitical borders and exists both outside and inside of the body. Lai’s Salt Fish Girl and Sullivan’s Maul are populated with the marginalized characters of cyberpunk’s past: women of color, clones, lesbians, children, the poor, and the disabled. In each text, these once sidelined figures take center stage as they directly interact with or literally embody technology.

In “After/Images of Identity,” Lisa Nakamura states, “Rather than being left behind, bracketed, or ‘radically questioned,’ the body—the raced, gendered, classed body—gets ‘outed’ in cyberspace just as soon as commerce and power come into play” (329). To borrow Nakamura’s use of “outing” here, feminist post-cyberpunk texts tend to explicitly “out” the gendered and raced body, especially in terms of its role in networks of commerce and power (often highlighting situations of exploitation). In a novel like Salt Fish Girl, where the “outing” is wholly intentional, Lai wants the reader to know exactly who is at the center of her novel (a young queer Asian woman) in order to fully empower that identity position despite attempts to control and diminish it. In Sullivan’s Maul, however, the “outing” of the female Korean American protagonist Sun is not as empowering as she is revealed to be a technological product (i.e., a computer generated avatar). In the rest of this chapter, I articulate the ways in which these feminist post-cyberpunk novels give voice to Asian women in high-tech future worlds, but, at times, still struggle to completely reject the techno-Orientalism of classic cyberpunk.

### Advocacy---Identity Politics

#### Centering debates on the Asian American subjectivity breaks new imaginative grounds that are illegible in the US national discourse that systematically excludes the Asian identity.

Song 12, University of California Riverside, (Mary, *Cyborg Dreams in Asian American Transnationality: Transgression, Myth, Simulation, Coalition*, University of California Riverside, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53d2x7nd>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

In Imagine Otherwise, Kandice Chuh recognizes the critical cogency for Asian American studies to consider postmodern insights about the limitations of representation: “Asian American studies may be seen as a formation of the critical landscape configured by a (poststructural) problematization of referentiality, which facilitates the (postmodern) jettisoning of the authority of the meta-narrative.” (Chuh 5)2 However, not only does Chuh suggest a need for a critical postmodern lens, she asserts that Asian American subjectivity is a particularly productive space to explore evolving notions of referentiality and multiplicity. She observes how Asian American subjects are racially-marked bodies that exceed the nation-state circumscriptions of the abstracted citizen through their ability to traverse boundaries both geographical and ideological:

I suggest that it is precisely because U.S. nationalism has constituted “Asian America” as a transnational identity that it has power as an analytic in exposing the failures of the U.S. nation-state’s promises of universal equality. …. In this manner, transnationalism might be seen as a discourse that advances investigations of the technologies of race and U.S. national identity formation, or perhaps more pointedly, the technology of race as a technology of U.S. national identity. (Chuh 60-1)

Using transnationality as a physical and a metaphysical term, Chuh is careful to clarify that the Asian American transnational paradigm refers not only to the material “crossborder flows of people, capital and cultures” (Chuh 62), but also the “border crossings without literal movement” (ibid) that break new imaginative grounds towards “political and cultural practices illegible in the official discourse of the U.S. nation-state.” (ibid) In this way, Chuh calls for the crucial task to examine as yet unexamined postmodern permutations of hegemonic technologies that work to contain and oppress Asiatically-marked bodies.

In Immigrant Acts, Lisa Lowe applies a materialist critique in her examination of how U.S. nation-state technologies of citizenship based on the abstract liberal subject is predicated on the ideologically paradoxical foundations of national exclusion and material exploitation of the transnational Asian immigrant. Lowe emphasizes the political exigency for Asian American scholars to critically engage in the historical and sociological contradictions that simultaneously disenfranchise the Asian American subject and substantiate the abstract U.S. citizen. Focusing on the material conditions that have systemically excluded Asiatically-marked bodies from national subjecthood, Lowe locates political resistance in the very prefiguration of this racializing technology that constitutes U.S. citizenship:

As the state legally transforms the Asian alien into the Asian American citizen, it institutionalizes the disavowal of the history of racialized labor exploitation and disenfranchisement through the promise of freedom in the political sphere. Yet the historical and continued racialization of the Asian American, as citizen, exacerbates [my emphasis] the contradictions of the national project that promises the resolution of material inequalities through the political domain of equal representation. (Lowe 10)

Lowe elucidates a political potentiality in recognizing Asian American transnationality in that the racialization of Asian American subjects highlights the hypocrisy and racism of the U.S. democratic rhetoric of freedom and equality. Furthermore, Lowe reveals how the ideological sustains the material conditions that perpetuate political inequity for Asian Americans.

### Advocacy---Poems

#### **our racial differences mechanic**

eyes limbs secret

parts design-soaked

and calculated in advance

superior strength

minds sharp as

haystack needles

unpredictable and algorithmic

death is our only weakness

Lai, Larissa. “Rachel”, *Automaton Biographies* //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

### Advocacy---Sawayama

#### [Chorus]

Came here on my own

Party on my phone

Came here on my own

But I start to feel alone

Better late than never so I'll be alright

Happiest whenever I'm with you online

[Verse 2]

Better together

Ever the overrated touch

I am connected

I am the girl you want to watch

Lips full of glitter glow

Spinning like mirror balls

Phone in a strobe

Stuck in a crazy cyber world

[Pre-Chorus]

And she said I'm not here for love tonight

The way you touch just don't feel right

Used to feeling things so cold

Cyber Stockholm Syndrome

“Cyber Stockholm Syndrome” (Rina Sawayama, 2017) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

#### Our performativity hacks symbolic currencies that undergird gendered racial formations. In our overidentification with cybernetic being, we produce unintelligibility that scrambles binary racial and gendered codes and form new modes of sociality and self-empowerment.

Kouch and Wang 18, \*June Kuoch is a queer and trans Southeast Asian American. They are a senior at the University of Minnesota majoring in Sociology with a focus in policy analysis and minoring in Asian American Studies, Gender Women and Sexuality Studies, and Comparative Race and Ethnicity in the United States. Kuoch is a local community organizer focusing on abolition through a queer and trans of color lens. Their work has been inspired the activist Yuri Kochiyama. Their current research focuses on haunting brought by United States empire building as it intersects with critical refugee studies, Asian American studies, critical archival studies, and queer of color critic. \*\*Allegro Wang is a queer, trans Chinese-American and an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota. They are currently a sophomore in the U of MN’s College of Science and Engineering and double-majoring in Computer Sciences and Gender, Women’s, and Sexuality Studies. Allegro’s primary area of interest in research is in how technology emerges as a site of both subjugation and resistance in its intersection with whiteness, queerness, and transness., (June and Allegro, “Cyber Fantasies: Rina Sawayama, Asian Feminism, and TechnoOrientalism in the Age of Neoliberalism” in Sprinkle: An Undergraduate Journal of Feminist and Queer Studies, Vol. 11, <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1085&context=sprinkle>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

Sawayama’s music videos, futuristic aesthetic, and lyricism deconstructs the West’s normalization of Asian women’s subservience. In “Cyber Stockholm Syndrome,” she sings about her personal relationship with technology as a site of solidarity and support, specifically singing, “Came here on my own / But I start to feel alone / Better late than never so I'll be alright / Happiest whenever I'm with you online” (Sawayama, 2017). Here, she also demonstrates how she found an escape from white supremacy through music and the cyber world. Specifically, this song was a project of catharsis to escape whiteness in a different world (Clarke, 2017; Myers, 2017). This production confronts how the cyber realm is traditionally encoded as a sphere of white men’s power as they control narratives of development, innovation, and technological “progress,” establishing technocratic, intangible spaces of dominance. Sawayama’s performativity thus becomes a means to subvert or “hack” the gendered racial formation forced upon Asian women. Hacking, here, “offers an eccentric mode of expression, a means to rupture[...]symbolic currencies and tendencies[...]which can be then decoded or scrambled” (Bui, 2014). Sawayama’s “hacking” of techno-Orientalism is a process of unintelligibility that creates new modes of sociality in that her performance deconstructs Western norms imposed on Asian women. This emerges as people are unable to auditorily grasp and categorize her music. Hacking is produced from her sense of hybridity. She hacks the dragon lady/lotus blossom binary imposed on Asian women. She hacks the West/East binary via the production of diaspora.

In A Cyborg Manifesto, Donna Haraway (1991) expands upon how technology can be utilized as a means of subversion writing, “coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world” (p. 152). For Haraway, the cyborg exists in the liminal space between human and technology, which is similar to the configuration of Asians in a techno-Orientalist framework (Haraway, 1991; Roh et al, 2015). Here, the cyborg disturbs a Western understanding of what does/does not constitute the human self by disrupting normative forms of embodiment, subjectivity, and sociality (Haraway, 1991).

In her utilization of cyborgism in the music video for “Cyber Stockholm Syndrome,” Sawayama breaks the boundaries between what is technological and what is human, a subversion of the technologization of Asiatic bodies and a form of self-empowerment (Bui, 2014; Haraway, 1991). Sawayama becomes cyborgian through the digitization of her body and surroundings (her steampunk aesthetic, the futuristic background surrounding the car, and the scripting of binary code across her face), which operate as a manifestation of techno-Orientalist logics as she becomes one with technology the same way Asiatic bodies are digitized in the 21st century. Her choice to physically embody technology is thus an instance of overidentification used to disrupt the Occidental gaze and subvert technoOrientalist norms. In Digitizing Race, Lisa Nakamura (2008) highlights the simultaneous debilitating and liberating use of technology on and by Asian bodies. In relation to race neutrality and the erasure of racial violence in the West, Nakamura (2008) states that “the ‘cyberspace model’...ignores these crucial differences. The reduction of all images to sets of binary code seems to pool them all into an undifferentiated soup of bits and bytes” (p. 7). Thus, the Western (white) relationship with technology hinges on a method of erasing difference, a model of racial neutrality that only white individuals are capable of accessing in that only white individuals can distance themselves from their race, whereas people of color are always already racialized and coded into particular stereotypes. Sawayama’s overidentification with technology, a source of Asiatic stereotyping, then, is a physical and metaphysical embodiment that escapes the universalization of the cyber realm as understood by the West, instead using cyberspace to create her own sphere of agency.

### Advocacy---Sinofuturism

#### Thus, we embrace Sinofuturism. In the cybernetic age, our criminal cyber-exoticism outlines a darkside cartography of the East that resituates our temporal imaginaries towards Asian knowledge in the face of Western anxiety. While they tie us to the past, we soar into the future.

De Seta 20, Gabriele de Seta is a digital anthropologist and sociologist specialising in everyday digital culture in the Chinese speaking world, and known for his contributions to digital ethnographic methodology. He works at the University of Bergen., (Gabriele, “Sinofuturism as Inverse Orientalism: China’s Future and the Denial of Coevalness”, *SFRA Review*, vol. 50, no. 2-3, <https://sfrareview.files.wordpress.com/2020/09/50-2-a5deseta.pdf>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

The earliest documented use of the term is to be found in ‘Fei ch'ien rinse out: Sino-futurist under-currency’, an essay written in 2003 by musician and cultural theorist Steve Goodman. Drawing on the tactics of Afrofuturism, Goodman combines references to Chinese philosophical traditions, organized crime syndicates, and underground trading networks with the rise of cybernetics and computing technology, outlining “a darkside cartography of the turbulent rise of East Asia”. This sinofuturist imaginary emphasizes the deleuzoguattarian “co-stratification” of East and West (Goodman), which is epitomized by the convergence of communication technologies and global capital. Goodman orbited around the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU), a Warwick-based collective experimenting at the nexus of underground cultures and philosophical speculation around the turn of the millennium, and inklings of sinofuturism can be found in writings by central members of this group. Most notably, Nick Land’s 1994 essay ‘Meltdown’ contains the ur-sinofuturist aphorism “Neo-China arrives from the future” (Land), and Sadie Plant’s book Zeros + Ones is steeped in Asia-futurist intuitions:

Five hundred years of modernity fades when the weaving of bamboo mats converges with the manufacture of computer games in the streets of Bangkok, Taipei, and Shanghai. The silicon links were already there. (253)

Sinofuturism is an enticing proposition. Firstly, it portends to overcome the arbitrary distinction between China’s ancient past and its contemporary modernization, promising to open up knowledge production about the People’s Republic of China towards its uncharted future. Secondly, sinofuturism seems sufficiently justified by historical trends and ongoing geopolitical developments: China’s consolidation as a superpower on the world stage, its massive process of urbanization creating hundreds of cities in a few decades, as well as its successes in the realm of science and technology all point to the undeniable futurity of the PRC. At the same time—a chiefly Euro-American, Anglo-centric time, to be sure— sinofuturism relies on discursive tropes and explanatory models that should appear suspicious to observers familiar with the representational genealogies of expertise about East Asia and “the Orient” at large. Under its glossy veneer of science-fictional novelty and cyber-exoticism, sinofuturism partakes in the problematic heritage of an enduring techno-orientalist discourse.

The concept of techno-orientalism was originally proposed to account for the emergence of a Western discourse about Japan’s technological development during the late 1980s and early 1990s, typified by the assertion that “Japan has become synonymous with the technologies of the future” (Morley and Robins 168). Technoorientalist themes resonate strikingly with stereotyped depictions of many East Asian countries: the Japanese’s “robot-like dedication” to both work and world domination, their inscrutable culture of self-censorship, as well as their remorseless practices of copycatting all present a threat to the Western grip on modernity (150-158). Morley and Robins prophetically recognize that after Japan, other East Asian locales— first the “Four Asian Tigers” of Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong, then China—will likely become the subject of techno-orientalist representations (173), and recent history has proven their intuition to be correct. As Wendy Hui Kyong Chun notes, a generalized “high tech orientalism” has come to pervade most depictions of East Asia in popular culture, offering the modern Western subject “a way to steer through the future, or more properly represent the future as something that can be negotiated” (178).

When compared with Edward Said’s foundational critique of orientalism, it is clear that techno-orientalism propagates similar imaginaries by foregrounding technology over tradition and substituting the past with the future. Said’s central contention is that Western accounts of the Orient consistently denied it the possibility and legitimacy of representing itself. Orientalists worked in parallel with colonial enterprises by envisioning themselves on a mission to recover the Orient’s lost past in order to improve its present—and extractive or subjugated—condition (Said 78). Techno-orientalist imaginaries similarly encroach upon the articulation of situated temporalities and impose their own correlations between technology and the future; and yet, in contrast to its colonial antecedent, high-tech orientalism responds to a fundamental Western anxiety about a perceived loss of civilizational primacy on the global stage (Ang). The commonalities between sinofuturism and techno-orientalism begin to shine through metropolitan skylines and neon-tinged haze, betraying a common mechanism underlying their operations.

In his discipline-rattling book Time and the Other, Johannes Fabian ruthlessly dismantles anthropology’s “schizogenic use of time” (Bunzl xi) by demonstrating how the production of ethnographic knowledge is predicated upon a temporal distancing of its Other. Anthropologists in the field regularly inhabit and embody different temporalities than their informants (Fabian 21) and, even more crucially, their writing relies on a distancing device that Fabian terms “denial of coevalness”, which is “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse” (31, italics in original). The denial of coevalness allows anthropology to approach its Other as if it inhabited a temporally bounded culture functioning as “a kind of timemachine” (39) for comparative and evolutionary inquiry. All kinds of orientalism presuppose this denial of coevalness, and supporting a re-entrenchment of the Western present—irrespective of the orientation of the temporal representation employed—is the primary purpose of this mechanism.

This genealogy of temporal othering evidences how both sinofuturism and technoorientalism are not merely culpable of propagating exoticizing fantasies about the future in China or other Asian contexts, but also responsible for perpetuating a more generalized denial of coevalness. In contrast with established orientalist tropes and with more recent liberal-democratic varieties of “sinological orientalism” (Vukovich), China is no longer deemed to be trapped in its atemporal pastness or condemned to eventually synchronize with modernity: instead, it already inhabits the future, arrives from it, or beckons a Chinese mode of futurity with global implications. In all these variants, sinofuturist imaginations deny China the possibility of challenging and negotiating representation in the coeval present staked out by Western knowledge production. The future is for sinofuturists what the past was for orientalists: a foil for steering representation by denying coevalness.

The legitimacy of sinofuturism is premised on a parallelism with other emerging articulations of futurity: the comparative approach proposed by Armen Avanessian and Mahan Moalemi, for example, juxtaposes it with Afrofuturism, gulf futurism and other ‘ethnofuturisms’, highlighting the novel emergence of futureoriented imaginaries from non-Western contexts. While this approach cautions that futuristic articulations “outside of the west and across the Global South and other former peripheries can also evolve into neo-colonial tendencies” (Avanessian et al. 9), it also glosses over a more fundamental problem of serializing ethnic or national futurisms: their reference to the future might be the only contact point between otherwise radically different aesthetic and ethical programs—something that the history of Italian futurism glaringly evidences. Even Lawrence Lek’s artwork Sinofuturism (1839-2046 AD), which has become a defining reference for this term, repeatedly reaches for a common tactical repertoire among “minority movements which share an optimism about speed, velocity, and the future as a means to subvert the institutions of the present” (Lek)

As proven by Afrofuturism, movements that upend hegemonic and colonial temporal frameworks are fundamental to reclaiming representational agency against the denial of coevalness. But in order to do so, they have to organically emerge from the periphery of Western time, rather than be conjured as part of technoorientalist fantasies. Instead, while the post-digital exotic pastiches of sinofuturism have circulated enough to consolidate into a recognizable aesthetic appropriated and subverted by local electronic musicians and new media artists, it is their less self-aware and more sensational variety that continues to find currency in popular representations of China. The introductory chapter of William A. Callahan’s China Dreams: 20 Visions of the future, aptly titled “China is the future,” offers a striking example of this banal brand of sinofuturism:

It’s an exciting time to be Chinese. While in the West the first decade of the 21st century was defined by pessimism due to 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Great Recession, Chinese people are very optimistic that the 21st century will be the “Chinese century.” The fruits of China’s three decades of rapid economic growth are there for all to see: by 2010, the People’s Republic of China (PRC) had the fastest computer in the world and the smartest students in the world, and it was enthusiastically entering the space age—just as the United States was retiring its fleet of Space Shuttles. (Callahan 1)

This book’s first paragraph strings together many of the tropes highlighted above: national identity, the idea of a Chinese century, the PRC’s economic growth, and the post-reform developmental leapfrogging indexed by the trifecta of computational primacy, academic talent and space exploration, all measured against rusty yardsticks left over from the Cold War era.

To sum up: sinofuturism responds to a lack of engagement with China’s future in both academic expertise and popular discussions of the country. It does so provocatively, by speculating on possible future configurations of wildly different aspects of Chinese history, culture and society, juxtaposing technological developments and traditional customs, global trends and local phenomena, political systems and material forces. At the same time, sinofuturism draws on— and at times directly reproduces—the tropes and narratives of techno-orientalism, reducing China to the last in a series of East Asian countries investing resources to accelerate industrialization and informatization and thus threatening the Western grip on technological innovation and transnational supply chains. The historical superimposition of techno-orientalism with popular culture genres like cyberpunk offers a convenient route for sinofuturism to find success as an aesthetic repertoire that is legible across contexts: outside China, it reacts with the mixture of fascination and anxiety for the illegibility and scale of China’s rise; inside China, it lends itself to the self-orientalizing celebration of national success. But this should not obfuscate its main operation.

Sinofuturism, like techno-orientalism, operates as a denial of coevalness. In being largely articulated from the outside as an interpretive discourse, it posits some sort of equivalence between China and the future: China is the future, China comes from the future, the future will come from China, and so on. These proclaimations are as enticing as they are suspect, for they deploy the future as a way of deferring participation in contemporariness. The future functions exactly as the past does in orientalist arguments: as a temporality through which otherness can be safely managed and problematic interactions steered away from. If the locus of Said’s orientalism was the Hejaz region, “a locale about which one can make statements regarding the past in exactly the same form (and with the same content) that one makes them regarding the present” (Said 235), the loci of sinofuturism are the skylines of Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Chongqing, ready to be inscribed with claims about the future. Sinofuturism is a reverse orientalism—an orientalism operating its denial of coevalness through the attribution of futurity.

In conclusion, I believe that my drastic evaluation should be a warning rather than a veto. While dealing with the present is unavoidable, the future is arguably the temporal domain most relevant for the construction of more livable (or even just survivable) shared worlds (Powers). There is nothing wrong with envisioning China’s future, tracing its future-oriented discourses, and speculating about its impact on regional and global futures, as long as one keeps in mind the implications of any sort of temporal othering. Fabian’s ideal of coevalness, the intersubjective engagement that demands the Other’s inclusion in a shared present, cannot be achieved by simply referring to a country as ‘contemporary’: what is demanded is instead the extension of a co-presence in which the Other’s time can be allowed its own situatedness and contingency. Imagining the rise of a modernizing China through the mediation of Western media, the waning echoes of Japan panic and an established cyberpunk canon during the 1990s resulted in the provocative speculations of sinofuturism— today, one can take some steps forward, or perhaps sideways, towards coevalness.

Luckily, there is no shortage of articulations of the future in China, all waiting to be encountered in their own terms. Chinese philosophical traditions have argued around different conceptions of time over centuries, utopian futurity has driven numerous upheavals, and revolutionary temporality has been a key ideological battleground around the founding of the People’s Republic of China (Qian). The history of the Chinese Communisty Party’s economic development is written in official plans spanning years or entire decades, and yet its technological policy has also been influenced by unlikely conversations with Western futurists (Gewirtz). Even more prominently, a century of Chinese science fiction has eventually found international success through translations and has been crowned by the Hugo Award conferred to Liu Cixin in 2015 (Song). There are countless futures to be found in the work of Chinese thinkers, academics, directors, writers and politicians, and these should not just be earmarked as a term of comparison for (or an alternative to) Western modernity (Greenspan et al.), but as coeval articulations of time. It is time to think, plurally, in terms of sinofuturisms, and to encounter Chinese futures that have always been already there.

### Advocacy---Virtuality

#### Narrative imaginations of identity at the edge of the virtual, seeping between the virtual and the real, are where affective potential is unlocked. Only by engaging the virtual can we understand emergence and utilize its triggerings of change.

Song 12, University of California Riverside, (Mary, *Cyborg Dreams in Asian American Transnationality: Transgression, Myth, Simulation, Coalition*, University of California Riverside, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53d2x7nd>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

The connection between identity simulation and virtual narrative can be found in Hayles’s comment on literature as simulation in her text, My Mother Was a Computer: Digital Subjects and Literary Texts: “…literature functions more like simulations than do other discursive forms, because like computer simulations such as Karl Sims’s “Evolved Virtual Creatures”, literary texts create imaginary worlds populated by creatures that we can (mis)take for beings like ourselves. (Hayles 6) Likening literature with computer simulations, Hayles points out how narratives can create creatures that we mistake for ourselves – and is this not identity? Additionally, Massumi correlates the vital role that imagination plays in the world of virtuality when he states: “Imagination is the mode of thought most precisely suited to the differentiating vagueness of the virtual.” (Massumi 134) For Massumi, imagination is key because it sparks virtuality; virtuality is key because it triggers emergence: “Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of virtual, where it leaks into actual, that counts. For that seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found.” (Massumi 43) Massumi limns the boundary that lies between the virtual and the actual as the locus where emergence occurs. It is this locus where Choi’s narrative simulates identity. American Woman is a narrative wrought from the paradigm of actuality to create a virtual narrative that leaks into our personal consciousness as political awareness.

The affective power behind this sort of virtual narrative lies in our apprehension of what we already know and what we desire to discover. Choi clearly founds much of her narrative on the easily-recognized media coverage of the Patty Hearst case. But instead of narrating a non-fictional account that would replicate the U.S. media coverage of the privileged “American princess”, Choi rejects this paradigm for one that favors the barely known Asian American woman known to have accompanied Hearst in their final year in hiding, Wendy Yoshimura. Thus, despite her choice to use the Patty Hearst case as a platform for her narrative, Choi places her Japanese American protagonist, Jenny Shimada, center stage. In a way, Choi bait-and-switches her readers by packaging a story about an American princess – someone we visualize to be white and privileged – and instead offers us the unheard story of someone who is neither white nor privileged. Subsequently, Choi’s title to her novel patently points to her own bait-and-switch narrative tactic. What we are left to wonder is how much of this story is “true” and/or “authentic”?

#### Racial discrimination has seeped into the incorporeal – only by blurring the lines between the virtual and the material can we adapt to and disrupt our representations.

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In the 1990s both popular culture and academic theorists promised freedom from the constraints of race, gender, sexual preference, and class via the Internet. This optimism was short-lived: in the twenty-first century, we know that bodies matter and that narratives about virtual disembodiment or equality often depend upon the very racial or gendered stereotypes that they purport to be eradicating.3 Technoculture studies scholar Lisa Nakamura sets up a key question about race and the Internet: “Can the Internet propagate genuinely new and nonracist (and nonsexist and nonclassist) ways of being,” or is “online discourse . . . woven of stereotypical cultural narratives that reinstall [the] conditions of gender, race, and class as conditions of social interaction?” (Digitizing Race xii). Gibson’s Bridge trilogy investigates this very problem, ultimately demonstrating that discourses of race, gender, and class are reliant on the binary opposition between physical and virtual, as well as interiority and exteriority. Gibson destabilizes these easy binary distinctions through the creation of an alternative space, Walled City, and a character, Rei Toei, who is both real and virtual.

In the future universe of Gibson’s trilogy, the Internet has become as highly regulated and policed as actual physical spaces. In reaction to this, radicals create a digital city located outside of the restrictions of the mainstream Internet: Walled City has “no laws . . . just agreements,” and therefore houses an eclectic population who have founded a new space outside of, and resistant to, the dominant digital culture (Idoru 209). As Masahiko puts it, it is “of the Net, but not on it.” Gibson’s “Walled City” much resembles the “City of Bits” described by the late William J. Mitchell, who was dean of the school of architecture at MIT and a prescient urban and media theorist: “This will be a city unrooted to any definite spot on the surface of the earth, shaped by connectivity and bandwidth constraints rather than by accessibility and land values, largely asynchronous in its operation, and inhabited by disembodied and fragmented subjects who exist as collections of aliases and agents. Its places will be constructed virtually by software instead of physically from stones and timbers, and they will be connected by logical linkages rather than by doors, passageways, and streets” (William J. Mitchell 24).4 The emphasis on virtual “logical linkages” over physical barriers like “doors and passageways” suggests that the virtual city does not share the same social inequities that are represented by the architectural enclosures of material cities, meant to keep locals in and invaders out. At the same time, it would be inaccurate to maintain that Gibson’s Walled City is “unrooted to any definite spot . . . on earth” because we learn that Walled City is a reproduction of the real city of Kowloon (also known as Kowloon Walled City). A largely ungoverned settlement in Hong Kong, when it was a British colony, Kowloon functioned as an autonomous zone that had been without laws or police because of a mistake in the possession agreement with China. As described in Gibson’s novel Idoru, it was a tiny space but extremely densely populated, which housed “drugs and whores and gambling. But people living, too. Factories, restaurants. A city. No laws” (221).

Gibson’s allusion to the historical Kowloon Walled City goes beyond merely exoticizing the city for its criminality and otherness. Rather, I argue that the historical allusion grounds Gibson’s virtual Walled City in real, inhabited space, thus disrupting the taken for granted binary between digital and physical spaces. This linking together of virtual and material space continues in the first lengthy description of the city:

Something at the core of things moved simultaneously in mutually impossible directions. It wasn’t even like porting. Software conflict? Faint impression of light through a fluttering of rags. And then the thing before her: building or biomass or cliff face looming there, in countless unplanned strata, nothing about it even or regular. Accreted patchwork of shallow random balconies, thousands of small windows throwing back blank silver rectangles of fog. Stretching to the periphery of vision, and on the high, uneven crest of that ragged façade, a black fur of twisted pipe, antennas sagging under vine growth of cable. And past this scribbled border a sky where colors crawled like gasoline on water. Hak Nam . . . City of Darkness. Between the walls of the world. (Idoru 195)

Most salient in this passage about Gibson’s Walled City are the architectural structures that abound—buildings, balconies, windows, and façades. Even though these appear as man-made structures, Gibson weaves natural or organic imagery into their descriptions: Chia, the young protagonist of Gibson’s second text of the trilogy, can’t tell if what she first sees is a “building” or “cliff face,” windows become “silver rectangles of fog,” pipes are described as “black fur,” cables are dense as “vine growth,” and the sky is a combination of gasoline and water. Similarly, diction such as “countless unplanned strata, nothing about it even or regular,” “accreted patchwork,” “uneven crest of that ragged façade,” and “scribbled border” repeat the notion of improvisation over orderliness. This blurring of boundaries between natural and artificial, material and virtual is what composes this ideal city of Gibson’s. It is a different virtual experience from the cyberspace of Neuromancer, with its abstract, jewel-colored geometric forms and its clean dualism of “meat” and virtuality. Bodies and the spaces they inhabit—Laney’s deteriorating body in Cardboard City; Zona’s disabled, brown body in Mexico; Masahiko’s unconscious body sprawled in a love hotel in Tokyo—simply can’t be obscured under the Internet’s optimistic rhetoric of universal freedom and the disappearance of space and distance. The ideal city must combine the material and the virtual; it must use the new digital order to restructure and reconfigure our inhabited spaces.

There is a long philosophical tradition of theorizing the virtual in a way that suggests that the virtual is consistently tied to the real. I will briefly survey some of the dominant critical approaches here, before turning specifically to Brian Massumi’s theoretical model that links new modes of bodily sensation to virtual experience—of particular importance to our discussion of digital technologies, race, and embodiment. In Matter and Memory, Henri Bergson aligns the virtual with memories and dreams: “Whenever we are trying to recover a recollection, to call up some period of our history, we become conscious of an act sui generis by which we detach ourselves from the present in order to replace ourselves, first, in the past in general, then in a certain region of the past—a work of adjustment, something like the focusing of a camera. But our recollection still remains virtual” (143). For Bergson, the virtual (dreams, memories, imaginations, pure qualities) is real insofar as it has an effect on us; in other words, the virtual insists on the real. It is not accidental that Bergson uses the analogy of a technological apparatus—the “focusing of a camera”—to ground his notion of the virtual in material reality. Building on Bergson’s ideas, Gilles Deleuze writes that both the actual and the virtual are real, but not everything that is virtual is or becomes actual. Similarly, science philosopher Pierre Levy maintains: “The virtual is that which has potential rather than actual existence. The virtual tends toward actualization. . . . The tree is virtually present in the seed” (23).

Political philosopher and social theorist Brian Massumi describes the virtual as being akin to unused, potential energy. As he puts it, “One way of starting to get a grasp on the real-material-but-incorporeal is to say it is to the body, as a positioned thing, as energy is to matter. Energy and matter are mutually convertible modes of the same reality. This would make the incorporeal something like a phase-shift of the body in the usual sense, but not one that comes after it in time. It would be a conversion or unfolding of the body contemporary to its every move. Always accompanying. Fellow-traveling dimension of the same reality” (5). Most helpful about Massumi’s theory is the manner in which he describes the virtual in relation to the body’s sense of affect and sensation. Rather than existing as abstract information, for Massumi, the virtual consists of processes that operate on multiple registers of sensation. He sums this phenomenon up as the “‘real but abstract’ incorporeality of the body” (21).

Massumi’s notion of the virtual sensations of the body finds an illustrative example in Gibson’s Idoru. Returning again to the passage that details Chia McKenzie’s first experience of virtual Walled City, we encounter multiple references to movement and affect in cyberspace: “They were inside now, smoothly accelerating, and the squirming density of the thing was continual visual impact, an optical drumming. . . . A sharp turn. Another. Then they were ascending a maze of twisting stairwells, still accelerating, and Chia took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Retinal fireworks bursting there, but the pressure was gone” (195–196). The primary sensory quality evident in this passage is that of sight or vision. On the surface, this dominance of vision aligns with our typical experience of interacting with the computer or laptop: viewing a virtual two-dimensional image (or sometimes three-dimensional, as Internet connectivity and bandwidth constraints evolve) on a screen and pointing and clicking simultaneously with one’s fingers on an electronic mouse. However, Gibson’s depiction of Walled City exceeds these purely physical, bodily sensations. The visual sensation described occurs on another register beyond merely seeing, given the diction of “impact,” “drumming,” and “fireworks bursting” in conjunction with the eyes. In terms of the tactile, we are informed of Chia’s experience of a “squirming density” and “pressure” that appears alien and estranging to our regular body’s resistance against gravity. The pressure and density that Chia experiences most likely come in conjunction with the intense speeds at which she is traveling in cyberspace. Gibson’s portrayal of her movement in the cyber plane mostly resembles flight, particularly in conjunction with the pressure that Chia describes (g-force, per chance?). The way that Chia is able to navigate her virtual body with sharp turns and accelerations around Walled City’s immaterial architecture, its labyrinth of stairwells and buildings, constitutes an affective experience that exceed the regular sensations perceived by the body’s sensory organs; Chia’s online venture into Walled City can be accurately described only as sensations of Massumi’s “real-material-but-incorporeal” body. Chia’s navigation of her virtual urban space becomes an experience that augments, supplements, and cross-hatches her material urban inhabited space.

In creating an alternate space that straddles the incorporeal and the material, Gibson is perhaps offering us his vision of “genuinely new and nonracist (and nonsexist and nonclassist) ways of being” (to borrow Nakamura’s earlier phrasing). It is a virtual experience that does not negate the physical. Put another way, Thomas Foster reminds us that discourses of race have long been constructed within realms of the virtual and incorporeal, even before the advent of digital technologies. He points out “there is a specific racial history of the expropriability of the ‘soul’” (xxiii) and that “white power to represent blackness . . . takes the form of ‘miscegenated texts,’ in which AfricanAmericans figure as black bodies with white souls, that is, with an interiority comprehensible to white readers” (xxiii). Given this history, we might conclude that discourses of race have been reliant on the binary opposition between incorporeal and material, as well as interiority and exteriority. Gibson’s Idoru, Rei Toei, proves to be a thought experiment that challenges and disrupts such oppositions.

Gibson’s Idoru: Cybertype or Multicultural Cyborg?

Rei Toei, the idoru or idol singer of the second text of Gibson’s trilogy, is a world-famous pop star, an ideal beauty, an icon of sexual desire, and an artificially created avatar that disrupts the boundary between the completely virtual and the completely real. We are told she is “a personality-construct, a congeries of software agents, the creation of information-designers” (55). Rei is basically an exotic, virtual pinup girl, her immateriality inspiring physical male lust. When she first appears before Rydell—a rent-a-cop who appears in all three books of the trilogy—she is first naked, and then seen wearing clothes identical to his own. The detail of mirroring Rydell’s clothing suggests that Rei has no subjectivity of her own, but is only a reflection of Rydell’s masculine, Western desire. Her digital perfection creates an unrealistic ideal of beauty, which is most likely Gibson’s commentary on media stardom with the fan club that chases Rei and her “lover” Rez in Idoru.5

Eventually, however, the idoru evolves beyond this simulation of exotic Asian feminine beauty. At the end of All Tomorrow’s Parties, multiple physical Rei Toeis emerge from nanofax assemblers (a device utilizing nanotechnology to replicate items in various locations) across the world, a far cry from her original form as ephemeral hologram. In a fateful twist of irony, the nanofax assemblers are stationed at Lucky Dragon franchises. The stores, stereotypes of impersonal Asian global commodity culture, and their nanotechnology are subversively reappropriated by Rei. Rather than the goal of virtual disembodiment and “jacking in” to cyberspace that characterized Gibson’s earlier Sprawl novels, the idoru achieves the opposite objective of moving away from her original status as digital code toward literal corporeality and physical embodiment. We are told that she becomes “an emergent system, a self continually being iterated from experiential input . . . that river in to which one can never step twice. As she became more herself, through the inputting of experience, through human interaction, she grew and changed” (163). Rei Toei herself comments, “I’m so much more . . . I could go anywhere.” Here, while the idoru does not move entirely from being the sexual object of the male gaze (the multiple Reis emerge naked from the assemblers), Rei does appear to emerge as sentient subject, capable of independent thought and mobility. Her nakedness, in contrast to her earlier propensity to reflect others’ clothing appearances, may suggest a rebirth of sorts, in which Rei is now a blank slate ready to learn and acclimate to her external environment according to her own choices and will. The multiple Reis, however, also work to destabilize the notion of independent subjectivity and free will: we are left wondering which is the true Rei, or if there never was a true originary Rei in the first place since she was artificially constructed as a virtual, hologram idol.

The idoru shifts from object to subject, along with the resultant potential destabilizing of such subjectivity. As mere software, code, and programmed sexual desire at her inception, Rei Toei literally cements the notion of the Orient as an object devoid of subjectivity. Later, as she emerges naked from every Lucky Dragon nanofax kiosk on earth, the exoticized desire that she inspires has an uneasy and anxious merger with her status as autonomous subject. The bystanders watch her materialize from the assemblers first on television screens (every Lucky Dragon franchise has television displays of video surveillance of other Lucky Dragon franchises, all across the world), and then turn in shock to see Rei, not in the digitally mediated form of the TV screen, but directly before them in the flesh. This part in the narrative has a surprising effect of breaking the fourth wall for the reader of Gibson’s text as well: we, like the bystanders outside of the Lucky Dragon, are accessing Rei virtually (albeit in literary form), but the multiple Reis that pop out all over the world suggest that she can turn up anywhere, pushing the reader to not grow too comfortable with passively and pleasurably absorbing Rei and her story.

In challenging assumed notions regarding virtuality/reality, interiority/ exteriority, and subjectivity/objectification, Gibson’s Bridge trilogy destabilizes certain binary oppositions and preconceptions that consistently undergird techno-Orientalist stereotypes and narratives about Asian peoples and places. His texts demonstrate that techno-Orientalist discourses depend upon these oversimplified and neat binarisms. For instance, Gibson’s earlier Sprawl trilogy was contingent upon oppositions between “meat” and cyberspace, while the Bridge trilogy challenges us to think about the slippage and permeable boundaries between the virtual and the real. Such speculation allows for heterotopias like Gibson’s Walled City, where new modes of bodily sensation are introduced, and perhaps if we speculate further, new modes of thinking about racial embodiment beyond fantasies of Western penetration of the East. This is not to say that there is a symmetry between Western projections of the East and Eastern imaginings of the West; the West’s technoOrientalist representations of the East are quite powerful and pervasive. While it is important to critique representations of virtual Orientalism, I argue that such critiques are incomplete if they do not move beyond the unidirectional gaze that the West focuses on the East. We can do such work by examining the potential for dynamic crosscurrents or transactions that move in both directions (for instance, the East’s projections of the West, or even of itself ), and by examining the potential for techno-Orientalist discourse to adapt and disrupt its own stereotypes and representations.

### AT: Cap Good---Temporalities

#### Capitalism produces racialized temporalities in which Chinese labor is banished into abstractness, alienated from disguised social relations behind the products of human labor.

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By aligning Chinese bodies with abstract labor, their labor represents human labor in the abstract. It is this phantomlike objectivity of alien labor that establishes a commodity’s value. White bodies, on the other hand, are symbolically associated with concrete labor, which establishes a commodity’s quality.

Such a racial bifurcation of abstract and concrete labor is the work of the commodity fetish, which disguises the social relations behind the products of human labor. In terms of this book’s overarching claim, I argue that a key anchor of North American settler colonialism is an ideology of romantic anticapitalism that reifies a distinction between concrete and abstract social relations out of a misunderstanding of the dialectical nature of capitalism. Romantic anticapitalism hypostatizes the concrete, rooted, and pure, on one hand, and identifies capitalism solely with the abstract dimension of social relations, on the other. It glorifies what it sees as the concrete realm of social relations: white labor, the family, and the train itself—a machine whose concreteness is biologized as the “iron horse.” Alternatively, Chinese bodies are in nearly exclusive alignment with quasi-mechanized labor temporality, excluded from normative social and domestic temporalities. Once Chinese labor is no longer needed, romantic anticapitalism performs an aesthetic function by giving Chinese shape to the unrepresentable: giving bodily form to the abstract, temporal domination of capitalism. In this sense, Chinese labor allegorizes the commensurating function of abstract labor that propels capitalism forward. However, as Chakrabarty notes, for Marx the universal category of abstract labor serves two functions: “It is both a description and a critique of capital.”18 Following a Queer Marxist approach, this chapter will explore how abstract labor can pose such a critique.

The focus on temporality in Kingston’s and Fung’s work also serves to dramatize the impact of industrial technology on conceptions of time in the nineteenth century. In particular, railroad construction was intimately linked to the speed-up and internationalization of uniform time through technological innovation, time-space compression, and the standardization of Greenwich Mean Time. Completing a process of temporal secularization that began in the Middle Ages, time’s progressive detachment from the cosmos and human events was achieved in this period of national expansion and consolidation by rail. No longer did biblical events structure and determine time, as they once did within traditional Jewish and Christian conceptions of history; rather, time became increasingly continuous, homogeneous, and independent of events.19 Postone refers to this secularized temporality as “abstract time,” “an independent framework within which motion, events, and action occur . . . divisible into equal, constant, nonqualitative units.”20 Indeed, the progress of abstract time as a dominant form of time parallels the development of capitalism as a socially metabolic totality. In the context of this shift to a more totalizing capitalist temporality, what Kingston’s and Fung’s texts illuminate is how conceptions of time were racialized and sexualized. Indeed, as Petrus Liu specifies, it is a mistake to view socially necessary labor time as solely the mean labor time associated with technological developments but also in terms of its moral dimensions. He clarifies that “the value of a commodity is the amount of human labor embodied in it, but the value of the commodity of human labor is determined by moral and discursive operations outside the capitalist reproduction scheme.”21 Therefore, on one hand, white labor productivity and its heteronormative reproduction become qualitative expressions of morality and rationality associated with time discipline. As Michael O’Malley explains, there was a need “to protect time’s virtue,” its chastity tied to “scientific discipline requiring years of patient courting to master.”22 On the other, as I suggest in this chapter, Chinese labor becomes associated with the abstract, quantitative domination of labor time. This is what Postone de scribes as the “temporal dimension of the abstract domination that characterizes the structures of alienated social relations in capitalism.”23 Exposing the racialized temporalities of the labor process under capitalism, Kingston and Fung return with queer temporal revisions of labor and reproduction.

## Framework

### FW---Cruel Optimism

#### Rational political speculations produce cruel optimism, where progress narratives create empty promises that maximize productivity while leaving real people on the margins. Instead, we turn to the anomalies of discourse, where our strange futurity opens the aperture beyond frameworks of the knowable to open space for survivability.

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In an essay titled “The Rhetoric of Sex / The Discourse of Desire,” Samuel Delany examines one possible etymology for “discourse” that stems from the Latin word for an ancient Roman oval racetrack, where spectators stood on the inside of the track, while the runners raced around the encircled spectators. These Roman discourses, Delany notes, “were places of much betting . . . , the touting up of odds, and the endless speculative conversation on the merits of the racers characteristic today of horseracing tracks were a part of daily life at the discourse.”1 Building on Michel Foucault’s theorizations of discourse in Archaeology of Knowledge, Delany understands discourse as a structuring mechanism that not only “tells us what is central and what is peripheral,” but that also controls the entry and exit points of that facility.

Delany identifies the Roman discourse as an archaeology of knowledge that is simultaneously a primal scene for speculation. Discourse in this example presents itself as a mostly closed system that facilitates gambling by providing the conditions of manageable uncertainty without throwing itself over to chaos. The runners ostensibly never leave the track. What would happen, though, if they did? Like Foucault, Delany takes more interest in the multiplicity of discourses, discursive practices, and their relationships to the anomaly—that which falls beyond the purview of the discourse. For him, paying attention to the “anomalous and nonserious” discards of discourse reveals the exclusionary structuring mechanisms of the discourse itself.2 Delany moves through these thoughts on discourse to arrive at his perhaps better known set of formulations on paraliterature, which includes speculative fiction and all sorts of other “anomalous and nonserious” forms of writing. And as Delany points out, “‘anomalous and nonserious’ is how the accomplishments of women, whether in the arts or in the world, were judged. And the writings of blacks in this country were, until very recently, considered even more of an accident.”

“By our strangeness, we write our bodies into the future,” Miranda says.3 She’s talking about genetic mutation, but Larissa Lai also invokes queer and migrant futurity. These are the anomalous futures that have run amok from the discourse of speculation. Migrant Futures has been a study of speculation not so much as a genre, but rather as a discursive practice. Migrant futures are epistemological anomalies. They are science fictions less interested in getting the science right than in interrogating the systems that produced that science.

Speculation becomes a colonizing mechanism when it attempts to capture, profit from, and realize the future. Predictions, premeditations, precautions, preparedness—these are all signposts of a speculative science working to colonize the future. This book has located several arenas in which speculation has met up with these imperialist logics: the financial derivatives market, military securitization, transnational surrogacy insurance, global development banking, as well as bio- and geo-engineering. Speculation as discourse has been around for some time in various guises. Consider, for example, the progress narrative that primes the funding rationale for Henry Ford’s rubber plantation in Brazil. I have called attention to it in the figuration of homeland futurity at the U.S.-Mexico border. But it has been more interested in highlighting what it might mean to speculate otherwise.

In an article titled “Hope over Experience: Desirability and the Persistence of Optimism,” a team of Yale economists concluded that people’s desires direct them toward optimism over and against their so-called better judgment. Alan Greenspan denounced the “irrational exuberance” and blamed it for the Asian financial crisis in the 1990s. Through the work of queer theorists like Lauren Berlant and Jasbir Puar, we can see that capitalism thrives on the energy of this cruel optimism, pathologizing it only when the market collapses to save its idealized rational subject from reproach.

Migrant Futures addresses counterfactual futures as they are imagined in both apparent fictions—novels and films—as well as masked fictions such as economic forecasts, founding documents of scientific consortia, and development plans linked to structural adjustment loans. Rather than using the latter as background to understand the former, Migrant Futures places both types of extrapolative enterprises on an equal footing. Both generate cultural fictions that then produce material effects. If financialization is a project that turns human sentiment into data with the goal of predicting and mitigating risk for wealthy elites, Migrant Futures focuses on the speculative fictions of those populations shuttled in and out of zones of growth. The members of this undercommons refuse to participate in, and are denied access to, the ladder of corporate productivity and take comfort instead in forms of kinship and occupation that survive alongside and below the radar of freewheeling global entrepreneurialism. Their irrational exuberance serves them well in the struggle to enact an alternative economy of sharing amid destitution, love for others amid austerity, and collaboration amid incentivized competition.

To think of migrant futures is to posit that which may never come to pass but must nevertheless persist speculatively, against all odds. Perhaps the primary function of their existence is to hold open the aperture to the beyond, where the systems that seemingly dominate cease to overwhelm. The cultural texts assembled in this book explore a sense of wonder that exceeds or runs parallel to frameworks of the knowable. These speculations from below face uncertainty with exuberance, daring to stay open to chance, in part because that is all they have, but also because they are no longer playing the same game. They have left the track.

#### You should embrace reparative reading practices that reject neoliberal futures while sustaining futures toward survival

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Set in a dilapidated urban landscape, Malinky Robot revisits the primal scene of techno-Orientalist fantasy: Tokyo. However, by focusing on Tokyo’s day-laboring district of San’ya, which remains home to Tokyo’s dispossessed, Liew shifts the origin point of Japan’s economic success and underscores the vulnerability of those who were not folded into the prosperity of global capitalism.38 Like the denizens of Tokyo’s San’ya, Oliver and Atari “eke out a life” in a geopolitical context that works hard to eliminate them from the picture.39 Together they scrape together bits and pieces of culture, currency, and materials from the discarded matter of the city. “Eking out a life”—one of Liew’s favorite characterizations of Oliver and Atari’s mode of engaging with the world around them—resonates profoundly with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s formulation of reparative practices, which illuminates “the many ways selves and communities succeed in extracting sustenance from the objects of a culture—even of a culture whose avowed desire has often been not to sustain them.”40 Sedgwick’s formulations of reparative versus paranoid modalities distinguish between ways of experiencing time—within and beyond narrative forms. Distinct from paranoid reading, which is motivated by an attempt to inure oneself to potentially horrible futures, reparative reading stays open and vulnerable to the radical possibilities of surprise.41 Though called sequential art, comics as a literary form have a propensity for bending time across the page, wherein the space between panels—“the gutter”—could represent a fleeting moment or eons of time passing, not necessarily in chronological order. Malinky Robot flexes the possibilities of its graphic form to capture play and adventure in slow time at a moment when blockbuster films profit from ever more accelerated pacing. With sparse, unspectacularized story lines that amount to “a robot walks home,” or “two kids borrow bikes to visit a friend,” Liew’s utopian visions—ephemeral and provisional—unfurl across the daily exploits and mundane, communal acts of these unlikely heroes of the future. Malinky Robot ruminates on forms of idleness that upend conceptions of wasted time, while simultaneously highlighting the waste of capitalist overproduction. Whereas the dystopian tenor of techno-Orientalist cyberpunk and the breakneck ambition of Future•Singapore both engender a paranoid relation to futurity by manifesting either foreboding about or securitization of it, Malinky Robot remains remarkably open to surprise and radical uncertainty. In this way, it articulates a reparative form of speculation—one that revels in the play of chance rather than the taming of it.42 Malinky Robot opens in 2024 atop a skyscraper (figure 4.3), where sunrise finds the protagonists on top of the world, not because they own or dominate it, but because they have made the rooftop their makeshift shelter. Atari and Oliver are homeless, making do with life in urban decay. Here, “mornings are . . . stinky!!” (11). This is the surprising pronouncement that begins “Stinky Fish Blues,” the first story in the collection. At dawn, Oliver encounters not the optimistic vista of sunlit horizons but the smell of a stagnant city, littered with signs of broken technological promises. Yet morning does bring surprising, if fleeting, moments of hope and unexpected opportunity. Oliver and Atari go fishing at the docks and discover rare life in the toxic waters—the nearly extinct Foetidus piscis (the stinky fish), which has persisted despite barrels of industrial sludge polluting its home. Their fortuitous catch fosters the hope of cashing it in for reward, but the fish ultimately falls prey to a friend’s more pressing need to eat it. The kids are disappointed but not dejected, as prospects of cashing in recede to make allowances for the sharing of life in this contingent community. The stinky fish, living beyond all probability in pernicious condtions, serves as a fitting compatriot for Oliver and Atari, who manage to do more than just survive in a hostile environment. They dare to have dreams, foster friendships, and have adventures that actively extend the possibilities of the living conditions allotted to them, even if their dreams remain decidedly out of reach. Likely destined to earn a living through tough, menial, and temporary work, Oliver and Atari might entertain brief moments of hope, but the fantasy to fly is not about ascendancy or mastery. The view from the top of Oliver’s transient skyscraper haven differs from what Michel de Certeau describes in “Walking in the City.” From the summit of the World Trade Center, de Certeau experiences being “lifted out of the city’s grasp. . . . When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass. . . . His elevation transfigures him into a voyeur.”43 But Oliver’s prospects remain decidedly unchanged by this perspectival shift. He remains untransfigured, looking up like a homeless alien, not “looking down like a god.” This difference reverberates profoundly across the context of Atari’s and Oliver’s likely futures working in the construction sites that emblematize New Asia and its speculative building frenzy. Indeed, when the two look upon a construction site, they consider their curtailed set of opportunities, and even Oliver’s act of momentary ebullience (“I wanna fly a plane!”) (figure 4.4) seems squelched as the frame zooms out to capture the dwarfing effects of the world around him. The tops of skyscrapers yield only visions of unattainable aspirations and failed promises for Atari and Oliver, but they pursue adventure nonetheless and find in an arcade a virtual realization of Oliver’s hopes to pilot a plane. In this closing frame of the story (figure 4.5), Liew leaves us with a stunning display of reparative practice, of engaging in fleeting acts of pleasure to carve out alternative ways of looking forward. Together, Atari and Oliver explore alternative economies of exchange: they “borrow” bicycles that allow them to visit their friend Misha across town. Their mundane push toward collective ownership stands in stark contrast to the stealing-for-profit story Misha shares with them over lunch at “McDonnell’s” about Obiyashi Takamashuru, an unscrupulous man who stole the design for cantilevered gears on bikes from their mentor Mr. Bon Bon. This short vignette about bicycle thievery turns sideways when it’s revealed that bicycles themselves carry with them another story of stolen property. As we learn from Misha’s tale, the bicycle—as concept, design, and mode of transport—is always already stolen: the very mechanism that facilitates its locomotion turns out to be a lifted idea. Framed as the first in a series of comics within a comic, Misha’s Ingrown Nale reveals the history of the bicycle as property privatized and patented in the shadiest of circumstances, throwing the world of propriety into ethical question. Drawn in the heavily cross-grained and stridently scraggy pen-and-ink style of graphic mavericks such as Robert Crumb, Ingrown Nale (ostensibly produced from Misha’s hand but of course also a testament to Liew’s creative range) takes the reader into Obiyashi’s demented world of ruthless corporate competition, greed, and dishonesty. We follow Obiyashi to work on the day of his death and descent to a Dante-inspired hell, where he confesses how he stole the design of the cantilevered gear system. Though certainly incentivized to villainous action, Obiyashi turns out to be a dupe, trapped in the promise of a better future (figure 4.6). Before his fateful cardiac arrest, he reflects on his situation: “30 years! My life, a series of dwindling offices. I long for: the ocean, the trees, the breadth [sic] of my children as yet unborn. Today, though, will be a day different from days before” (45). We witness this corporate wonk’s perpetually fruitless drive toward upward mobility in several key details. Obiyashi’s namesake might ironically be Obayashi Global, the Japanese multinational construction corporation behind the building of Tokyo Sky Tree, the world’s tallest broadcasting tower. Obiyashi’s ascent in the corporate elevator leads him to a dead-end cube of an office. In his futile attempt to climb out of hell, he maniacally exclaims: “They gave me an office! They gave me a car! And a hat to wear for when it got windy!” (48). In these exclamations we hear the despair wrought by this subject’s investments in “aspirational normativity”:44 a perpetually upskilled life, heteronormative reproductive futurity, and a drive toward individualistic achievement. Obiyashi has spent years subjected to the “good life” logics of neoliberal capitalism—the logics that rationalize financial and social speculations privileging profit for the few over more disposable lives that don’t fit or aspire to the same narrative. The astonishing and inspiring element of the Malinky Robot stories is their commitment to disarming the seduction of neoliberal ascension and individualism in favor of cultivating extended practices of care and more inclusive notions of family and collective responsibility. In figure 4.7, we see Oliver’s comic strip embedded within the larger comic world of Malinky Robot. “Hi-Life” features two construction workers on their lunch break, sitting on a beam high up in a skyscraper, evocative of Charles Clyde Ebbets’s famous photograph, Lunch atop a Skyscraper, shot at New York City’s Rockefeller Center in 1932. In both examples, the drama revolves around the precariousness of high-rise construction work. Without harnesses, the workers seem alarmingly casual about their safety. Unlike the Depression-era photo, though, the display of risk in Oliver’s version has not been staged by corporate interest to promote the building of another Rockefeller skyscraper. Neither is the uncertainty of a person’s future contained by a narrative about the importance of saving. Liew opts, instead, to stay with the awkwardness of uncertainty, as one of the workers admits that he spends all his money on alcohol. In Malinky Robot, a post–financial crash story, putting money in a savings or interest-bearing retirement account might actually be more foolish than squandering one’s earnings on the pleasure of daily drinking. The snippet demonstrates Liew’s purposive undercutting of the “good life” promise—a promise of better futures that the act of building skyscrapers would seem to deliver. However, in Malinky Robot technological inventions, whether in the form of skyscrapers or cantilevered bike gears, fail to deliver on their promises. Oliver’s “Hi-Life” points to the irrelevance of whether these workers invest in the future or not; it recasts the tale of opportunity as a farce for those whom capitalism has deemed disposable, replaceable, and ultimately without a future. Liew sabotages reproductive futurity in a similar comic within a comic that plays on the popular children’s magazine activity of spotting the difference. Whereas a smiling child secures the happiness of the family portrait in the first panel, a tombstone supplants the child in the second and shatters the sunny disposition of reproductive futurity. Shattered also is the very exercise of spotting differences. These images make no pretense to similitude; with starkly contrasting color palettes—the first is in bright, mostly primary, colors, and the second is in macabre gray scale—spotting their differences hardly requires practiced sleuthing or careful discernment of the normal from the aberrant. Refusing to engage the familiar, normative apparatus, Liew puts pressure on Highlights’s slogan “fun with a purpose.”45 Oliver’s morbid rendering of spotting differences interrogates and dramatically halts the instrumentalization of fun. The critique of instrumentalized fun stands in direct contrast to Oliver’s preference for “irrational exuberance” over edutainment’s developmental games, designed to put kids on the dubious cutting edge of competitively tracked educational systems governed by quantitative evaluation and techno-positivist entrepreneurs. In this way, Oliver’s “Spot the Difference” comic registers a complaint against what Lee Edelman has termed “reproductive futurism,”46 a holding up of the figure of the child as the naturalized site of political incitement. The fraught case of imagining who shall inherit future Singapore, though, charts how capitalist development and ecological sustainability hold the question of reproduction and futurity in tension. Whereas a pronatalist movement in the 1980s led to a baby-bonus program with financial incentives for couples considering having second or third children, 1999 (on the heels of the financial crash of 1997–98) marked the launch of Singapore’s international head-hunting program to recruit students and professionals primarily from India and China.47 In 2001, the baby-bonus program was reinstated, awarding mothers $4,000 for each of the first two children born and $6,000 for the next two. More recently, at Singapore’s 2008 National Day, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong dedicated more than 5,000 words of his speech to discussing the falling birth rate.48 Singapore’s concern over its low birth rate—among the lowest in the world—was perhaps most overtly broadcast when a 2012 Mentos ad went viral, calling for a National Night wherein Singaporeans would enact their “civic duty” to make babies.49 Set to a song in which a male vocalist raps: “It’s National Night and I want a baby, boo, I know you want it, so duz the sdu,” the commercial refers to the Social Development Unit (renamed the Social Development Network), a governmental body devoted to addressing the low birth rate and housed under the broader reaching Ministry of Social and Family Development. That state development includes such calls to reproduction as civic duty situates Singaporean futurity not in the figure of the child, but in actual children. The Mentos commercial, in its unapologetic overture to heterosexual baby making, makes clear the connections between reproductive futurity and other speculative futures. National Night, according to the video, also means getting aroused by the potential of buying a $900 stroller and taking a stroll through the Gardens by the Bay park—a billion-dollar, 103-acre public construction project that even looks like a giant bubble of speculative financing with all the aesthetic trappings of speculative futurity. It is against these financial forms of irrational exuberance that Atari and Oliver’s flights of fancy and moments of ebullience stand in contrast. Nevertheless, the exuberance Liew captures in his vibrant, dynamic, and wiggling lines also distinguishes itself from the imaginary of austerity and responsibility, marshaled by discourses of personal finance.50 In another sidebar comic within a comic, Atari’s imagined superhero Doctor Midnight (Mr. Bon Bon in disguise) administers punishment to his foes even as he spouts after-school specials’ canned statements about health and fitness. With each pow! krak! bif! blow to the thugs who have come to claim the stolen bicycles, the doctor administers “medicine”: “floss after every meal!” “always wear your seat-belt!” and “Maintain an active lifestyle!” (60). Doctor Midnight’s recitation of sound-bites about selfimprovement and healthy living as civic virtue is decidedly ironic. For all of modern science’s promises of its beneficial effects on the population, these pledged benefits have passed over Oliver and Atari, who seem wholly unmoved by overtures to longevity and prosperity. As the sworn defender of street urchins, Doctor Midnight interrogates for whom these logics of prolonging life are designed. After dispatching his adversaries, he rebukes the thin assurances of better tomorrows: “Who builds the cities? By whose sweat, by whose blood?? And in return to ask nothing but a roof over their heads. . . . Seeking merely to manage from day to day . . . in these times of unending change . . . and in the bitter end to shuffle into the darkness of this mortal coil that binds us all. What is it that awaits us beyond that final frontier? What indignities, what sorrows? What semblance of this hell that we have already tasted on this cruel earth?” (61). The city of the future does not provide a roof over the heads of those who built it. Oliver and Atari “manage from day to day” by squatting in makeshift shelters either on rooftops or in abandoned “McDonnell’s” sites, making do with the materials of dilapidated futurity. Doctor Midnight’s closing monologue alludes to the oscillatory quality of Hamlet’s considerations “to be or not to be.” The allusion helps illuminate the relationship between life and futurity— “perchance to dream”—and insists on the importance of thinking of the future as contested and critical terrain. If they were to buy into the aspirations of upward mobility and the gleaming promises of Asian futurity, Oliver and Atari would partake in what Lauren Berlant has called “cruel optimism.” Berlant investigates “what happens to fantasies of the good life when the ordinary becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to ‘have a life’ that adjustment seems like an accomplishment.”51 In many ways, Malinky Robot sketches out in haunting beauty the condition of “living in crisis,”52 wherein we encounter Atari and Oliver negotiating “the impasse” of everyday crisis in their temporary shelters and tender socialities.53 In Atari and Oliver’s daily exploits, we find a sustained rumination on the caring relationship between two truant geeks who aspire “toward and beyond survival,” but in ways that move “toward an opening that does not involve rehabituation, the invention of new normativities, or working through and beyond trauma.”54 Rather than eschewing Asian futurity in the face of techno-Orientalism, Malinky Robot follows Berlant’s injunction “to imagine better economies of intimacy and labor.”55 Launched from within a “McDonnell’s” where Atari and Oliver have scored a free lunch from their friend Misha, this series of embedded comics, which include Misha’s story of the theft of Mr. Bon Bon’s intellectual property, Oliver’s Sunday funnies about joblessness and curtailed futures, and Atari’s Doctor Midnight superhero comic, allows incredible artistry and imaginative storytelling to unfurl against the backdrop of Super size french fries and the multinational reach of corporations like McDonald’s. As the friends return to their neighborhood on their borrowed bicycles, they run into Mr. Bon Bon, whose backstory they’ve just learned over lunch. In the closing full-page panel of “Bicycles,” we see Bon Bon crouch to inspect the cantilevered gear, the sign of all that could have been. But, as the ordinary hero, Mr. Bon Bon simply asks if the kids are hungry and suggests a new noodle place where they can eat, “his treat.” In the cruel world of foreclosed opportunities, where Mr. Bon Bon works construction even though his invention could have gained him access to a life of financial security and relative comfort, Liew’s story bears witness to the startling willingness to cultivate tender ties in precarious times. Malinky Robot posits an alternative to cruel optimism—call it a queer exuberance—that persists not only in the queer kinships Misha, Atari, Oliver, and Mr. Bon Bon form amid conditions of contingency and precarity, but also in Liew’s ekphrastic exercise that restores texture to Asian futurity when techno-Orientalism works to smooth over the vicissitudes of neoliberalism. As Singapore relies increasingly on temporary migrant workers, its flexible accumulation trades on the cruelly optimistic drive toward a good life and the promise of an Asian futurity that will never arrive for the vast majority of the workers who sustain the wealth of the few. Malinky Robot imagines otherwise.

### FW---Fiat

#### Narrative constructions of the future materialize the way we invest in the present. Their seemingly objective predictions calculate subjects into knowability while simultaneously rendering data into fiction, unleashing abstract symbolic violence onto the world. Our uncertainty disrupts securitization and embraces the knowable as lived experience, creating a horizon of the not yet for non-White futurities.

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This book puts into conversation speculative finance and speculative fiction as two forms of extrapolative figuration that participate in the cultural production of futurity. To put these two seemingly disparate arenas of narrative production into conversation, I largely use the methodologies of an emerging field that could be called critical finance studies in conjunction with a longer standing field called feminist science studies, which trained me to beware of the “god trick of seeing everything from nowhere” purveyed by the seemingly pure, objective vision of scientific and capitalist realism.6 It is indeed a god trick to get people to mistake prophecy for truth, notional figure for value, or futurity for the future. As a lifetime student of the power of narrative to alter reality, or at least perceptions of it, I have often been awed by fiction’s nearly magical actuarial potency. By approaching both speculative finance and speculative fiction as narrative productions, I emphasize the performativity of economics and therefore the potential power of the literary imagination to call forth new political economies, ways of living, and alternative relational structures; and different sorts of subjects into the world.

I use the term “futurity” to highlight the construction of the future and denaturalize its singularity, while maintaining an emphasis on how narrative constructions of the future play a significant role in materializing the present. “Extrapolation,” for example, is the name for the mathematical modeling practice economists use to predict future commodity prices and investment trends based on data compiled in databases such as the crb Commodity Yearbook, Wharton Research Data Services, as well as Global Financial Data Solutions. At the same time, science fiction studies might first associate extrapolation with the eponymous academic journal, which publishes scholarly essays on science fiction (also called extrapolative or speculative fiction). Migrant Futures investigates how we narrate futurity across various platforms, from speculative fiction to financial speculation. How do our stories of the future chart the ways we invest—financially, politically, ideologically, and intellectually—in the present? How do the logics of preemption break across the shores of financial securitization, military preparedness, and scientific projection? These are some of the questions taken up by anthropologists, sociologists, historians, cultural theorists, and other scholars contributing to an interdisciplinary examination of financialization.7

Most notably, Edward LiPuma and Benjamin Lee assert the social construction of financial derivatives—a social construction that, like race, nonetheless has profound material effects on people’s livelihoods, state politics, and international conflicts. LiPuma and Lee call derivatives “socially imaginary objects” and assert “the social construction of the various types of derivatives.”8 They also emphasize the “abstract symbolic violence” that speculative capital wreaks on the world—“symbolic in the sense that it is not accomplished physically by means of military force or colonialism, though it may, of course, engender the conditions (such as impoverishment) that precipitate violent crime and warfare” and “abstract in the sense that it never appears directly; rather it mediates and stands behind local realities—such as interest rates, food costs, and the price of petroleum.”9 One poignant example that LiPuma and Lee provide is the effect of presidential elections on the global economy. In the case of the 2002 Brazilian presidential election, for example, when Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva of the Worker’s Party was projected to win, “the principal players in the Latin American financial markets started to sell and short the Brazilian currency.”10 Electoral projections produced economic reality. As Migrant Futures headed into the final stages of production, the United States has witnessed the election of Donald Trump as its president. On the evening of November 8, 2016, as people watched the results come in, they also noted the Dow Jones falling precipitously. By morning, though, markets seemed to have leveled out, and the futures markets in U.S. Steel and private prisons in particular were looking quite good, indeed. This last example, when read through the burgeoning body of critical work in prison abolition movements, yokes the abstract violence of finance capitalism to more overt manifestations of state violence as exacted through the police force disproportionately on black and brown, queer and trans bodies in the United States.

Predicated on prediction, the algorithmic models used in the financial sector as well as by insurance companies often count on the movements of legible and calculable subjects. Financial speculation, extrapolation, and prediction rely on mathematical models and probabilistic logics to transform quantitative data into a narrative arc. By plotting points along a line on a graph and deriving meaning from those data, these narratives require a rendering of a trajectory. Though that rendering often takes shape in the visual field of graphic representation, financial forecasters produce extrapolative fiction when they functionally convert data into an interpretive arc, to be articulated and narrativized in and beyond the graphic form. Econometrics extrapolates from data collected by the University of Michigan Consumer Sentiment Index and Index of Consumer Expectations, for example, which reduce sentiment and expectation to numeric values in an attempt to measure and then advise for or against hedging uncertain futures. This “datafication” is also a rendering of data into fiction or statistical narrative, which Kathleen Woodward has characterized as “the preeminent expression of late capitalism.”11 Financial speculation produces a kind of speculative fiction, and despite its overtures to fact over fiction, it both contributes to and is affected by a broader cultural production of futurity. By reading the social construction of financial derivatives alongside more readily recognizable forms of speculative fiction, Migrant Futures asks if another mode of speculation is possible, one that is not immediately captured by the anxious gatherings of risk.12 If finance is, as Max Haiven characterizes it, “capitalism’s imagination,” wherein neoliberal financialization “comes at the expense of the radical imagination,” I locate a primary site of radical imagination in migrant futures that shift the site of emergency away from terror toward deportation, attend to alternative pockets of wonder such as feminist fabulation rather than defense strategy think tanks, and speculate worlds that demand new onto-epistemological ways of being and thinking.

Launching this examination are fundamental questions about who narrates these futurities and what kinds of subject positions play out in these projected temporal landscapes. Implicitly, the project interrogates who stands to profit from and who risks extinction in prevailing narratives about the future. The principal players in the derivatives markets are multinational corporations, international agencies such as the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, investment banks, and hedge funds that pool the investments of wealthy clients—basically, everyone but individuals and nations.13 The funds of the four largest U.S. participants—JPMorgan Chase, Citibank, Bank of America, and Goldman Sachs—represent more than 30 percent of the total global derivatives market.14 Furthermore, the fundamental governance of the global financial system has been dominated entirely by U.S. and European economic interests, though countries with clearly emerging market economies, such as China, India, and Brazil, have demanded a seat at the rule-making table.15 The financial colonization of the future builds on preexisting disparities of wealth held over from earlier histories of empire and neocolonial enterprises that break at the fault line between what has been called the Global North and South.

Meanwhile, mass migrations of the undocumented, unbanked, and state-less workers move in and out of geopolitical spaces, the nuances and histories of their displacement and precarity flattened by statistical aggregation. They are migrant noncitizens, outliers, most of whom hail from the Global South and have slipped beyond even “dividual” statistical legibility.16 In the calculus of risk, the unmeasurable uncertainty of this statistical undercommons generates some friction, some disruption of the would-be-unflappable promises of securitization. The economist Frank Knight, in his interrogation of risk, distinguishes calculable probability (risk) from the “absolute unpredictability of things” (true uncertainty).17 In the risk-uncertainty dialectic, sheer uncertainty invites profit seekers to convert profoundly unknowable states into probabilistic forecasts, to fold uncertainty back into risk practices—yet uncertainty cuts loose from risk discourse’s capture, eluding containment and quantification. While true uncertainty might refuse the grid of intelligibility that securitization would foist upon it, it remains knowable as lived experience, felt and negotiated perhaps most profoundly by those held in “the waiting-room of history.” As he describes this imaginary waiting room in Provincializing Europe, Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests that the “modern, European idea of history. . . came to non-European peoples in the 19th century as somebody’s way of saying ‘not yet’ to somebody else.”18 In the context of finance capitalism, though, the inhabitants of the waiting room are in fact being written out of the future. What would it mean to reconfigure that marginalization from European notions of progress, modernity, history, and futurity? What alternative futurities emerge from those living beyond the purview of statistical projection?

If the abstraction of populations into calculated risks and algorithmic approximations of lived experiences produces for state and international regulatory institutions “a legible and administratively convenient format,”19 queer and trans theorists have been particularly helpful in thinking through a politics that does not simply demand inclusion in that system. A 2015 special issue of Transgender Studies Quarterly, for example, takes aim at the “imperative to be counted,” which becomes “another form of normativizing violence that trans subjects can encounter.”20 Census Bureau and National Health Statistics data that feed U.S. biopolitical regimes of population regulation work to regularize a population and “flatten its zoetic confusions of movement and form, of time and space, of doing and being, into neat two-dimensional axes specifying static properties and numbers.”21 Population regulation and public health discourse, insofar as they share statistical methods with financial models of speculating on risk, could very well move toward three-dimensional models using differential geometry and statistical mechanics to predict volatility.22 But no matter how nuanced and complex the models get, Paisley Currah and Susan Stryker’s provocation to consider how trans disrupts configurations of “statistical citizenship” opens up a queering of speculation and perhaps even a queering of statistical data as numerical or categorical, discrete or continuous, nominal or ordinal.23 By “queering speculation,” I refer to a host of reconfigurations of our relationships to the “financialization of daily life” and the manifestation of a “risk society”—which is to say a normative investment in quantitative data to project futurity.24

When José Muñoz asserts that “the future is queerness’s domain,” he posits a horizon of potentiality. Though that horizon might invoke Martin Heidegger’s Being and Time and therefore asks us to contend with Heidegger’s Nazism, Muñoz’s articulation of a not yet draws more compellingly not only on Giorgio Agamben’s formulation but also on Ernst Bloch’s theorization of indeterminacy. Muñoz’s presentation of the not yet of queer futurity suggests a way to seize the not yet of European historicity as described in Chakrabarty’s waiting-room scenario. In Muñoz’s words, “we are left waiting but vigilant in our desire for another time that is not yet here.” Queer futurity offers a model for transforming the waiting room into a horizon. As it moves through examples of queer art, performance, and other queer utopian expressions, Muñoz’s Cruising Utopia looks to the realm of the open-ended gesture as an alternative to the way other forms of speculation attempt to pull that horizon of the future into the present for profit.25

By enjambing these two formulations of the not yet—one that seeks to illuminate histories of empire and exclusion, and another that insists on futurity as an opening up rather than a closing down—I want to consider the relationship between the waiting room and the horizon. For it is precisely in the exile’s relation to time—the point at which one is pushed out of what could be called straight time, settler time, or the profitable time of compound interest—that one can glimpse the horizon of the not yet, where not yet manifests itself not as a decree of foreclosure but as an embrace of the unknown. Building on the work of C. L. R. James, Muñoz writes: “To call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics.”26

### FW---Gaming

#### The gamespace of debate is intertwined with late capitalism – assumptions of fair play and logistical mapping reinscribe the conditions that uphold the fantasy of perfecting space. Instead, our extreme Asian gaming disrupts capitalist time and blurs the boundaries between Occident and Orient.

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In an essay called “Angels in Digital Armor: Technoculture and Terror Management” (2010), media scholar Marcel O’Gorman argues that notions of heroism in contemporary technoculture aim to satisfy two primary existential needs: the desire for recognition and the denial of death. Most video games interpellate players by reinforcing ideologies that underpin the sovereign subject, who believes herself to be immortal and master of the world represented on the computer screen. Gaming is one part of a broadly conceived digital technoculture for O’Gorman. Appropriating Bernard Stiegler’s thesis that the technologization of culture is linked to profound malaise and ontological indifference, O’Gorman argues that online heroism, constituted through attention garnered on Facebook, YouTube, and the news media, goes hand in hand with the disavowal of mortality and finitude. Toward this O’Gorman analyzes cases of gamer death in China and Korea, the Columbine High School shootings, and Cho Seung-Hui, the Virginia Tech shooter, as “explicitly technological, or even ‘cyber,’ because they involve the perpetrators’ use of media to rehearse or to promote their exploits in a desperate plea for recognition” (O’Gorman). He does not discuss race explicitly but implies that all users of digital media are somehow implicated.

While we agree with O’Gorman’s diagnosis of the culture of online celebrity and the proliferation of technically induced malaise, his analysis runs the danger of overgeneralization with the blanket term “technoculture.” We would like to attend to the specificity of video gaming and its Orientalist figuration by isolating a mechanic of StarCraft that is common to most video games: the acquisition of capital. More specifically, for the remainder of the essay we further interrogate the relationship between work and play. While drawing from McKenzie Wark’s Gamer Theory and key game play mechanics from StarCraft, we argue that extreme video gaming may be read to challenge the presuppositions that deem it “unproductive” labor. In doing so, we argue that extreme gaming upends notions of capitalist time, pointing to ontological aporias that blur the distinction between Occidental and Oriental.

Playing StarCraft teaches its players about life outside of the game, a testament perhaps to its broader relevance, training them to become better capitalists. Because of the cutthroat level of competition and the constant influx of new talent, professional gamers in Korea mostly enjoy short careers that are abbreviated by mandatory military service. After being discharged from the military, pro gamer Lee Joong Heon was employed at a video game company. But after a five-year retirement, Lee, formerly a Warcraft III player, decided to return to eSports and made the transition to StarCraft II. In a 2009 interview, Lee relates that his return is temporary and that he will retire again in three years. A job in a trading company is lined up for him once he is done gaming professionally (Yong-woo Kim). In a parallel career move, pro gamer Seo Jihoon found a position as a sports marketer with the Korean conglomerate CJ Group once he retired from StarCraft. A book published in 2000 in the wake of the financial crisis called Starcnomics connects StarCraft and its game play mechanics to the business world (Tae-heung Kim; Hee-jong Kang). The parallel between the logic of gaming and business may be evidenced in the United States as well. The University of Florida has offered a class on “21st Century Skills in StarCraft,” while the University of California, Berkeley campus has competitive StarCraft courses. Playing StarCraft teaches one to become better at life within capitalism.

These examples illustrate that StarCraft is not merely a form of play; instead, much of the “play” within the game could be considered a form of work. Unlike many video games, the player does not control an avatar or an in-game virtual representative (usually the main character of a narrative). In StarCraft and many RTS games, the player assumes a godlike overseer/ manager position with an isometric view of the battlefield. At the start of a session, the player can see and control his or her base, with the rest of the map, in the bottom-left corner of the screen, obscured by a “fog of war.” If the player clicks on parts of the map past his or her base, the view is hidden in blackness until it is traversed by one of the player’s military units. The player knows only two things: how large the map is and that an enemy is located somewhere. As in cognitive mapping, the player wishes to lift the fog of war to chart out the playing area and master the space. The player does not engage the enemy immediately, for he or she must first build up forces in preparation for it. And in order to prepare, the player must acquire and manage resources, like the capitalist in life outside the game.

Thus despite its twenty-fifth-century settings, game play in StarCraft proceeds with twentieth-century late capitalistic assumptions. At the start of each game, the player is given a central base, four worker units, and start-up capital. With these resources, the player constructs more buildings such as barracks, factories, gateways, and spawning pools in order to recruit more workers, build new structures, and produce new military units. The worker units acquire vespene gas (a resource only found in the game) from geysers and harvest minerals from the environment. The barracks train an array of offensive and defensive military units, each with particular modes of movement and attack patterns. Oftentimes preparation for battle—and the battle itself—can take only minutes or an hour and more, and the player is forced to make most of these crucial moments by planning ahead, making quick decisions, and moving rapidly. The thrill of engaging the enemy must be preceded by this tedious labor, which is squandered when the player’s units are destroyed in combat. As such, the aim of producing only in order to destroy and be destroyed aligns StarCraft with something akin to building a sand castle. The pleasure of constructing a sand castle is embodied in the labor utilized to build something ephemeral. Within capitalism, this ephemerality is obscured by the ideological belief that tedious labor is productive labor, yet management within StarCraft brings the basic ephemerality of capital itself to the fore.

In Gamer Theory, McKenzie Wark breaks down the distinction between the real world and the illusory world of the video game. He coins the term “gamespace” to signify not the virtual realm depicted on a screen, but a physically placeless realm where the logic of gaming, including quantitative modes of human valuation such as the “lifebar,” indicated underneath each unit, underpins lived existence. In contrast to Johan Huizinga’s famous definition of play as “a stepping out of ‘real’ life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own,” for Wark playing video games is coextensive with the human operation of hardware and software in our contemporary postFordist economy (26). “Games are not representations of this world,” Wark writes, “they are more like allegories of a world made over as gamespace. They encode the abstract principles upon which decisions about the realness of this or that world are now decided” (20). Considered within the logic of late capitalism, gamespace quickly takes on a holistic aspect, for it also describes the total administration of human activity outside the video game, while perpetuating the ideology that the game is nevertheless predicated on the “fair fight” and the maintenance of a “level playing field.” Gamespace overlaps with the space of the neoliberal, global economy. For Wark, a critical theory of video games begins by taking outside reality not as the model to which games should aspire, but itself as “a gamespace that appears as an imperfect form of the computer game” (22).

As Wark dismantles the binary between reality and game, other distinctions are implicated. Specifically, if gamespace describes an existential condition in late capitalism, and if the mechanics of reward and punishment operative in video games allegorizes an identical mechanics in contemporary lived life, then Wark’s deconstruction necessarily carries similar implications for the distinction between work and play. While in an earlier era of capitalist development such a distinction structured what Marx called “species-being,” as well as productive and unproductive activity, in the age of video games work becomes another form of play, and vice versa. Gaming is a form of work, but as of yet not everyone is paid to play.

The rules of fair play in video games and the ideology of neoliberalism intersect: if the player works hard, the player’s efforts will be acknowledged and the work compensated. Most video games are motivated by this reward dynamic through the achievement of a high score or the acquisition of coveted items and money, both of which correspond to the acquisition of capital in the nonvirtual space. Endless acquisition in gamespace is particularly pronounced in the practice of “gold farming,” widespread in China. Gold farmers play for hours acquiring virtual capital in MMORPG games such as World of Warcraft in order to sell it for real capital (Vincent). Yet through this, traditional ontological distinctions between gaming and the actual world are radically confused. Approaching online RPGs as an economist, Edward Castronova describes the relatively banal “economics of fun” that underpin the synthetic world of games. “The economy is in fact an integral part of the fantasy,” Castronova writes. “Nothing makes a world feel more alive than an active market system” (172). Gold farming, the most laborious form of contemporary video gaming in the neoliberal economy, troubles Western capitalist notions of work and play by bringing tedium into play. It is thus perhaps not a surprise that certain journalists express disdain for professional video gaming and with the idea of eSports: for them, video games belong to the realm of leisure, sitting for hours being unproductive, and are not supposed to be laborious.

Yet in this, StarCraft offers peculiar problems. StarCraft provides abundant financial reward, especially for professional gamers, who are among the highest paid in Korean eSports, but its game play does not depend on conventional systems of reward. In-game capital provides player satisfaction in most games. However in StarCraft, since in-game capital is ephemeral, the player has only his or her professional record. This is contrary to other games where gamers have something “to show,” such as a powerful avatar with the capital, commodities, and experience to signify the labor and time put into the game. In StarCraft the only record of total labor time is the players’ IDs with their career wins and losses. The point of StarCraft is not to accumulate resources, but to use them as efficiently as possible before the match is over. In-game resources such as minerals and vespene gas imitate the exchange value of money in order to produce more buildings and units, but there is no long-term merit to the production of surplus value beyond the length of the individual match. Unlike in gold farming, accumulated capital retains no exchange value. Instead, resources have use value insofar as they become mobilized to defeat the enemy. Seen from the perspective of gamespace, the conditions of the professional StarCraft player imitate those of temporary capitalist labor, but the player’s activity also reveals the virtual ontology and short-term orientation of capital itself. The management of minerals and vespene gas in many ways allegorizes the management of virtual funds for short-term, liquid markets in the shadow banking system.

If games create environments where gamers, regardless of their identity, compete in “fair play,” then extreme gamers push its limits by playing harder than everyone else. The morbid fascination in gamers who play themselves to death then threatens to expose an older ideological assumption that underpins this very interest: that human activity may be divided cleanly between unproductive leisure and productive labor. Despite the claim that postindustrial economies have unilaterally dissolved the boundary between leisure and labor, within techno-Orientalism this ideological remnant of the industrial economy reinscribes the division. Asian gamer death then remains ambivalent, for it blurs the discursive boundaries that underpin the gamespace of contemporary capitalism while taking the logic of life in neoliberalism to its limit. The threatened subject of the neoliberal economy must subsequently underscore the real historical specificities that persist between cultures and reconstitute them on the level of ontology. The Western gamer then, like that depicted in Sony’s commercial, believes that he or she can stay on top without having to compete with the rising Asian economies. Such differences are all too often understood within the tropes of racism and technology: Asians are chained to their computers through their addiction to StarCraft, while the West remains essentially free, having a much more “healthy” relationship to video games. However, our analysis of gaming and capital suggests that all users are implicated in the logic of gamespace.

The dream of “never stop playing,” like the mystifications of Orientalism, reflects not the truth of the exotic Other, or the transgressive possibilities opened up by purchasing a PlayStation Vita, but the narcissism of the capitalist subject. The dream of gaming endlessly reflects the dream of the hip gamer who never has to work, while the Asian gamer, who dies from playing, points to a fundamental aporia that subtends the binary between work and play, and between self and exotic other. As Alexander R. Galloway puts it in his book The Interface Effect, “We are all gold farmers” (136). This thought troubles binaries of life in industrial capitalism by which we understand value and productivity in modernity. In this, the Asian gamer may be thought of as “ahead” of the West in terms of the development of the neoliberal economy. Reinstating racial binaries functions as a bulwark against the deconstruction of life (which should be productive in capitalism) and death (which is often considered unproductive), as well as against the anxiety this deconstruction produces. Fetishizing Asian gamer death and the Asian work ethic performs the work of disavowal, disavowal of the fundamental differences that persist between self and other, while attempting to mediate non-Western modes of capitalist productivity.

When Blizzard released StarCraft II in 2010, eAthletes immediately embraced the new installment. Professional leagues sprouted up, and in May 2012 both OnGameNet (the most prestigious StarCraft league) and the Korean eSports Association announced that they would be making the official transition to StarCraft II (TeamLiquid). Lim Yo-hwan, the player most synonymous with StarCraft, also retired from StarCraft: Brood War to begin playing StarCraft II, a move so significant that a documentary titled Lim Yo-hwan’s Wings was produced (Ho-kyung Choi). The industry was able to migrate quickly because of the similarity of the mechanics between StarCraft and StarCraft II. And thus like its predecessor, StarCraft II may be read to problematize the binary between work and play outside the game, as well as imaginations of Occident and Orient. It also makes apparent the quick turns in the cutthroat Internet gaming milieu that characterizes much of East Asia and brings to the fore the culmination of capitalist logic. This is the very same mechanism that cycles eAthletes, while leaving young men, and the occasional young woman, dead in PC bangs just as quickly as it promotes them to national heroes. While these gamers perish in their quest to never stop playing, the death of the Asian gamer will be appropriated within the geopolitics of labor in Asia—unless, of course, video gaming is allowed to transcend reified notions of play.

### FW---Racializing Logics

#### The form of debate that calls us to “adhere to the rules” instates a subject that reproduces and rewards subjects who adhere to racializing logics built into the game.

Lu 21 (Melanie Lu, Writing Consultant at Vanderbilt's Writing Studio, Editor, Vanderbilt Lives, Undergraduate Creative Nonfiction Journal; April 27th, 2021, “Gendering the Techno-Orient: The Asian Woman in Speculative Fiction,” <https://ir.vanderbilt.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/1803/16493/LuMelanie_VUIRSubmission.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; accessed 7/23/2022) ng

The possibilities are numerous, yet my interests here gravitate more specifically towards the emerging discourse on video games, the most lucrative entertainment industry in the world today. My previous analysis of films—especially Ghost in the Shell—has demonstrated the importance of taking into account the nature of visual form, in addition to narrative content, in shaping particular viewer interpretations. Paying attention to the creative medium itself becomes especially important when we enter the realm of video games, where interactivity is one of the defining characteristics of game experience. While any text, whether literary, visual, or otherwise, arguably “interacts” with an active reader/viewer in some way to produce meaning, video games offer unique challenges to how we think about interacting with texts. Not discounting the ongoing discussion regarding the role of narratology versus ludology in video games studies (Juul 16), I aim to briefly highlight here the medium’s high level of interactivity as a significant area in which racialization and gendering take place through mechanisms inherent to video games. I am therefore less interested in how fiction or storytelling in games can Otherize—they certainly do—but rather in how the underlying structures of video game mechanics do so, perhaps as part of a larger conversation on the ideological mapping of computer-mediated processes. For my purposes, I wish to call attention to the rule-based, outcome-oriented qualities that govern most video games; the fact that the player is encouraged, compelled, or simply allowed to perform certain actions in order to achieve certain outcomes is crucial to understanding how video games exert cultural influence and (re)produce ideology. Ian Bogost’s concept of procedural rhetoric is useful here: distinct from the verbal or visual rhetoric that accompanies more traditional forms of media, procedural rhetoric as often operating through digital systems designates the practice of using processes such as game mechanics persuasively, where “arguments are not made through the construction of words or images, but through the authorship of rules of behavior, the construction of dynamic models” (Bogost 29). Bogost contends that video games that effectively mount sophisticated procedural rhetoric can inform and challenge players to reflect on how processes in the material world do, can, or should work, thereby interrogating these material systems themselves (Bogost 57). But even as I accept Bogost’s fundamental premise that video games utilize argumentative procedure to great degree, I resist the suggestion that this procedure is necessarily rhetorical in nature: while players can indeed be persuaded to adopt certain views, it is also likely that the same procedures can manipulate or condition them into doing so. In other words, Bogost fails to adequately address the extent to which pre-existing ideologies may already naturalize, and thus reinforce, the very material processes video game procedures can literalize or seemingly call into question. Alexander Galloway has pointed out that procedures in video games—or what he calls “protocols”—can be viewed as allegories of control, where, through following and absorbing game rules that mirror the politics of the informatic age, players are “learning, internalizing, and becoming intimate with a massive, multipartite global algorithm” (Galloway 35). It is this more pernicious effect of video game procedure that I highlight as a reinstantiation of techno-Orientalism in new media. Let us briefly consider one example of a video game where this tension between procedure and allegory comes into play through racial Othering. While Lucas Pope’s 2013 independent game Papers, Please has garnered much critical attention for its procedural sophistication in interrogating the realities of immigration policy and authoritarian state violence, his most recent detective game Return of the Obra Dinn (2018) utilizes procedure in ways that are subtler and perhaps more troubling. On a general level, Obra Dinn employs procedural mechanics common to the detective genre’s idealization of objective, intelligible, and unmediated historical truths, such as by granting the detective means to traverse time and space when unravelling the Obra Dinn’s mystery; however, here it is important to elaborate on how racialization mechanisms are similarly woven into the structural pathways of the game. Set aboard a fictional East India Company trade ship from 1802, the game requires the player to investigate the fates of the Obra Dinn’s 60 crew members and passengers, who have all died or disappeared due to various natural and supernatural causes. The player navigates in first-person the complex layout of the monochromatic three-story ship with a magical pocket watch, which allows them to return to specific moments before each character’s death to explore relevant audio and visual clues. Using a roster and drawings of the crew, the player makes progress in the game whenever they correctly determine and input character fates into their inspector’s logbook; with every three cases solved, they are able to access more scenes and proceed further into the mystery. Even on a narrative level, the game Orientalizes by relying heavily on a mystical Formosan treasure chest as a central plot device: belonging to a group of royal Formosan passengers, this exotic object is revealed to have set in motion the endless tragedies on board, where, through some unfathomable Oriental magic, hordes of “terrible beasts” of the sea are lured in to attack the Obra Dinn. What calls for scrutiny is not just how the plot of the mystery unfolds, however, but more importantly the procedural strategies of deduction players have at their disposal when identifying characters and subsequently their fates. While more scrupulous or ambitious players may meticulously look for conclusive clues embedded solely within the narrative, such as by reconstructing timelines, analyzing character relationships through dialogue, or tracking specific character items at key locations, the game also offers a more freeform reasoning space in which external factors, such as profession or race, can be exploited for processes of elimination. At more difficult stages within the game where clues are scarce, one inevitably finds themselves noticing the simplistically rendered, but unmistakably present, racialized appearances of the characters, or the pronounced accents and linguistic variation of the dialogue recordings replayed at each death. Combined with the logbook’s convenient catalogue of all character origins, which include a variety of European and Asian nationalities, these normative racial markers make it possible for the player to guess character identities through trial and error, since the logbook automatically progresses once any three correct fates are reached. For instance, a player might assume a certain character to be Chinese based on their appearance and/or accent; then, with two identifications already entered into the logbook, the player could input all the Chinese names given until one of them triggers a third correct response. The way the game portrays individual racial appearance, accent, or culture—whether “accurately” or otherwise—is irrelevant here; what Bogostian procedure highlights are the rule-based structural pathways encoded in the game that permit racialization to work as a strategy in the first place. Obra Dinn thus motivates the player to make the kind of racial generalizations—accent as natural index of identity, ethnic features as justified means of racial and subsequently social categorization, etc.—that Bogost anticipates such a game to critique through procedure. Yet, instead of using rhetoric to expose the harm of racial Othering, the game cements their normative nature; since players are able to proceed in the game in this way and uncover the “truth” of the mystery, Obra Dinn actually rewards them for engaging in these ideological practices, thus further naturalizing the constructed logic of racialization. This implicitly encoded notion of reward is especially important when we reflect on Bogostian procedure in terms of its argumentative qualities. Unlike language that aims to persuade through direct instruction or explication, the procedures players are introduced to in video games like Obra Dinn are powerful tools by which ideology is learned, in the sense that players internalize—through interacting first-hand with rules of the game—processes that they themselves observe to be effective, often in high-stakes settings. In Obra Dinn’s online community forums, some players comment gleefully or in frustration about the fact that they can use “brute force” logic to clear the game, while others retort that this is not how the game is “supposed to be played.” But a singular or mandatory method for playing the game does not exist, just as a singular method to interpret a text does not exist, and it is precisely this possibility, this hidden logic, embedded in the game that becomes critical to its treatment of racial ideology as argument. For Obra Dinn does not offer a puzzle in which race does not exist or signify, nor does it explicitly satirize racialization as its own procedural vice, as was perhaps done with Papers, Please; instead, players encounter situations where racialization, seemingly irrelevant, ultimately proves to be highly effective once learned. Indeed, racialization is deliberately made a covert, intuitive, indeed algorithmic logic, much as how it operates in the real world, and herein lies the argumentative, or “persuasive,” power of digital procedure. Whether it is the earlier forms of explicit racism seen in yellow-peril propaganda, or the appropriation and depoliticization of race under the disguise of postmodern aesthetics, or the increasingly common narratives of post-racial dystopia featured in speculative fiction, reinstantiations of Orientalism and techno-Orientalism continue to define and surveille how Asians speak, act, and exist in both fictional and real worlds. Thinking back to Said’s early concerns with Orientalism’s amorphous, self-adapting nature over time, it is imperative that we pay close attention to the rapidly evolving expressions of global media and continue to identify, resist, and ultimately dismantle the various languages and spaces by which such oppressive systems of Othering exist. By examining the nuanced constructions of the subject-object binary as manifest in the Asian woman’s ornamental objecthood, this thesis has hopefully taken a step towards the critical discourse on reimagining gendered racial ontologies to promote more productive and subversive understandings of modern personhood.

## Kritiks

### AT: Anti-Blackness

#### Techno-Orientalism reduces Blackness to techno-primitivism, laboring exchange value, and unmodern irrationality. In the postmodern future, you should evaluate race through technocentric anxieties.

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Framed by comparative and postcolonial approaches to Asian American studies, my approach to techno-Orientalism destabilizes the false universality of the “human,” that animating figure of speculative fiction. In “The Intimacies of Four Continents” (2006), Lisa Lowe locates the modern “human” subject’s nineteenth-century emergence, which normalized freedom, liberty, rights, and progress, within the material conditions produced through slavery, genocide, and indenture. Critical analyses that affirm liberal categories like freedom, rights, and progress forget that they arise from the exclusions, occlusions, and deathliness of race. Race thus temporally marks an ontological difference from the modern subject of liberal humanism; to be nonwhite is to be out of sync with modernity. Within this chronotopic definition of the “human,” the postmodern future of techno-Orientialism has left the “human” and its modern present of mercy and community behind to become a technocentric dystopia, while the decadent premodernity of past-turning Orientalism leads “humanity” astray from its modern values of discipline and order. Moreover, outside of these time zones of the “human” is the subjection of blackness. In Lisa Nakamura’s analysis, blackness in the digital age signifies techno-primitivism, primitive spirituality, and laboring exchange value. Reading depictions of technology in multiracial futures, Nakamura shows how white heroism takes on moral power through projections of Asianness and blackness: Asianness symbolizes a tool for white success, while blackness—stuck in an unmodern irrationality—legitimizes but never equals white valor (Digitizing Race, 109, 116, 127–128). These figurations of time racialize liberal humanism’s promise of freedom as whiteness; the category of the “human” and its appearance of universality disguise these structuring exclusions.

To be clear, I love Joss Whedon and his dedication to human rights, seen on-screen in the Whedonverse’s thematic preoccupations and off-screen in his support of international feminist organization Equality Now. However, as Mimi Thi Nguyen contends, the “human” of human rights structurally depends on the inhuman violence spread in delivering its promises of freedom. First, by naming race as this inhuman remainder, I intervene in the field of Whedon studies. The incredulous tone with which Eric Hung reviews this literature in “The Meaning of ‘World Music’ in Firefly” suggests how these acafan analyses forgive representational color-blindness, whitewashing, and racism beyond the screen to praise the auteur; the Dollhouse special issue of Slayage: The Journal of the Whedon Studies Association does not include race in its vocabulary. Focusing on race in the narratives of the Whedonverse introduces the inhumanity of the “human” as an unresolved problematic of minoritized groups’ struggle for representation. Second, I take up techno-Orientalism as a relationally racializing trope in speculative fiction to illustrate the nonequivalent co-construction of anti-Asian and antiblack racisms. These palimpsestic Orientalisms are not a fiction to be proven false, but characterize the twentyfirst-century anxieties of difference in the white supremacist culture from which Whedon writes; Asian American expression or presence alone cannot correct these interconnected racializations.

#### Asian American critique of their own involvement in domestic settlerism can be the basis of conjoining global decolonization movements to domestic deimperialization—the creation of futures beyond settlerism requires the production of new knowledges that attack the stress points of global empire—

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[3/7/12, Candace Fujikane, “Asian American critique and Moana Nui 2011: securing a future beyond empires, militarized capitalism and APEC”, Volume 13, Issue 2, 2012]

If one pushes even further to argue that there must be a dialectical process in any deimperialization movement, then what conditions need to be created in the United States to bring about an effective movement there? What would the concrete forms of such a movement be? What are the appropriate methodologies for making deimperialization a reality in the neoimperial center? (Kuan-Hsing Chen 2010) Our brother Attwood Makanani, a cultural practitioner and voyager, once told me, ‘You gotta haku’, and I didn't understand what he meant. ‘Haku’ is the term for braiding or composing something. And now I think I understand that Pacific peoples can take the most fragile fibers and weave them into powerful ropes to bind homes together, canoes together, and even move great objects through the forest. Let us braid our struggles together into an unbreakable cord that's much stronger than our individual parts. Let us make a net that's big enough and strong enough to restrain even the most powerful of these strange and dangerous fish that threaten to engulf us. (Kyle Kajihiro 2011) As essays in this volume of Inter-Asia Cultural Studies examine the implications of Asian American studies in Asia, I would like to open up this essay with a consideration of the fragile fictions of US imperialism in Asia and the Pacific. On October 11, 2011, US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton published an op-ed piece in Foreign Policy on the necessity of aggressive military and economic advances in the Asia-Pacific region. Entitled ‘America's Pacific Century’, Clinton's statement stakes a claim to the Pacific, opening with the conditions of war in Iraq and a repositioning of US military forces from Iraq and Afghanistan to Asia and the Pacific: As the war in Iraq winds down and America begins to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, the United States stands at a pivot point. Over the last 10 years, we have allocated immense resources to those two theaters. In the next 10 years, we need to be smart and systematic about where we invest time and energy, so that we put ourselves in the best position to sustain our leadership, secure our interests, and advance our values. One of the most important tasks of American statecraft over the next decade will therefore be to lock in a substantially increased investment—diplomatic, economic, strategic, and otherwise—in the Asia-Pacific region. (Clinton 2011) Such a framing clearly articulates the militarized theater necessary for the performance of US economic policies. It is in the rhetoric of militarized capitalism that we see the nineteenth-century logic of US imperialism: gunboat diplomacy that forced open markets in Asia and the Pacific continues today as Aegis warships enforce free trade. In this way, Clinton's declaration prepared the ground for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum of 21 nations in the Asia and Pacific regions hosted by the United States in Honolulu, Hawai‘i, in November 2011. APEC's ostensible mission is ‘championing free and open trade and investments’, but as critics like Walden Bello have argued, APEC is being used by the United States to pull itself out of financial crisis, particularly in furthering the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), formed in reaction to the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) that went into effect in 2010 (Bello 2011). The TPP countries include the United States, Australia, Brunei, Chile, Malaysia, New Zealand, Peru and Singapore with Japan, Indonesia, Russia and others as potential members. As Bello (2011) explains, the TPP is viewed as a ‘WTO-plus’ because it is even more stringent in its free trade rules than the World Trade Organization (WTO): The objective of the original agreement was to reduce all trade tariffs to zero by the year 2015. It now aims to be a comprehensive agreement covering all the main pillars of a free trade agreement, including trade in goods, rules of origin, trade remedies, sanitary and phytosanitary standards, technical barriers to trade, trade in services, intellectual property, government procurement, and competition policy. As critics agree, APEC's representation of transnational interests has led to the deregulation of Asian and Pacific economies that makes possible the exploitation of human and environmental resources with devastating effects for indigenous peoples, farming and fishing communities, workers, women and poverty-stricken people in Asia and the Pacific. As the APEC leaders met at the Hawai‘i Convention Center, an alternative conference was held by Pua Mohala i ka Pō and the International Forum on Globalization (IFG). The Moana Nui 2011 (Peoples of the Asia/Pacific vs. APEC/TPP) conference brought together activists from Hawai‘i, Rapanui, the Philippines, Guåhan/Guam, Okinawa, Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Marshall Islands, Palau, Tonga, Fiji, Micronesia, Australia, Sāmoa, Siberia, Vanuatu, Malaysia, South Korea, Japan and the United States. Invited speakers included Native economists, farming and fishing practitioners, advocates for political and economic sovereignty, globalization experts, experts on the global land grab, specialists in media, public education, environmental studies and law, and anti-bases movement activists. In their description of the event, the coordinators of Moana Nui sent out a call to the peoples of Asia and the Pacific to articulate their own self-determining visions of a sustainable economic and political future: Moana Nui is intended to provide a voice and possible direction for the economies of Pacific Islands in the era of powerful transnational corporations, global industrial expansion and global climate change. This conference will issue a challenge to Pacific Island nations and communities to look for cooperative ways to strengthen subsistence and to protect cultural properties and natural resources. The timing of this conference is intended to overlap the next meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in Honolulu and hopes to call public attention to the critical importance of maintaining sound and productive local economies in the Pacific Islands both for their own sake and food security in the world. (Moana Nui 2011a) Against the fictions of free trade, the most powerful note of consensus at the conference was that traditional cultural practices that sustained indigenous peoples for millennia are the most sustainable. These international gatherings enable us to protect and promote those practices by piecing together our local analyses for a clearer picture of the global operations of interlinking forms of imperialisms, colonialisms, corporate capitalisms and militarisms. As anti-APEC and Moana Nui organizing and demonstrations illustrated the fragile fictions of empires, it is the cumulative effect of these deimperializing moments that is restructuring a future beyond empires. The magnitude of this imperial, militarized capitalism is rendered as a global map of stress points that cannot bear its inhumane burdens. Interlinked popular movements and their production of knowledge, then, become like bursts of runaway voltage striking at these stress points. Visions of the future hinge upon the ideological wars over the production of knowledge, and these insights into the vulnerabilities of empires enable us to chart emergent formations and to map new directions for Asian American critical praxis. As I contend in this essay, the seemingly unassailable architecture of US empire is under erosion from both within and without. Although Asian American studies as a discipline was born out of the civil rights movement and criticisms of imperialist wars being fought in Asia, Africa and South America, Asian Americans later turned to delineating the institutional parameters of Asian American studies, focusing on domestic issues of racism in the United States and the ‘claiming of America’. It was in the 1990s that theorists in postcolonial studies and Third World feminist studies raised questions about the artificial boundaries that were being drawn in examinations of Asian American texts. Later work on the continuities between Asian American studies and the imperial and colonial contexts of Asia was inspired by writers who traversed international boundaries, including Chandra Mohanty (1988), Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1989), E. San Juan, Jr. (1991a, 1991b, 1991c), Oscar Campomanes (1992, 1995), Chungmoo Choi (1993), Lisa Lowe (1991, 1993), and Inderpal Grewal (1994). Most recently, texts such as Setsu Shigematsu and Keith Camacho's (2010) edited collection Militarized Currents: Toward a Decolonized Future in Asia and the Pacific have worked to connect the histories of Japanese and US empires across Asia and the Pacific. On another register, an emergent form of Asian American critique challenges the presence of the United States within its imagined borders. The etymological narrative that the United States is ‘home’ to Asian American studies is being critically re-examined in analyses of settler colonialism and the US settler state's assault on indigenous peoples, their land, and their state sovereignty. In the fall of 2000, Jonathan Okamura and I co-edited a special issue of UCLA's Amerasia Journal entitled ‘Whose vision? Asian settler colonialism in Hawai‘i’ (Fujikane and Okamura 2000), followed by an expanded collection, Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai‘i (Fujikane and Okamura 2008). Kanaka ‘Ōiwi scholars Haunani-Kay Trask, Mililani Trask, Momiala Kamahele, ku‘ualoha ho‘omanawanui, and Healani Sonoda foreground the genocidal operations of the US settler state and raise critical questions for Asian Americans about their status as settlers on indigenous lands.1 As a fourth-generation Japanese American settler in Hawai‘i and co-editor of the collection, I describe Asian settler colonialism as a constellation of the colonial ideologies and practices of Asian American settlers who are part of the broader structure of the US settler state (Fujikane 2008: 6).2 Asian settler colonialism refers to the present participation of all Asian Americans in Hawai‘i in US settler colonialism through different kinds of settler practices, ranging from colonial administration to the routines of everyday life. Asian American settler contributors to those volumes illuminate aspects of Asian settler colonialism from different fields and disciplines to illustrate its diverse operations and material impact on Kānaka ‘Ōiwi. As those of us who have critiqued Asian American settler colonialism have argued, an understanding of our positions as settlers in Hawai‘i and in the United States has become critical to reconceptualizing Asian American critique. As in poststructuralist work, the critique of Asian American settler colonialism asks us to enter into a more self-reflexive inquiry about our positions both in relation to the US settler state and to indigenous peoples. Far from an essentializing move, the critique of Asian American settler colonialism invites us to investigate the complex ways that Asian Americans are implicated in the settler colonial policies of the United States and to delineate the kind of anticolonial and anti-imperial work that must be done. The international workshop on ‘Asian American Studies in Asia’ became a critical site of inquiry for me in articulating the continuities between a critique of Asian American settler colonialism and deimperialization in Asia. In thinking about these questions, I was particularly struck by the kinds of critical analyses Kuan-Hsing Chen makes in his call for a deimperialization of both Asia and the United States. As Chen argues, the study of Asia as method alerts us to the possibilities of reorienting Asian American critique by using Asia as a reference point, moving beyond the imperial centers and imagining and engaging in post-imperial practices inspired by different geopolitical sites. As Chen writes, The implication of Asia as method is that using Asia as an imaginary anchoring point can allow societies in Asia to become one another's reference points, so that the understanding of the self can be transformed, and subjectivity rebuilt. Pushing the project one step further, it becomes possible to imagine that historical experiences and practices in Asia can be developed as an alternative horizon, perspective, or method for posing a different set of questions about world history. (Chen 2010: xv) In the quotation I take as my first epigraph, Chen also asks what methodologies can make deimperialization a reality in the neoimperial center. The question is derived from his concern that ‘the collapse of the empire does not mean the collapse of the former colonizing population's imperial consciousness’, and he cites Mutō Ichiyō's argument that critical intellectuals must assume the responsibilities for being accomplices to the crimes committed by the imperial state (Chen 2010: 206). Only in this way can deimperialization occur. I would argue that a critique of Asian American settler colonialism constitutes one such methodology that mobilizes a mode of self-reflexive inquiry in Asian American critique and conjoins it to a decolonizing and deimperializing movement in Asia and the United States. It is a methodology that calls upon us to re-examine the settler colonial underpinnings of Asian American narratives and praxis, underscoring the need for Asian American settlers to challenge settler colonialism in their own communities as well as in the larger US settler state. It is in tracing the production of settler colonial knowledges that we can expose the operations by which Asian American settlers have participated in obscuring the conditions of US occupation, colonialism, and imperialism. Only by achieving justice for Kānaka ‘Ōiwi and for American Indians can we as Asian American settlers liberate ourselves from our positions as agents in a settler colonial system of violence. It is in this work that I see a critique of Asian American settler colonialism broadening out in shared affinities with the project of deimperializing Asia. This now brings me to a key argument about Asian American studies in Asia: Asian American critique must engage in Asia and the Pacific as method, to borrow and extend Chen's argument, which means reorienting ourselves in more expansive ways toward Asia and the Pacific in order to work toward a decolonized, deimperialized future. This is not to say that we must abandon our own important local or national analyses of racism, heteropatriarchy, class struggle, or the relationships between indigenous peoples and settlers, or the transnational flows of people and resources among global sites. Instead, we can expand our work simultaneously in these different arenas and bring those critical analyses together

to show how globalization has an impact on Asian American critique and also that the Asian American critique can be part of a decolonizing and deimperializing force in Asia and the Pacific.

#### The 1AC’s analytic frame is necessary—slavery and anti-blackness are inadequate to understand and must be theorized in conjunction with settler colonialism as structuring modernity and constituting blackness

King 13

[2013, Tiffany Jeannette King, “IN THE CLEARING: BLACK FEMALE BODIES, SPACE AND SETTLER COLONIAL LANDSCAPES”, PhD Dissertation]

We must consider that Settler colonialism shapes and constitutes Black life, specifically slavery and its afterlife in America. While slavery and anti-Black racism should be active and robust analytic frames that guide Black Studies and help us understand Black subjectivity in the Western Hemisphere, settler colonialism also structures Black life. The genocide of Native peoples, the perpetual making of Settler space and Settler subjectivity—as unfettered self actualization—do not immediately stop existing as forms of power when they run into Black bodies. The way that settler colonial power looks and manifests itself just changes; it does not stop. Settler colonialism, as a subjectless discourse, is a form of productive power that touches all that live in the US and Settler colonial nations.30 Though it touches and shapes everyone’s life it does so in very different ways. For the purposes of my own research I am arguing that settler colonialism’s normalizing power enacts genocide against Native peoples (disappears Native people) but it also shapes and structures antiBlack racism. The ontological positions that were created by slavery, specifically the Slave are still alive and well however, settler colonial power intersects with, works through and structures the repressive and productive power that makes the Black captive fungible and socially dead. Throughout, In the Clearing poses the question, in what ways does settler colonial power help structure slavery and anti-Black racism? This project ultimately argues that slavery and anti-Black racism are not adequate to fully understand the material and discursive processes that create Blackness in all of its embodied genres in North America. Slavery and anti-Black racism are also not the only repressive powers that make the Black body abject, fungible and situated at the outer limits of being-ness. Both slavery and settler colonialism structure modernity and need to be fully conceptualized as forms of power that help constitute Blackness. Conceptualizing the ways that settler colonialism and slavery co-constitute one another is an essential component of this dissertation.

#### Settlement, spatiality, and place must all be theorized as essential to the production of the “human” and the materialization of blackness as an ontological position—the process of settlement enables self-actualization by the Settler through the turning of blackness into a position of the settled-slave

King 13

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This is not an appeal to expand the category of the settler, as I have argued before Black slaves and descendants of slaves are not settlers. However, the processes which make Black bodies fungible flesh, a form of terra nullius, and embed their bodies in the land as settled-slaves needs to be theorized as modalities of settlement. Settlement needs to be retheorized along the contours of the bodies that it renders materially and socially dead. Scholarship from Marxist geographies, cultural landscape studies, anthropology and the emerging field of settler colonial studies is useful for helping us think about space, however, it does not help us think about the ways that the process of settlement also materializes Blackness as an ontological position. Native studies and Black studies enable a discussion of how the production of Settler and Master or Settler-Master subjectivity comes about due to its parasitic relationship to Native death and Black fungibility/accumulation (social death). When we think about the Settler-Master as parasitic we can also begin to think about their process of settlement as one that also requires the making of ontological categories occupied by the dead. The process of settlement allows the Settler-Master to become a human with spatial coordinates because the Native dies and the Black becomes a non-being (a settled-slave).15 Settlement is more than transforming the land. It is more than the teleological process of weary white people making a home and Native people naturally disappearing over time. Settlement is an assemblage of technologies and processes of makings and unmakings. Its processes require the making and unmaking of bodies, subject positions, space, place and claims to various forms of autonomy, self actualization and transcendence. In Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview, Lorenzo Veracini, a founding scholar of the emerging field of settler colonial studies describes the process of settlement as a process that enables the “unfettered mobility” of the settler.16 While abject others within settler colonial nations are “principally characterized by restrained mobility” the settler experiences the capacity for “unfettered mobility.” This description of the kind of state of existence that settlement allows the settler is instructive. While Veracini’s description moves us closer to a discussion of states of being, I want to reframe Veracini’s description and introduce a few more elements to the equation. Settlement as an intricate, dynamic and contradictory relationship to Native bodies, Black bodies and the land/nature. Settlement structures the Settler’s relationship to the Native, the Black and nature as a relation of negation. Settlement also creates complex ontological positions that are constituted by both states of stasis and flux. What I mean by this is that some bodies (Native and Black) are relegated to a permanent position of flux. Native bodies are always slipping into death, Black bodies are always sliding into states of fungibility and accumulation. The flux and instability of the Black and the Native enable the Settler to experience a self actualizing state of both libratory stability and transcendent autonomy. The ontological positions of the Native (slipping into death) and the Black (sliding into fungibility and accumulation) are positions of fixed-flux. As Wilderson argues these positions do not occupy the universal liberal orienting and humanizing frames of time and space. They are fixed and rooted in a place of elimination and expanding use for the settler’s unending pursuit of self actualization. By settling, or gaining an exclusive claim to time and space, the Settler is able to simultaneously become a stable, coherent and autonomous human subject who occupies space while they also experience hyper mobility, transcendence and self directed transformation. The Settler moves back and forth at will between states of rootedness and mobility, stability and postmodern (self determined) constructedness. The Settlers’ unfettered movement between these contradictory spaces and states is predicated on the “fixed-flux” of Native and Black bodies. Fixed-flux is the underside of the Settler’s unfettered mobility and self actualization. It is always being susceptible to having the world flipped upside down at the whim of another (the Settler). Settlement functions like a violent form of deconstruction. Settlement as a gratuitously violent project that kills the Native and accumulates the Black also reorganizes discourse. The relationship that exists between the signifier and signified for concepts like autochthony and indigeneity and words like clearing under conditions of settlement become shifting ground beneath our feet.17 The prior meanings held by the terms and words autochthonous, indigenous and clearing are destabilized and then completely evacuated due to the material and discursive muscle of settlement. At the site of the clearing, Settlers are able to become autochthonous and indigenous at the same time. Frank Wilderson helps us think about the kind of discursive and material violence that occurs within what he calls the “Settler/Master/Human’s grammatical structure.”18 Within this grammatical structure, Wilderson argues that there is a disavowal of the violence of genocide in the way the settler narrates the formation of the US. On one level, the disavowal occurs through the settler’s preferred part of speech. Clearing is only spoken of as a noun in the Settler/Master/Human’s grammatical structure. Clearing is never used as a verb in the human’s grammatical structure. Wilderson draws our attention to its use: “Clearing, in the Settler/Savage” relation, has two grammatical structures, one a noun and the other as a verb. But the Western only recognizes clearing as a noun. But prior to the clearing’s fragile infancy, that is before its cinematic legacy as a newborn place name, it labored not across the land as a noun but as a verb on the body of the “Savage,” speaking civil society’s essential status as an effect for genocide.”19 This discursive displacement represents an actual displacement. As the Settler/Master/Human renders the clearing a static place, void of settler violence and absent of indigenous bodies and relations to the land, the Settler also indigenizes themselves to this abstract space. The Settler is allowed to merge with the land as they root themselves. They become autochthonous people that “sprang up from the land.”20 Settlers are now the group of humans that establish a right/righteous relationship with the land. Settlers proclaim themselves the new indigenous population. The original indigenous peoples are stripped of their indigeneity and rendered dead. Within the process of settlement, the indigenous people become embedded in or are literally buried as the dead within the land. The Settler then assumes a new autochthonous identity and emerges from the earth anew. Even when the Settler indigenizes or roots themselves into the land; they do not become stuck there like Native peoples. In her book, Black Body: Women, Colonialism and Space, Radhika Mohanram spends time explaining how enlightenment notions of the Indigene and European binary operate.21 The body conceived as incarcerated by nature is partially achieved by the discursive construction of the native as a “person who is born and thus belongs to a certain place,” and is in fact over determined by that place.22 The European on the other hand can be of a place but is not incarcerated by it like the Native. Their settler “indigeneity” offers them “unfettered mobility” as well as unfettered self actualization. Native people do not acquire this through their indigenous status. Upon encountering the settler (who becomes indigenous) the Native experiences their indigeneity as non-existence and death. The clearing also shapes Blackness as it carves out the settlement-plantation. The clearing in its verb form certainly labored across the bodies of Native people. However, the clearing also worked on and transformed the bodies of Blacks. The Black body is turned into the Settled-slave. Nana and Elizabeth Peazant are Settled-slaves whose bodies evince the way that the process of settling “cleared” Blacks of all spatial coordinates that could make them human during this process of making the settlement/plantation. Blacks become mere ‘states of flux,” and the atomic potential for space. At the site of the clearing, both a spatial and ontological production, Black bodies are the raw material and precursor to space. While Black bodies are geographic and necessary to the production of space they are not geographic subjects that humanly inhabit space at the site of the clearing.23 As geographic—dark—matter and material under settlement they make space possible but cannot occupy it. Existing in a continual state of liminality and change Black femaleness is a place making unit but not in place. Place is where humanness resides. According to Tim Cresswell, place and its links to humanness, morality and identity are a part of a humanistic project.24 For the humanist undertaking geography, “ontological priority was given to the human immersion in place rather than the abstractions of geometric space.” The humanist concept of place is accompanied by the baggage of morality, identity, authenticity and exclusion. Within modern thought systems, there is a tendency to locate people with certain identities in certain places. There is also a tendency within this metaphysical framework to imagine “mobile people in wholly negative ways.”27 Bodies on the move or sentient beings in a state of “fixed-flux” who slip into death like the Native or slide and transform as fungible flesh have no place and are considered suspect within this worldview. Through humanist articulations and re-theorizations of place, the universal and abstract notion of space becomes humanized and exclusionary admitting only a select group of people. Making a place is also about making a home.28 Place (and space) as home was functioning within imperialist endeavors of the enlightenment far before human geographers of the 1970s named it as such. As a geographer, Tuan has focused a great deal of attention on the extent to which people have attempted to “create order and homeliness out of the apparent chaos of raw nature.”29 In fact “the concept of place is central to our understanding of how people turn nature into culture by making it their home.”30 What happens when this humanist endeavor of turning nature/chaos into culture/order/home meets up with the imperialist endeavor? Sylvia Wynter argues that both the Native and the Black are considered states of non-Reason and chaos within Enlightenment humanism. Under imperialism, both the bodies and the lands of Native and Black people were states of chaos that needed to be ordered. While Tuan’s configuration of place and the transformation of raw nature into a home for humankind does not have the violent and exclusionary form of the human in mind, my reconfiguration of the place of settlement does. The landscapes of settlement, when they appear to the eye as a tranquil pasture with a log cabin or people sun bathing on a beach conceal the violent processes hidden in the clearing. One way of revealing what is hidden is through rethinking what a landscape is and how it functions. Richard Schein presents an interpretation of landscape as a process. In fact, Schein argues that landscape is always in the “process of becoming.”31 Another aspect of Schein’s theorization of the landscape that is productive is that he construes the landscapes as having material and epistemological value. The epistemology of the landscape disciplines those who come into contact with it. The disciplinary element of landscape is embedded in the fact that the material aspect of the landscape is seen, and presents itself as linear and objective.32 The landscape is in fact not self evident but duplicitous.33 Likewise settlement as a process and what it achieves even in its materiality (clearing, settlement-plantation) is not self-evident but multivalent and at times counter intuitive. What is hidden is that settlement is not just the making of a physical location for the Settler; rather, what is concealed is the simultaneous process of the Settler rooting in order to launch. Settlement is the subjugation and sinking/fixing of others into a state of flux (death, fungibility) in order for the Settler to transcend into a state of humanness. As the ultimate self actualizing human, the Settler can actually overcome the particularity of place (body, gender, race, abject sexuality) and launch into universal and abstract space (humanness). To be human in Frank Wilderson’s terms is to have “cartographic capacity.”34 “Spatial and temporal capacity is so immanent on the field of Whiteness that the effects and permutations of its ensemble of questions and the kinds of White bodies that can mobilize this universe of combinations are seemingly infinite as well.”35 To be a Savage or to be Black is to exist in the realm of no time and space.36 An apt visual for what happens when the Settler (noun) settles (verb) both people and land is one of a propelling long jumper. A long jumper is a subject who plants in order to launch oneself into space. This process of disciplining bodies, land and the viewers’ eye is hard to always perceive.

### AT: Baudrillard---Perm

#### Our postmodern simulation of life is a turn against the simulacrum, forcing it into its own mad proliferation that produces differentiation rather than sameness.

Song 12, University of California Riverside, (Mary, *Cyborg Dreams in Asian American Transnationality: Transgression, Myth, Simulation, Coalition*, University of California Riverside, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53d2x7nd>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

If we contemplate how narrative-making is an art that simulates identity, we might better appreciate the field of literary scholarship ! especially if we better understand the products of simulating identity versus the consequences of representing identity. Jean Baudrillard observes that our culture of simulation has become wholly reliant on signifiers that have replaced “reality” with “hyperreality”. Massumi critiques Baudrillard’s notion of hyperreality as a perception that leaves us in a sea of endlessly floating signifiers where “[m]eaning has imploded” (Massumi, http://www.anu.edu.au). Massumi asks, “But do we really have no other choice than being a naïve realist or being a sponge?” (ibid) Instead, Massumi advocates Deleuze’s notion of simulacra as an alternative to “being a sponge”:

The thrust of the process is not to become an equivalent of the “model” but to turn against it and its world in order to open a new space for the simulacrum’s own mad proliferation. The simulacrum affirms its own difference. It is not an implosion, but a differentiation; it is an index not of absolute proximity, but of galactic distances. (ibid)

Promulgating Deleuzian simulacra, Massumi rejects Baudrillard’s endless sea of signifiers on the grounds that it is too passive a vision of the world. Massumi believes that Deleuze’s figuration of simulacra lends the term more potency in that the sea of signifiers we live in is not of endlessly nondiscriminate labels, but rather, each singular signifier is a distinction unto its own. It is not about recognizing that we (referent to things as well as persons) are all really the same, it is rather about recognizing that we are all really so incredibly different.

In other words, a postmodern literary simulation of life can be indicative of the turn that envisions potential political change. Using Massumi’s interpretation of Deleuzian simulacra, I investigate how Choi simulates identity in her novel American Woman by transgressing the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction. By imbricating her story with non-fictional information with fictive narrative, Choi highlights the permeability between what we perceive to be non-fiction and fiction in order recognize our invested expectations in assimilation rather than difference. She depicts how despite the U.S. media’s profound investment in revealing the “true” Pauline, not even Pauline nor Jenny seem to know who this “true” Pauline is. On the other hand, Choi showcases the media’s absolute disinterest in Jenny; her narrative emphasizes this fact by acutely focusing on Jenny’s interior landscape. In this way, Choi creates a paradoxical narrative that deconstructs identity by thwarting our expectations of “discovering” any “true” Pauline except through Jenny. In other words, Choi answers the real-life question of Patty Hearst’s identity as answerable only through the fictive framework of Wendy Yoshimura’s silenced narrative. In this way, Choi’ narrative reveals how identity is not found in the assimilation of our desires but rather the differences that we tend to overlook. Choi chooses to explore identity through the process of examining the simulacra of U.S. media as commensurable to the simulacra of fiction.

### AT: Identity-Based Ks---Simulated Politics

#### Representational identity politics are pre-coded narratives that recreate complicity to hegemonic oppression. Only by embracing the logic of the cyborg in a simulated politics can we construct space for our identities.

Song 12, University of California Riverside, (Mary, *Cyborg Dreams in Asian American Transnationality: Transgression, Myth, Simulation, Coalition*, University of California Riverside, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/53d2x7nd>) //CHC-DS 🐱‍👤

It is this severance from any original story that supports Haraway’s notion of simulating identity over representing identity. When Haraway states that “[t]he cyborg is not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations” (Haraway 164), she recognizes how simulation politics does not recapitulate the same kind of centralizing logic of power that representation politics is susceptible to. Foucault’s biopolitics describes the technologies of oppression that the nation-state has exerted over marked bodies in the guise of population hygiene. One step away from eugenics, biopolitics organizes the population under the logic of caring for the population such that a body is no longer an individual’s right but that one body is in the rightful care of everyone else. In this way, hegemonic power succeeds in representing the needs of a body such that its oppression of that body is seemingly justified. For biopolitics to continue, we must remain complicit to the myth that truth is a representable phenomenon and that there lies an originary truth for all bodies. Representational politics of identity for marked bodies recapitulate this logic by perpetuating the myth that certain bodies can represent a particular originary truth. Relying on the body as image, such a politics forces us to commit to a pre-coded narrative that applies to certain multiple bodies. In both cases of the nation-state as well as minority politics, representational politics ultimately substantiates the kind of boundaries that centralize and marginalize.

A simulational politics of identity based on the logic of the cyborg resists the centralization of power in that it rejects the myth of any originary truth. Instead, the simulation politics of the cyborg is about producing its own truths based on the recognition and transgression of the boundaries that sustain hegemonic mythologies about truth and the body. According to Haraway, the body is no longer a unified, coherent and pure entity. Subsequently, to construct our identities based on such notions of clarity and purity only serve to sustain our complicit subservience to an informatics of domination through the hegemonic technologization of our bodies. In order to escape these systems of oppression, the cyborg offers its own technologization of the body such that we embrace the hybrid conditions of our bodies and the identities we consciously construct around them. Simulating identity, then, is about recognizing that there is no original story, and that the real story is the story that is unfolding right in front of us. Identity cannot be represented nor can it be discovered. Rather, identity unravels experientially such that it is recognized processually as we transgress across boundaries that reveal the constructed conditions of subjectivity. Haraway’s cyborg articulates the profound stakes in which such an alternate politics of identity are invested in when she states: “The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.” (Haraway 151)