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Databodies: Digitalising the Ustopian Spaces in Hari Kunzru's *Transmission*

ABSTRACT

The present paper attempts to circumscribe Hari Kunzru's 2005 novel, *Transmission*, within the genre we label, following Margaret Atwood, "ustopia," defined as the intersection between the twin impulses of utopia and dystopia. Encompassing both the exhilaration and the anxieties triggered by our speedy immersion in an increasingly digital world, the particular brand of cybernetic ustopia we focus on seems governed by what N. Katherine Hayles called "the regime of computation," a tropological projection of the universe envisaging subjects and landscapes as products of code and functioning through making, storing, and (crucially) transmission. Our aim is to show how the "intermediation" Hayles identifies as an effect of the encounter between analog materiality and digital information produces, in the terms of Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, an ontology of "epigenesis," or the random emergence of new organisms from the same mutations in the code that Kunzru's "viral" landscapes epitomizes.

KEYWORDS

Ustopias; Regime of Computation; Digital Universe; Digital Epigenesis; Transmission; Drift; Databodies.

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Ustopias: landscaping the future through the history of the present

Ustopia is a telescope word framed by Margaret Atwood against the obsolescent contingencies of its blended constituents, utopia and dystopia, which are deemed to mutually encapsulate latent versions of each other and to blur the distinctions that pose one as the inverted space- and mindscape of the other:

within each utopia, a concealed dystopia; within each dystopia, a hidden utopia, if only in the form of the world as it existed before the bad guys took over. Even in [...] the most unrelievedly gloomy dystopias ever concocted – utopia is present, though minimally, [...]. As for the utopias, [...] there is always provision made for the renegades, those who don't or won't follow the rules: prison, enslavement, exile, exclusion, or execution.¹

Ustopias are, to use the perspective of other theorists, "histories of the present"² or "archaeologies of the future,"³ whose paradoxical temporalities project "presentified" geographies and landscapes which, in their turns, are inhabited by subjects functioning



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as nodal points in an often catastrophic network of relations that might nevertheless project the hopeful glimpse of new salvation. In an increasingly cybernetic world, the regime of the digital encroaches upon utopia's territory, as well, generating global spaces of informational flows where "intermediated" selves construct their bodies through the binary genomics of the code. It is here that novels like Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* (whose very title seems to embody a crucial mode of existing in the contemporary world, rapidly propagating into the future) become relevant for the genre of utopia.

Fredric Jameson explains the attraction for utopia that seems to be a general mark of the current collective imaginary in its capacity to provide alternative forms of representation to the all-encompassing system of the global market:

The Utopians not only offer to conceive of such alternate systems; Utopian form is itself a representational meditation on radical difference, radical otherness, and on the systemic nature of the social totality, to the point where one cannot imagine any fundamental change in our social existence which has not first thrown off Utopian visions like so many sparks from a comet.⁴

It is what Jameson calls "the dialectic of Identity and Difference" that turns the utopian/dystopian impulse (or what we, following Margaret Atwood, call "ustopias") into a force shaping the organisation of the real; ustopias do so, as Jameson usefully points out, not only through their historical inclusions, but also through the representational strategies (Jameson lists closure, exclusion and inversion, but the repertoire is more exhaustive) that contain, within the distance between the sign and its referent,

the tensions informing our selves, our temporalities and our spaces.

If we follow Jameson, the driving impulse of u(s)topia seems to reside in ambiguity, since the difference from reality that makes it possible may also render it "unimaginable."⁵ For our current purposes, one of the main interests of Jameson's analysis seems to reside in his exploration of the complex temporalities that make the u(s)topian impulse possible while simultaneously plunging it into representational and conceptual aporias. For not only does u(s)topia function by projecting forward a teleological future that it inscribes into the present of the text (therefore robbing it of its ontology), but it also projects backward a present that is somehow enabled by the possibility of the yet non-existent future. The mere thinkability of such a future already conditions a present that depends on it, thus turning it on a determination of its being. Founders of u(s)topias may dream them up because they are already founded by the very u(s)topias they are creating: the original relation between present and future is thus reversed, and the question of teleology becomes unaskable.

Another way of looking at the relation of reciprocal constitution between utopia, the subjects and their spaces is suggested by N. Katherine's Hayles concept of "intermediation," defined as "the complex transactions between bodies and texts as well as between different forms of media" allowing for the formation of various "posthuman" versions of subjectivity as "effects of media."⁶ According to the American theorist, the dominant tropological regime currently mediating our understanding of the world spawns from the metaphor of the "Computational Universe, that is, the claim that the universe is generated through computational processes running on a vast computational mechanism underlying all of physical reality."⁷ Mother Nature substituted by the



“Motherboard:” one crucial consequence of this shift resides in the creative tensions it engenders between the “simulation” of computer codes and discursive representations of reality, such as narrative in general, or utopias in particular. Simulations can be thought of as attempts to think the complexity of the world starting from the simplicity of initial conditions inscribed in the binarism of the code; since this complexity, based on the unpredictability of the system’s self-organisational activity, exceeds any possibility of mathematical or logical *reproduction*, simulation becomes synonymous with *production*, which effectively does away with the boundaries between representation and a putative external “referent,” and instead firmly sets up representation as “presentification.” While narrative works in a similar fashion, its grounding in what Hayles calls the “lifeworld” of perception and the senses simultaneously distances it from the numerical realm of computer simulation; however, given the pervasive penetration of computational topology at the very heart of human figurations of reality, there is no escaping such generative aporias underlying the contemporary production of both subjectivities and landscapes. In her book, Hayles identifies three main modes in which what she calls “digital subjects” are interpellated by the advent of the “regime of computation” and its overlapping with the remains of older topological regimes: making (constituted by the dynamics between language and code), storing (emerging from the tensions between printed and electronic textualities) and transmitting (poised at the interface between the analogue and the digital). As Hayles explains, “[m]aking, storing and transmitting can be thought of as modalities related to information; they also help to constitute the bodies of subjects and texts”⁸ – or some of the instruments of intermediation.

When she discusses transmission, Hayles is not interested in the propagation of

information from one point to another in space, but in “mechanisms and processes by which informational patterns are transferred between analog consciousness and digital cognition, understanding the latter variously as located in the computer, in human nonconscious processes, and in digital simulations.”⁹ The disturbing possibility that conscious thought might be an effect of “pre-programmed” instructions (embedded in the hardware of the body like invisible software), while by no means new, is being explored from a fresh perspective by the contemporary regime of computation that reconfigures the mind as a product of digital algorithms, with catastrophic effects on the emergence of the subject as an “agent.” Hayles points out that twentieth-century attempts at decentralising the self through its figuration as a rhizomatic, machine-like “body without organs” run by the software of desire in Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*, as well as what Hayles describes as “Lacan’s conception of the unconscious as a kind of Turing machine”¹⁰ (to mention only the most famous examples), bear uncanny resemblances to the “computational universe” whose foundations are cellular automata¹¹ – resemblances which allow for the smooth transfer to a vision of human already knowledge cybernetically mediated. The discursive exchanges between representations of the body as biological organisms and as mechanical assemblages blur the boundaries between human and machinic agency and destabilize concepts of personhood and individuality by turning cognition into a distributed state shared by analog embodied consciousness and digital, cybernetic operations.

As Hayles concludes, this triggers a mutation in the definition of what it means to be human, bringing into sharper the inescapable mediated nature of consciousness and the grafting of the analog and the digital as driving energies. Turned into the medium



that brings together subjectivity and computation, transmission shifts the central philosophical question to the issue of how the permeability of the organic by the digital shapes our entanglement with the world in such a way that it undermines conventional structures of disciplining bodies and selves, engendering techno-anthropological entities whose unstable natures serve as “ustopian” manifestations of the (post)human condition.

The dialectic of identity and difference that we have identified at the heart of ustopias seems to govern the contemporary techno-generative regime that Arthur and Marilouise Kroker describe under the label of “code drift.” “Drift” is a concept they borrow from biology, where it refers to the evolutionary changes produced by random genetic mutations, and “splice” onto the discourse of the digital universe – the global information network, replete with the simultaneous pulsations of “the terrorism of the code” and the “ecstatic visions of augmented reality, mobility, and connectivity.”¹² Suspended between the dystopian vision of “everything solid melting into air” (accompanied by the nightmare of technological total surveillance and colonisation of the human by the mechanical other), and the utopian hope of a transhumanity leaving behind natural limitations to a bright future of omniscience, instantaneous communication and endlessly expanded life, the digital universe bears the imprints of the tensions between the analog and the digital encapsulated into what Arthur and Marilouise Kroker describe as the future subjectivity of “enhanced data bodies of augmented reality.”¹³ The phenomenon of code drift – the probabilistic certainties of invisible arbitrary, unpredictable mutations – mirrors the evolution of “humanity” insofar as it carries

no necessary message, no final meaning, no firm future, no definite goal:

only a digital culture at drift in streams of social networking technologies filtered here and there with sudden changes in code frequencies, moving at the speed of random fluctuations, always seeking to make of the question of identity a sampling error, to connect with the broken energy flows of ruptures, conjurations, unintelligibility, bifurcations.”¹⁴

Paradoxically “tethered to mobility,” the “data bodies” are determined by the indeterminacies of sampling errors and driven by a nervous system made up of binary code whose inhumanity is expressed in a will to invisibility that seems to counteract the overexposed and infinitely multiplied image of the self on the computer screen. As with Hari Kunzru’s *Leela Zahir*, it is in the gendered pressures of the digitalised corporeality that this invisibility comes back with a vengeance, temporarily recuperated from the “purely illusory spectre of the nomadic body.”¹⁵ Contemporary ustopian fiction reconfigures this digital corporeality, still retaining the (negative and positive) energies of social, biological, economic and geographic sways, using the “ontology of *epigenesis*: the belief that digital organisms proliferate by the new appearance of code structures and networking functions”¹⁶ [our emphases].

“Epigenesis,” another notion on loan from the language of genomics, is the name of the theory that holds that the development of the organism takes place by the appearance of new structures (as opposed to “preformation”, which suggests that these structures had already been there at the beginning).¹⁷ Epigenesis is, as remarked by Kroker and Kroker, a discourse of creation *ab nihilo* that perfectly suits the “great code” of the digital world designed and re-designing itself from the continuous skirmish between pattern and randomness,



between syntactical structuring and unexpected ruptures. The viral self-reproduction of the code corresponds to the propagation of difference that disturbs the immobilised reproduction of identity, disrupting subjectivities, bodies and geographies. This has far-reaching consequences: according to Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, the digital universe can be described using the theoretical discourse of “epigenetics” – “the study of the neural mechanisms by which digital genes bring about their phenotypic effects.”¹⁸ It could be that utopian fiction might act as the fictional counterpart of theoretical epigenetics, simulating (to use Hayles’s concept) in terms of a struggle staged between code and narrative, the emergence of intermediated, “data-enhanced” subjects.

Regenia Gagnier refers to the contemporary information age as the “third stage of technocracy” (after the industrial and the communications revolutions), which aims to bring human reproduction under the scientist’s control and fulfil the biotechnological dream of parthenogenesis, of circumventing the sexual channels of procreation; moreover, for Gagnier, the posthuman cyborg is not an antithetic counterpart of the human will to power and knowledge, but a trope of *recombinance*, a metaphor of the technological augmentation and extension of the human as a cyborg-citizen.¹⁹ In the same vein, Australian life sciences theorist Cathy Waldby describes the horizons of our biofuture as beleaguered with the gothic, uncanny progeny of biotechnology, as the opaqueness and “self-contiguous depth” of human anatomy undergoes translucent vivification via computer imaging techniques: as Waldby maintains, the Visible Human Project, which, by the turn of the millennium, had produced three-dimensional, full-scale, digitalised representations of the prototypal male and female bodies, has inaugurated a regime of posthuman technogenesis,

if not through the much-anticipated/ maligned downloading of consciousness into the computer,²⁰ then

Through the auspices of computation and molecular biology, the qualities of vivacity have been redistributed throughout systems of information. The force of life is increasingly posed and manipulated as bioinformation, a negentropic programming of matter which lives as replicating, mutating code. Casting life along such lines necessarily alters the terms of death as well, although in general death remains unthought in bioinformatics, presented simply as a *lack* of information.²¹

Transmitting the digital body

Transmission, Hari Kunzru’s third novel of 2005, explores the utopian inflections of the process whereby the digital technologies are reconfiguring conceptions of space and time, the potential of the body and the mind can be augmented cybernetically and the fixity of “human nature” is disrupted by the exponential enhancement of the possibility of our *neoanthropoietic* emergence in the sphere of information. The title signals that in the age of late global networking and distributive cognition, scapes are dissipated into nodal points of convergence amongst patterns of information flow and exist in virtual interconnectivity with other scapes, whether we speak of the transportation of goods, the mobility of humans, the communication of information or the satellite transmission of signals.²² Thus, the “fuzzy humans”²³ of Kunzru’s techno-universe are contingent nexuses that expand their complex matricial boundaries onto their non-human environments, becoming interstitial hybrids that connect spaces of origin and



spaces of destination in their postcolonial perambulations, but also sites of embodied subjectivity and digitalised mediality. The novel thus features the configuration of technospace via the transference of the characters across the softened psycho-geographic frontiers described by Zygmunt Bauman in his account of liquid modernity, a stage that, in the Polish sociologist's view, is abandoning the "heavy," "hardware" strategies of panoptical containment/insulation/sedimentation and flaunting practices of mobility/flexibility/velocity associated with a "light," "software" post-panoptical strand of modernity.²⁴ Convergent with this account of posthuman transmissibility is Rosi Braidotti's notion of nomadic articulations of space that may lithely traverse these shifting cartographies: Deleuzian deterritorialisation (the switch from cellularity to globality, from capillary seepages to network surges) is summoned by both theorists as the archtrope of contemporary nomadism, a phenomenon coterminous with Bauman's entropic processes of boundary liquefaction/sublimation and with Braidotti's emphasis on molecular distribution/dissemination/precipitation as the necessary operations of dissolving and destructuring molar stasis; however, unlike Bauman, who detects "slipperiness," "shiftiness," "evasiveness" and "fugitiveness" as the hegemonic prerogatives of a "nomadic and exterritorial elite" over the "settled majority,"²⁵ Braidotti invokes "nomadic subjectivity" as the "ethically accountable and politically empowering" perspective – psycho-cartography or figuration – of the polyscopic, rhizomatic, posthuman self, outside and beyond the dyadic rifts that marked Cartesian, dualistic notions of identity.

The "nomadic selves" of Kunzru's text exist in translation across space. Enticed by the prospect of relocating himself in the paradisiacal Silicon Valley of "Amrika" and

by his symbolic dream of elevation in a dark, broad escalator, Arjun Mehta, the socially enfreaked geek and unexceptional IT man, emigrates from India and inadvertently accepts insertion into the molecularly partitioned space of Databodies, a Californian company that encourages human capital flight and populates its technologically efficient cubicles with brains drained from the less economically advantaged areas of the globe. Bottling up his resentment at being transferred into a mere computational item – a databody – within the drifting codes of America's cybocracy,²⁶ Mehta pursues these lines of flight by becoming the invisible employee of a global computer-security firm, Virugenix, eventually abstracting himself altogether from the world after releasing a catastrophic computer virus that paralyses the cybernetic systems and plunges global activity into stasis. Within the same regime of computation, Leela Zahir, the rising star of the Mumbai film industry, already incorporates the flickering indeterminacy that immersion in a regime of spec(tac)ularity entails. Her further absorption into the infosphere,²⁷ as a "little pixelated dancer" surfing the drift codes of an email attachment that includes viral variations on the insidious *leela.exe*, is coupled with her own traversings of outer geographies, making her, next to Arjun, the post-genetic or, rather, epigenetic parent of the monstrous digital offspring – the virus – that leaves the world in disarray. The third element that further destabilizes the matricial technowomb is Guy Swift, Mehta's antagonist, in socio-political terms, as his transmission will feature a katabatic descent from the height at which their pathways intersect at the onset of the narrative (thirty thousand feet apart, as one is enjoying his luxury flight, while the other is crossing terrestrial hinterlands in a humble bus) to the effacement of his identity in the anonymity of statelessness.



In what Haraway calls the New World Order Inc.,²⁸ identities are redistributed across a continuum whose polar opposites are the technologically inept and the technologically adept, the subjects' openness to entwinement in networks of digitality conditioning their rapports with the biotech chronotope. Thus, on the one hand, there are those who, like the parents of Arjun and Leela, have an innate aversion to technological hybridisation and artefactualisation (they cannot "factor" in the "march of technology" into their offspring's career projects), envisaging the space of sociality as restricted to the familial confines of immediacy.²⁹ For instance, Arjun's mother is terrified to hear of her son's intention of disengagement from the fixity and stability of the ancestral hearth, as his journey to America would expose him to the mutability of identity that abstraction from at-homeness into what, for an immigrant might appear as an "empty space,"³⁰ awaiting as-signations of meaning, would foster; in the same key can be read her objection to Priti's becoming "cosmopolitan," as the young girl's exposure to telepresence devices is deemed to have left a deleterious imprint on her mindset.

By contrast with the technophobiacs' preference for the solidity of panoptical partitionings of "hard" space, operating under the logic that natural proximity/sameness has the beneficence of a nurturing envelope for the self, whereas technologically induced distance/difference is tantamount to irreparable identitarian cleavages, the technophiliacs like Sunny Srinivasan, the Indian official interviewing Arjun for the Databodies position, acquire the spectral quality of the transitional non-places they more or less provisionally occupy: amidst the hustle-and-bustle and free-flowing traffic of people elbowing in and out Connaught Place, where Arjun himself feels impelled to remain still and quiet in order to "preserve

himself," Srinivasan "appeared to be less a human being than a communications medium, a channel for the transmission of consumer lifestyle messages."³¹ So too is Guy Swift, the British specialist in communication and public relations, whose techno-coded mind deciphers the others as mere instantiations of other hybrid coagulations of flesh and data, as, for instance, during his flight "from one point of the earth's surface to another," he

enjoyed the attendant's android charm, the way the disciplined female body reminded him it was just a tool, the uniformed probe-head of the large corporate machine in which he was enmeshed. He (or rather his company) was paying this machine to administer a calculated series of pleasures and sensations.³²

The implication is that in the globally disseminated post-panoptical structures of capillary power, entering an alliance with technology condones a tranquil acceptance of identitarian segmentariness, as humans are becoming not the molar cogs and wheels of what Andy Clark³³ might call the "opaque" biotech power regime, but as the flows and drifts of imperceptible, molecular, transparent informational clusters, on whose fluency and continuity the larger, complex autopoietic system – the neocolonial cybo- or cyberocracy – depends.

The posthumanist paradigm advocated by Guy Swift is set in stark contrast with the humanist set of moral and rational values of stability and gradual teleological advancement advocated by Arjun's parents. Thus, his advertising and marketing company, called *GS:TM (Guy Swift: The Mission)* envisions rebranding any and all identities, whether of the body individual, the body social or the body planetary. All technical



beings, in the Latourian sense,³⁴ whether they are humans or non-humans, lend themselves to fluidisation and digital “vivi-fication,”³⁵ for his TBM brand

stood for Total Brand Mutability. [...] Having helped to sell an unknown quantity of sporting footwear, alco-pops, games consoles and snowboard-ing holidays to CAR-starved under-thirties in Britain and Continental Eu-rope, he had experienced what he de-scribed as a personal epiphany, the re-alization at a full-moon party in Thai-land that his future lay in the science of “deep branding”, the great quest to har-ness what in *GS:TM* he termed the “e-motional magma that wells from the core of planet brand.” “Humans are so-cial,” he would remind his clients in pitch meetings. “We need relationships. A brand is the perfect way to come together. Human input creates aware-ness and mines the brand for emotion. In a real way, the more we love it, the more powerful it gets.”³⁶

In a sense, what Guy Swift attempts to achieve through the simulation of a space of communal virtuality under the twisted aegis of simulacra is what Gilbert Simondon de-fines as the passage from identitarian unity to transindividual multiplicity via the opera-tions of transduction that are fostered by im-mersion in technical culture.³⁷ Up to a point, it might be claimed that Arjun’s own expe-rience of self-exile founders within the rhi-zomatic networks of anonymity and invis-ibility of his molecular existence in the A-merican neo-concorpocracy because of an essentially humanist paradigm in which he is still structurally anchored, making him resistant to disappearance into the code. “Digital epigenesis,” which for posthuman-ists like Guy Swift appears to be an

exhilarating corporeal, “physical connec-tion” to technology’s “alien fibrillation [or] flutter of potential,” represents for Arjun reification, objectivation, pathologisation. Hence, his desire to invent a virus that can scramble the digital code which traverses the world and grants it spectral consistency:

When you write code you are in con-trol. You construct a world from first principles, drawing up the axioms that govern it, setting in motion the engines of generation and decay. Even in a computer environment designed by someone else you can relax, safe in the knowledge that you are engaged with a system that runs according to poten-tially knowable rules. From this per-spective the real world possesses the paradoxical quality of not feeling real enough. Surely, of all things, reality ought to be transparent, logical. You should be able to unscrew the fascia and view the circuitry inside.³⁸

For Arjun Mehta, the humiliated deni-zen of the “interstitial world, [of] discreet virtuality,”³⁹ writing code, albeit the pollut-ed code of viral diffraction, is the equivalent of a renaissance of the world, within the “met-(r)amorphic” and “meta(l)morphic” digital matrix,⁴⁰ which goes against the grain of normal heterosexual procreation: the male is the one who unleashes the monstrous prog-eny – the Leela virus – in the world, in an overall perverted nativity process not be-cause the offspring is devoid of embodied life, or because it does not replicate the pa-ternal eidolon (even though, true, it is the image of the “mother” it endlessly repli-cates), but because it reveals the tremen-dously ambivalent potential of mergers be-tween humans and technology on the brink of posthuman becomings.

Arthur and Marilouise Kroker’s use of the concept of digital epigenesis is uncannily



anticipated in *Transmission*, with its insistence on the havoc wreaked on the apparently serene and well-organised (at least in the protagonist's mind) code system by a self-replicating virus in the form of the beautiful Bollywood actress. The overlapping of code and body (it might also be significant that the company the main character works for is called Databodies) operated in the novel signals the colonisation of the biological by the digital, resulting in hybrid, cyber-corporeal beings participating in the "global data genome" which functions according to a "distributive, circulating, relational" logic. The release of the *leela.exe* virus marks the inaugural event that replaces the egological gaze of the dominating subject (who allows itself to be drawn in by the virus precisely because of its desire for mastery over the image of the beautiful Leela) with "the subject as an emergent ecology of biology/sociality/data" which spells the end of "the human species as we have known it with its privatised ego, localized consciousness, and radical separation of the senses."⁴¹ In the novel, the instant transmission of the virus through the network of disparate geographies accessed by the narrative as so many "windows" on the computer screen undercuts any attempt to reconstitute a "sequence of events" organisable into an explanation, because

The truth is that Leela was not one thing. She was not even a set or a group or a family. She was a swarm, a horde. At the same time as *Leela01* was being spread via email, other Leelas, other things with her face, were being uploaded to shareware sites, were tunnelling their way into web servers to be doled out as Applets, were propagating at a phenomenal rate through peer-to-peer networks. There were versions of her that broke completely with the past, that were targeted

at the complex operating systems used by businesses and universities, at the stripped-down ones designed for cellphone handsets and personal organizers. So many Leelas. So many girls with the same face.⁴²

The new, drifting ontology of the digital universe is mimicked, for instance, by the beginning of the novel, with its instantaneous "snaps" of the real, each struggling to act as the impossible origin of the story, despite the self-sufficient, epigenetic, emergence of the virus out of the interstices of the real. As the text insists, the "source" resides in the darkness of the code, in the "topological curiosities, the loops and knots" of the software, whose "cascade" of ones and zeros, the original intersection of "something" and "nothing" undercuts the ecstatic dance of the human figure on the screen:

Morning through Venetian blinds.
A cinema crowd watches a tear roll
down a giant face.
The beep of an alarm. Groans and slow
disengagement of limbs.
She shuts down her machine and
They sit together in a taxi
A curvature. A stoop.
swivels her chair towards the window
and
Someone in the stalls makes loud kissing
noises
poor posture
between the two of them a five-inch
gap
she takes another bite of her sandwich
laughter
the posture of a young man standing
outside a New Delhi office tower.
An arbitrary leap into the system.⁴³

In parallel fashion, the ending of the novel marks the impossibility of closure as



the last phrase of the text (explicitly referring to extracting a meaningful pattern from the randomness of the code) remains suspended in the silence of the blank final page, while the refusal of an explanation propagates like a virus, just like the bodies of the two protagonists become ubiquitous, infinitely reproduced along the digitalised landscape of the globe:

There are sightings of Arjun Mehta and Leela Zahir around the world, sometimes alone, sometimes in company. She is seen begging in the streets of Jakarta and talking on the phone in the back of New York cabs. He is spotted one day at an anti-globalization demo in Paris and the next coming on to the pitch in a hockey match in rural Gujarat. He has got enormously fat. She has been surgically altered to look like a European. One persistent report, mostly from Pacific Rim countries, has a young man fitting Mehta's description accompanied by a South Asian woman of a similar age, "tomboyishly" or "punkily" dressed. They are sometimes seen kissing or holding hands. According to conspiracy theorists, there is only one possible explanation, only one pattern that makes sense."⁴⁴

Bodily and geographical epigenesis are brought together in the circularity of narrative epigenesis, as the utopian space opened up by the text subverts the linearity of chronology and the binarism of the code by metaphorically returning to the loops and knots of the initial, pixelised sightings of Leela's dancing image on the screen.

Conclusion

The digitalisation and, implicitly, the dissolution of selves in the reticulated transversalities of online space, coupled with fears that a viral disturbance of the patterns of digital flow might overturn the cosmic articulation of real space into chaotic dissipation reflect the present-day dystopian scenarios of our digi-genetic constitution as cyber/cyborg citizens of the posthuman age.⁴⁵ At the same time, the reinstatement of the novel's protagonists, Arjun Mehta and Leela Zahir, as fully, albeit shiftily embodied individuals (cloaked in the anonymity of non-spectral, somaticised existence) after the digital storm that has concurrently polluted and cleansed the global tech-world of viral (and socio-economic and political) discrepancies grants a utopian glimmer to the space of transmission, which we are all traversed by and conglobed in.

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Notes

¹ Margaret Atwood, *In Other Worlds. SF and the Human Imagination* (New York and London: Doubleday, 2011), 85. For See, for instance, Krishan Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), 100.

² Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash, "Introduction," in *Utopia/ Dystopia. Conditions of Historical Possibility*, edited by Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 1.

³ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

⁴ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xiii.

⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, xv.

⁶ N. Katherine Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer. Digital Subjects and Literary Texts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7.

⁷ Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, 3.

⁸ Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, 7.

⁹ Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, 171.

¹⁰ Hayles, *My Mother Was a Computer*, 176.

¹¹ Cellular automata are the simplest, atomistic components underlying a system, whose interaction regulated by minimalistic rules gives rise to the emergent complexity of the evolving system, see Stephen Wolfram, *A New Kind of Science* (Champaign, IL: Wolfram Media, 2002).

¹² Arthur and Marilouise Kroker, "Preface" to *Code Drift*, 1.

¹³ Kroker, "Code Drift," 5.

¹⁴ Kroker, "Code Drift", 6.



- ¹⁵ Kroker, "Code Drift," 11.
- ¹⁶ Kroker, "Code Drift," 22.
- ¹⁷ See Kroker, "Code Drift," 14.
- ¹⁸ Kroker, "Code Drift," 24.
- ¹⁹ Regenia Gagnier, "Individualism from the New Woman to the Genome: Autonomy and Independence," *Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 1 (2003): 103-128.
- ²⁰ Moravec imagines a "postbiological world dominated by self-improving, thinking machines," whose minds will have been modified to "operate effectively after being rescued from the limitations of a mortal body," in Hans Moravec, *Mind Children. The Future of Robot and Human Intelligence* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 5.
- ²¹ Catherine Waldby, *The Visible Human Project. Informatic bodies and posthuman medicine* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 110.
- ²² Cf. John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 4-5.
- ²³ Robert Pepperell, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness beyond the Brain* (Portland: Intellect, 2003), 20.
- ²⁴ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), 1-13.
- ²⁵ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 13-14.
- ²⁶ Chris Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen: Politics in the Posthuman Age* (London: Routledge, 2001), 39.
- ²⁷ Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 47.
- ²⁸ Donna J. Haraway, *Modest_Witness@-Second_Millennium. FemaleMan@_Meets_-OncoMouse™. Feminism and Technoscience* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 3-4.
- ²⁹ Hari Kunzru, *Transmission* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 4.
- ³⁰ Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 104.
- ³¹ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 8.
- ³² Kunzru, *Transmission*, 12.
- ³³ Andy Clark, *Natural-Born Cyborgs. Minds, Technologies and the Future of Human Intelligence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 198.
- ³⁴ Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10-11.
- ³⁵ Waldby, *The Visible Human Project*, 110.
- ³⁶ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 20.
- ³⁷ Gilbert Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, trans. Ninian Mellamphy (Paris: Aubier, Editions Montaigne, 1958), 86.
- ³⁸ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 103.
- ³⁹ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 27.
- ⁴⁰ Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses. Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003), 214.
- ⁴¹ Kroker, "Code Drift," 25.
- ⁴² Kunzru, *Transmission*, 107.
- ⁴³ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 4-5.
- ⁴⁴ Kunzru, *Transmission*, 275-276.
- ⁴⁵ Hables Gray, *Cyborg Citizen*, 9-18.