# ALL THIS PROGRESS



BY AISHWARYASHREE

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The name *All This Progress* operates across several scales: my own development as a designer, the evolution of this project and its ideas, technological advancement, and India's aspirations for national development. It reflects an attempt to understand what progress means, who defines it, whether moving forward necessarily means moving towards something better, and how we might intervene in the process.
Ultimately, this project is an attempt to find a way forward.

Cover Image Source:
u/AkshayJoshiFilms on Reddit

# INTRODUCTION

## HOW MIGHT MARGINALISED POSITIONALITIES CHALLENGE DOMINANT SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION AND CONSTRUCT ALTERNATIVE VISUAL AND CULTURAL DEFAULTS, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA AND THE EMERGING INFLUENCE OF AI?

Much like my studio practice, I prefer my enquiries to remain open-ended. I approach research with a willingness to learn from every reference I encounter, have my assumptions challenged and allow my thinking to change, rather than simply seeking material that reinforces existing ideas. Yet, after much intellectual push and pull, I find myself continually returning to something I feel particularly passionate about, especially given my positionality as a big brown woman: representation.

> As my enquiries grow increasingly complex, I see myself exploring representation through multiple lenses, particularly questioning what we understand as the 'default': how it is constructed and who has the authority to establish it. I am particularly interested in new media and digital platforms, examining how their ostensibly progressive infrastructures continue to reproduce historical colonial and misogynistic biases. How is an entirely new digital world being constructed through familiar hierarchies of power, and what does this mean for the ways in which we see, understand and represent the world?

Mainstream media and popular culture play a significant role in establishing these visual and cultural norms, and graphic communication design is itself deeply implicated in their production and circulation. I want to use the discipline both to critique these structures and to explore how it might contribute to constructing alternatives. I am interested in developing alternative blueprints, if not entirely new infrastructures for media and representation. Particularly in juxtaposition to mainstream media, I want to explore how familiar visual languages, formats and points of accessibility might be appropriated and reworked through alternative perspectives. Rather than creating something entirely removed from existing media, I want to engage with what people already recognise and encounter, while offering different ways of seeing, interpreting and imagining. This is my initial point of departure, although I hope to take these explorations beyond critique and into more speculative, experimental and ultimately inventive territory.

To keep my practice iterative, I have been experimenting with vibe coding as a means of making and prototyping. Its flexibility has allowed me to think and build beyond the limitations of my existing technical skills. However, my use of AI is accompanied by considerable scepticism and an ongoing investigation into its implications for authorship, labour, bias and representation. I am also interested in its increasingly alien nature and what its growing integration into everyday life might mean for the future of humanity. Equally, I want to understand its material consequences, particularly its environmental costs and contribution to ecological decline. AI therefore forms both a methodological

consideration and a parallel enquiry within my practice. I am want to question the assumption that technological advancement necessarily equates to neutrality and progress, particularly when the systems underpinning these technologies may reproduce the very structures I seek to challenge. For now, I see AI primarily as a means of facilitating research and experimentation, while remaining open to how this position might evolve.

TL;DR: I WANT MY PRACTICE TO ENCOURAGE A CRITICAL RECONSIDERATION OF WHAT WE ACCEPT AS NATURAL, NEUTRAL OR UNIVERSAL, AND WHOSE INTERESTS THESE DEFAULTS SERVE. I WANT TO EXAMINE REPRESENTATION THROUGH THE REALITIES OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA AND THE POSSIBLE FUTURES SHAPED BY AI, QUESTIONING NOT ONLY THE BIASES EMBEDDED WITHIN THESE TECHNOLOGIES BUT ALSO THE VISUAL AND CULTURAL WORLDS THEY MIGHT COME TO CONSTRUCT. MORE THAN SEEKING REPRESENTATION WITHIN EXISTING SYSTEMS, I WANT TO EXPLORE HOW WE MIGHT GAIN THE AGENCY TO AUTHOR ALTERNATIVE SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION AND BEGIN TO BUILD DEFAULTS OF OUR OWN.

# SITUATING MY PRACTICE

THE FOLLOWING SELECTION BRINGS TOGETHER PROJECTS, PRACTICES AND BODIES OF WORK THAT I FIND RELEVANT TO MY DEVELOPING ENQUIRY. THESE WORKS OPERATE IN DIFFERENT ASPECTS, THROUGH THEIR NARRATIVES, VISUAL LANGUAGES, FORMS, STRUCTURES, METHODOLOGIES OR CHOSEN MEDIUMS. SOME SHARE CONCERNS WITH MY OWN ENQUIRY, WHILE OTHERS OFFER APPROACHES THAT CHALLENGE OR EXPAND THE WAY I THINK ABOUT MY PRACTICE.

THIS IS AN ONGOING PROCESS OF EXPLORATION. I AM NOT APPROACHING THESE WORKS AS A FIXED SET OF INFLUENCES, BUT AS POINTS OF DIALOGUE THROUGH WHICH I CAN DEVELOP AND SITUATE MY OWN THINKING. AS MY ENQUIRY EVOLVES, I EXPECT THIS SELECTION TO GROW AND SHIFT ALONGSIDE IT.

# *Humans in the Loop*
## Directed by Aranya Sahay

FILM



Still from *Humans in the Loop*

*Humans in the Loop*[1] became an important reference point within my enquiry because of the way it positions indigenous labour and ecological knowledge against the inept & rigid logic of AI systems. Set in Jharkhand, the film follows Adivasi women working as data labellers, whose labour quietly sustains technological systems that rarely recognise the knowledge they themselves bring to them.

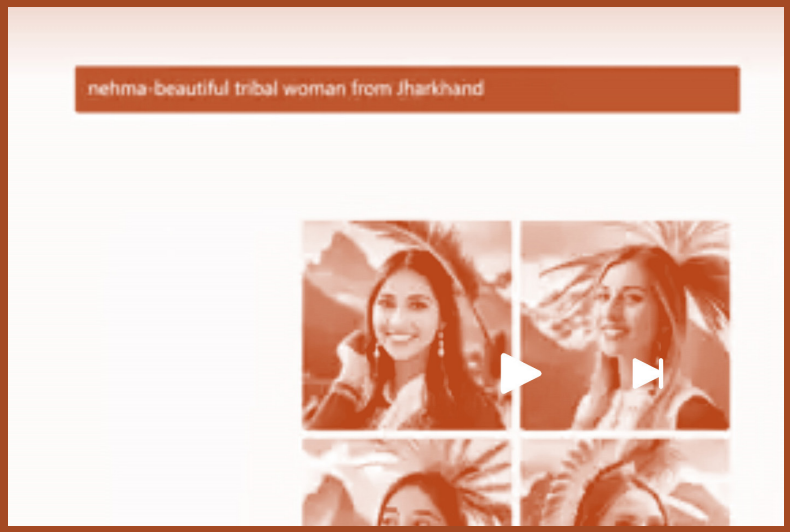
One scene in particular, in which the protagonist is asked to categorise an insect as a "pest", felt especially significant. From her experience of the ecosystem as a tribal woman, the insect serves a beneficial purpose by consuming the harmful parts of a plant and allowing it to grow. Yet, the classification system offers no language for this more nuanced ecological relationship, reducing the insect to a binary category of useful or harmful. The inadequacy lies not in her knowledge, but in the limitations of the system attempting to classify it. I found this interesting in relation to language itself: what happens when a knowledge system encounters something for which its vocabulary has no equivalent? Should we be building machines that claim to know everything when the material we feed them is itself inaccurate, incomplete and shaped by our own limitations as humans?

> Another scene, in which the women search for "nehma beautiful tribal woman from Jharkhand", produces a series of predominantly Caucasian-looking women depicted in stereotypical Native American headdresses. The disconnect between the search and its results exposes how digital systems can collapse distinct cultural identities into generic visual stereotypes. It reveals how the representation of certain communities is often filtered through datasets and visual conventions shaped by dominant Western perspectives, rather than the lived realities of the people being represented.

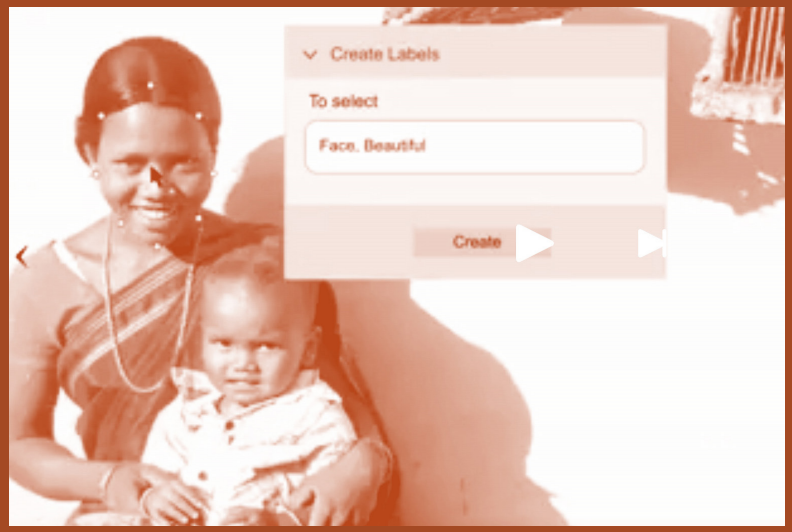
Together, these moments became symbolic of the wider digital landscape, where complex relationships to land, ecology, identity and culture are flattened into datasets, searchable categories and standardised visual references. The film made me think about the politics embedded in seemingly ordinary acts of classification and image retrieval, and how systems that claim to organise and represent the world can simultaneously misrecognise, homogenise and erase it. It also reinforced my interest in invisible labour within computation, particularly the role of women whose knowledge and labour sustain technologies that fail to acknowledge, or even accommodate, them and their own ways of understanding the world.

1 Sahay, A. (dir.) (2024) *Humans in the Loop* [Film]. India: Storiculture.

Stills from *Humans in the Loop*:



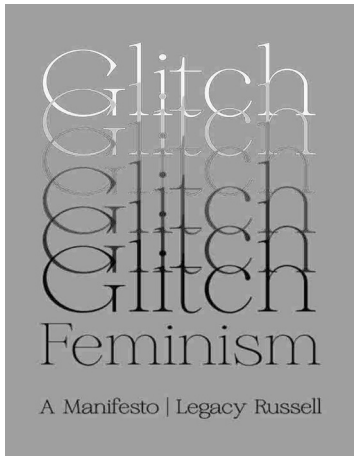

1. A search for "nehma-beautiful tribal woman from Jharkhand" returns Caucasian-looking women in Native American headdresses.




2. Consciously labelling tribal as beautiful.

# *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*
## By Legacy Russell

BOOK




*Glitch Feminism*[2] introduced me to a language through which I could articulate my frustrations as a woman and a person of colour, while drawing parallels with computation and digital systems. Russell highlights how prejudices that existed long before the internet continue to persist within it, translated into computational form. What feels particularly significant about *Glitch Feminism* is that it does not simply identify these problems, but proposes the glitch itself as a method of resistance and reimagining identity. Distortion, interruption and failure cease to be things that need correcting and instead become spaces through which new identities, possibilities and ways of existing can emerge.

What particularly attracts me to Russell's writing is its use of analogy. Placing feminism within the language of computers changes the way one understands both technology and society. It makes the digital world feel less like a separate, neutral space and more like an extension of the world we already inhabit, carrying its hierarchies, prejudices and exclusions with it.

> I seek to extend the idea of the glitch beyond its technical meaning. What happens when we interrupt the visual and cultural conventions through which technology imagines the future? Whose aesthetics, histories, languages and forms of knowledge are treated as peripheral, and what might become possible if they were instead used to construct new visual and cultural frameworks? For me, this opens up a way of thinking about the future that does not simply reproduce familiar, dominant visions of technological advancement, but makes room for other cultural imaginaries and ways of knowing.

Russell's proposition has also influenced how I approach making. I am drawn to processes that allow for experimentation, disruption, rebuilding and unexpected outcomes, rather than treating technical limitations or failures as obstacles. My recent engagement with vibe coding has opened up ways of working with computational tools that would otherwise sit beyond my technical capabilities, allowing me to experiment with systems, interfaces and forms of interaction through an iterative process of making. At the same time, this has made me more conscious of the contradictions of working with AI. While it offers possibilities for extending my own creative and technical agency, I remain critical of the biases embedded within the systems I am using. I recognise the contradiction of using these tools to create while simultaneously questioning the worlds they are trained on and the futures they help construct. In this sense, the glitch becomes both a visual language and a way of working: a means of questioning established structures while creating alternatives within them.

2 Russell, L. (2020) *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*. London: Verso.

# *Memes and the Future of Pop Culture: Conditions in Net Utopia*

## By Marcel Danesi

BOOK

FROM THE BOOK: ACADEMIC CITATIONS

1. "THE INDIVIDUALIST BRAIN IS AN IDEAL, SHAPED BY PREVIOUS SOCIO-TECHNOLOGICAL FORCES AT WORK IN HUMAN EVOLUTION. AS SUCH IT IS STILL A WORTHY ONE; BUT IT ALSO HAS A SERIOUS DOWNSIDE. MENTAL DISEASES, CLINICALLY DIAGNOSED, ARE PART OF THIS DOWNSIDE. FOR THIS REASON CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY, NOT RELIGION, EMERGED IN MODERNITY TO HARMONISE THE MIND SCIENTIFICALLY WITH ITS SURROUNDINGS. MOVEMENTS SUCH AS PSYCHOANALYSIS, EXISTENTIALISM, ABSURDISM, SURREALISM, AND POSTMODERNISM COULD NEVER HAVE EMERGED IN A TRIBAL SOCIETY WHERE THE HARMONY OF THE GROUP IS EMPHASISED; THEY ARE PRODUCTS OF THE INDIVIDUALIST BRAIN WHICH IS SUBJECT TO ALIENATION AND ANOMIE, AS DISCUSSED ABOVE. IT IS LITTLE WONDER THAT IN THE WEB 2.0 WORLD, WHERE A VIRTUAL COMMUNAL BRAIN HAS CRYSTALLISED, SUCH MOVEMENTS HOLD LESS SWAY. IN ACADEMIA, INDIVIDUALISM BROUGHT ABOUT DEBATES AND STUDIES ON IDENTITY, ALTERITY, AND OTHER CONSTRUCTS OF THE INDIVIDUALIST MIND, BRINGING THE TENDENCIES OF THE ROMANTIC IDEALISTS INTO SHARP SOCIAL FOCUS WITH INDIVIDUALIST ARTISTIC MOVEMENTS FROM EXPRESSIONISM OR SURREALISM. THE NOTION OF PERSONAL IDENTITY IF IT EMERGES AT ALL HAS LITTLE VALUE IN COMMUNAL GROUPINGS, WHERE THE ONLY IDENTITY THAT HAS VALUE IS THAT OF THE LEADER-THE SHAMAN, THE NOBLE, THE HERO, AND SO ON-WHO DETERMINES GROUPTHINK."[3]

3 Danesi, M. (2019) *Memes and the Future of Pop Culture: Conditions in Net Utopia*. Leiden: Brill.

2. "...IT CAN BE SAID THAT MEME CULTURE IS BUILT ON THE SAME PROMISE OF THE ATTAINMENT OF A COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS THROUGH ARTIFICIAL MEANS. LIVING IN A SOCIAL MEDIA UNIVERSE, WE MAY INDEED FEEL THAT IT IS THE ONLY OPTION AVAILABLE TO US. THE TRIUMPH OF THE INTERNET LIES IN ITS IMPLICIT PROMISE TO ALLOW HUMAN NEEDS TO BE EXPRESSED INDIVIDUALISTICALLY, YET CONNECT THEM COMMUNALLY-HENCE THE PARADOX. MOREOVER, AS THE COMMUNAL BRAIN BECOMES MORE AND MORE ENGRAINED IN SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES, WHICH ARE THEMSELVES CONNECTED TO THE LARGER PATHWAYS OF A GLOBAL CONNECTED INTELLIGENCE, A NEW BRAIN HAS EMERGED, CALLED BY SOME A "GLOBAL BRAIN," THAT IS, A BRAIN THAT MESHES COMMUNAL BRAINS INTO ONE OVERARCHING SYSTEM OF THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOUR. THIS IS AN EFFECT OF LIVING IN AN ELECTRONIC ENVIRONMENT."[4]

DETAILS

1. QUOTE: "MAN IN THE ELECTRONIC AGE HAS NO POSSIBLE ENVIRONMENT EXCEPT THE GLOBE AND NO POSSIBLE OCCUPATION EXCEPT INFORMATION-GATHERING." MCLUHAN.[5]

2. DEFINITION; **CULTURAL RELATIVISM**: THE PRINCIPLE THAT AN INDIVIDUAL'S BELIEFS, VALUES, AND PRACTICES SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD BASED ON THAT PERSON'S OWN CULTURE, RATHER THAN JUDGED AGAINST THE STANDARDS OF ANOTHER

4 Danesi (2019).

5 McLuhan, M. (1998), p. 27, cited in Danesi (2019).

This made me wonder who the “leader” really is here. The people building and profiting from these systems don’t come from a neutral place, they come from histories of power, superiority, and colonisation. To then trust our identities with the same structures feels uneasy, especially when those identities are already under pressure, constantly remixed, distorted, and sometimes reduced to ridicule just to sustain visibility. I wonder how different could it really turn out for us this time? If the framework remains the same, then what actually shifts? Will we ever, within their terms, be seen as human without being marked as different, or is that difference something the system needs to keep us legible at all?

My research also draws on memetics to consider how ideas, images and cultural references circulate through meme culture, influencing everyday communication, behaviour and collective imagination.

# *Hyperstition*
# Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)

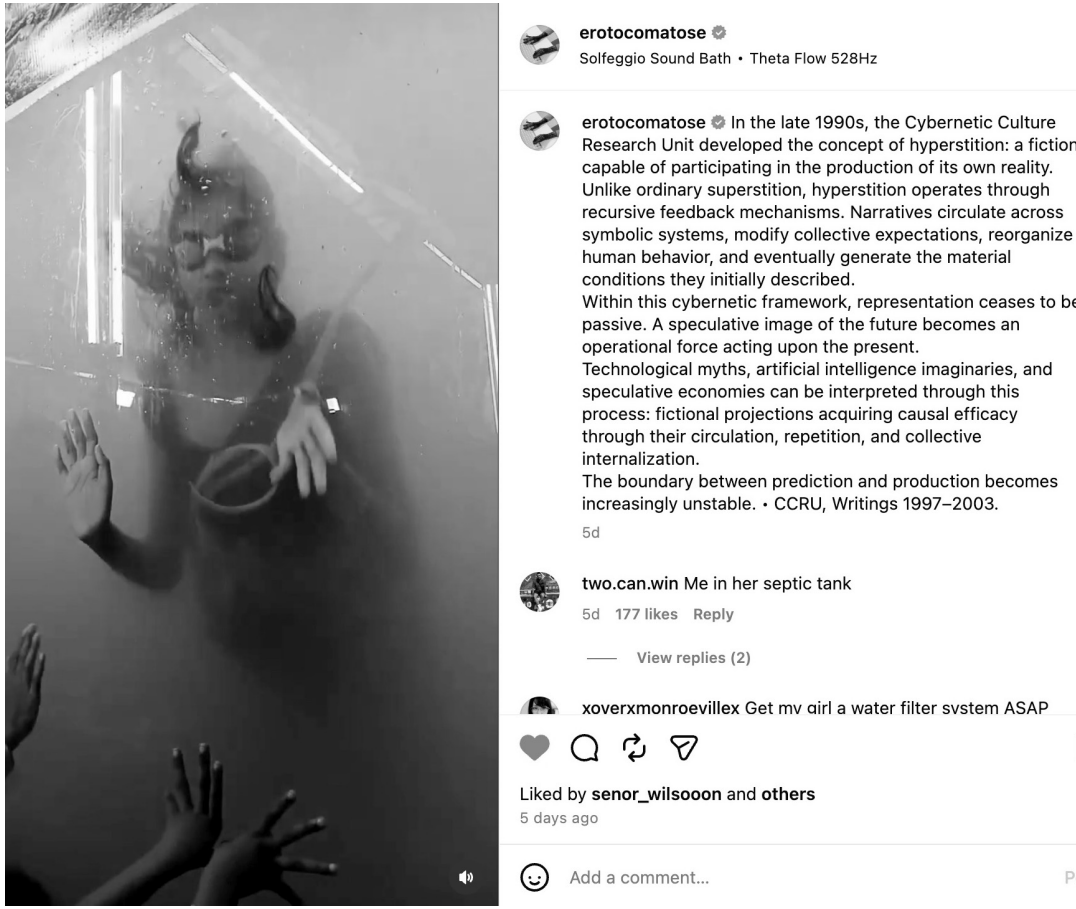
CONCEPT

Hyperstition emerged in the 1990s through the work of the Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (CCRU)[6] at the University of Warwick. The term, combining hyper and superstition, is particularly associated with Nick Land and the collective's experiments with theory-fiction, cybernetics, science fiction and the occult. Other figures associated with this intellectual milieu include Sadie Plant and Mark Fisher.

> Hyperstition describes how a fiction or idea can help bring about the reality it anticipates. Narratives circulate through culture, shape collective beliefs and behaviours, and can eventually produce the futures they imagine.

I find this concept useful for thinking about the relationship between visual culture, representation and the futures we construct. Images and speculative worlds do not simply depict possible futures; they can help make them possible. This raises the question of whose imagined futures gain the authority to become reality, and how alternative imaginaries might challenge them.

Demonstrated here through the jalpari (mermaid), a recurring figure in fiction and mythology, including Indian folklore. The image appears to show a fair somewhere in South Asia, where performers bring mythical characters to life. Here, a human performer inhabits the role of a jalpari, making an imagined figure tangible.




A jalpari performer at a fair, shared on Instagram by erotocomatose.

For me, this demonstrates the power of imagination, but also the frameworks that shape it. We imagine from the visual and cultural worlds available to us. This makes accurate and nuanced representation across media and platforms essential; without it, the futures we imagine risk reproducing the same distortions and limitations we have inherited.

6 CCRU (2017) *Writings 1997–2003*. Falmouth: Urbanomic.

# “AI, Democracy, and the Problem of Collective Disempowerment”

## By Chiara Cordelli

BOOK CHAPTER · CHAPTER 8 IN *DEMOCRATIZING AI*

FROM THE BOOK: ACADEMIC CITATION

> “THE RIGHT TO COLLECTIVELY SHAPE THE FUTURE CAN ONLY BE JUSTIFIED BY APPEALING TO A MORE FUNDAMENTAL INTEREST – THE INTEREST IN RELATING TO ONE’S OWN SOCIOPOLITICAL WORLD IN A NON-ALIENATED WAY. WE RELATE TO THE SOCIAL WORLD IN A NON-ALIENATED WAY WHEN WE CAN BE REASONABLY EXPECTED TO UNDERSTAND AND AFFIRM THIS WORLD AS OUR OWN; THAT IS, AS (I) THE PRODUCT OF OUR COLLECTIVE DOING AND VALUING, RATHER THAN AS THE RESULT OF ALIEN AND UNCONTROLLABLE FORCES, AND AS (II) EXPRESSING OUR JOINT AIMS.”[7]

7 Cordelli, C. (2026) ‘AI, democracy, and the problem of collective disempowerment’, in Zimmermann, A. *Democratizing AI: Annette Zimmermann in Dialogue*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, ch. 8.

Chiara Cordelli’s use of the idea of alienation, particularly the prospect of systems becoming forces beyond our collective control, prompted me to think about AI as an alien entity. This became a starting point for exploration: how are we responding to an AI invasion as humans, and how does that differ from the collective response we have so often imagined in science fiction? In popular culture, an unknown alien presence is typically met with preparation, resistance and collective action. Our response to AI has been markedly different. Rather than preparing to confront or question it, we seem to be adapting our existing systems to accommodate its arrival. This contradiction inspired me to visualise the rapid growth of AI through the framework of an alien invasion (Work in Progress).



# *The Desert of the Unreal*
## By Karen Orton, *Dazed*

ARTICLE

In this conversation with Karen Orton[8], Sophia Al-Maria and Fatima Al Qadiri discuss Gulf futurism through the experience of a region that seems to have leapt through time. Al Qadiri describes feeling as though Kuwait had "leapt a century", while Al-Maria speaks of a "quantum leap" that left a temporal gap between older ways of life and extreme wealth.[9] Glass skyscrapers and technological surveillance have arrived alongside older social codes, creating what Al-Maria describes as a "missing piece of history".[10]

> What's notable about Gulf futurism is how it uses this temporal dissonance to challenge conventional ideas of the future. It examines a reality where hypermodern architecture, consumerism and digital culture coexist with cultural erasure, restrictive social norms and environmental destruction.

I find this particularly relatable in the Indian context. When imagining the future, we often default to either utopian or dystopian visions, overlooking the more complicated realities of progress as it unfolds across different parts of the world. In societies often described as conservative or deeply religious, modernity can arrive abruptly through architecture, technology and imported ideas of development, without necessarily displacing older cultural and social structures. What emerges is neither a replication of the societies from which these ideas originate nor a continuation of what existed before, but a hybrid condition: something distinct, contradictory and entirely its own. Al-Maria and Al Qadiri's exploration of Gulf futurism offers a framework for recognising and examining these realities on their own terms, rather than measuring them against predominantly Western ideas of what the future should look like.

8 Orton, K. (2012) 'The desert of the unreal', *Dazed & Confused*, November, pp. 94–99.

9 Al Qadiri and Al-Maria, quoted in Orton (2012).

10 Al-Maria, quoted in Orton (2012).



From *The Desert of the Unreal*, *Dazed* (2012):



# *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*

## By Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby

BOOK




Dunne and Raby[11] explore the role of design in imagining alternative futures, arguing that dreams and visions are not simply escapist fantasies but can shape our desires and motivate us to bring different worlds into existence. They question the increasingly limited ambitions of contemporary society, where radical visions have been replaced by more immediate hopes for survival. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's observation that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than an alternative to capitalism,[12] they ask what role design can play in making alternatives imaginable. Through speculative design, they propose using fictional scenarios and objects to question the present, expose assumptions and explore possibilities beyond the probable.

This connects directly to my own practice and positionality. As a brown woman from India, my imagination is shaped by a very specific set of social, cultural and material conditions. Living with the realities of environmental degradation and deeply entrenched social structures, it feels imperative that people situated within these conditions have not only the hope for a better future, but the agency to imagine and invent one. Too often, the futures presented to us are borrowed from elsewhere, or reduced to simplistic utopian and dystopian visions.

What I take from the book is that optimism need not mean simply hoping for the best. Speculative thinking can give optimism a form of agency: allowing us to imagine alternatives, test their possibilities, expose their contradictions and even construct warnings about futures we do not want. For my practice, this makes design a means of moving beyond critique and into the active production of new possibilities.

11 Dunne, A. and Raby, F. (2013) *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

12 Jameson, F., cited in Dunne and Raby (2013).

# SITUATING MY REFERENCES AROUND MY ENQUIRY

## AI & MEDIA
*the systems: AI, datasets, the internet*

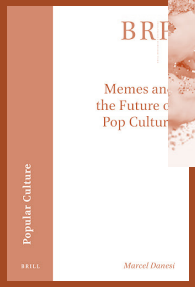
CRITIQUING THE SYSTEMS

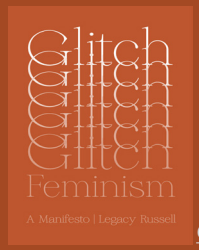
BUILDING WITH THE SYSTEMS

*"AI, Democracy, and the Problem of Collective Disempowerment"*




*Memes and the Future of Pop Culture: Conditions in Net Utopia*




*Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto*



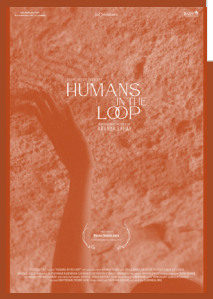

*Hyperstition*

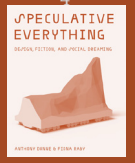
## REPRESENTATION
*critiquing dominant systems: exposes the problem*

## FUTURES
*constructing alternative defaults: builds a response*

HOW MIGHT MARGINALISED POSITIONALITIES CHALLENGE DOMINANT SYSTEMS OF REPRESENTATION AND CONSTRUCT ALTERNATIVE VISUAL AND CULTURAL DEFAULTS, PARTICULARLY IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY MEDIA AND THE EMERGING INFLUENCE OF AI?

*Humans in the Loop*




*Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*



*The Desert of the Unreal*

CRITIQUING THROUGH LIVED EXPERIENCE

BUILDING FROM LIVED CULTURE

## POSITIONALITY
*the people: lived, marginalised, hybrid*

# DEVELOPING A POSITION

1. DEVELOPING NOIDAFUTURISM AS A RESPONSE TO THE LIMITATIONS OF EXISTING FUTURIST FRAMEWORKS AND THE SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF CONTEMPORARY INDIA.

2. BRINGING MY OBSERVATIONS OF NOIDA INTO CONVERSATION WITH EDMOND Y. CHANG'S THEORISATION OF ASIANFUTURISM, USING IT AS A CASE STUDY TO EXAMINE HOW FUTURIST FRAMEWORKS ACCOUNT FOR GEOGRAPHICAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES. THROUGH THIS COMPARISON, I ESTABLISH THE DISTINCTIONS THAT INFORM MY OWN POSITION, WHILE CONSIDERING WHETHER NOIDAFUTURISM CAN OFFER A MORE SITUATED WAY OF THINKING ABOUT INDIAN FUTURES.

# Noidafuturism

I have never felt represented by existing futurist frameworks, whether Asianfuturism or Indofuturism.

> Within Asianfuturism, India is largely absent from its dominant depictions, with the umbrella term often privileging East Asian cultural and visual signifiers. This is something I will explore further in my critique of Edmond Y. Chang's chapter, "Looking for Asianfuturism: Asian American SF and Games of Color," in *Techno-Orientalism 2.0: New Intersections and Interventions*.[1] Even Lawrence Lek's explorations of Sinofuturism[2] demonstrate how a more geographically specific futurism can still struggle to account for the complexities of the society it represents, let alone the breadth of an entire continent. For the longest time, Asianfuturism has appeared to me as a flattened cultural imaginary, one that allows the West to engage with an easily recognisable idea of Asia rather than its diverse realities.

I see a similar problem within Indofuturism. Ideally, much like Sinofuturism, it should offer a more detailed and nuanced engagement with its cultural and geographical context. Instead, its visible manifestations often appear to cater to a Western gaze, even when their consumers are Indian. Western technology becomes the language through which progress is imagined, while precolonial histories, mythologies and cultural traditions become the foundations for imagining utopian futures. Both positions remain debatable: the former




Existing representations of Noida and comparable cities, sourced online and personal archives.

1 Chang, E.Y. (2025) 'Looking for Asianfuturism: Asian American science fiction and games of color', in Roh, D.S., Huang, B., Niu, G.A. and Fan, C.T. (eds.) *Techno-Orientalism 2.0: New Intersections and Interventions*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 281–297.

2 Lek, L. (2016) *Sinofuturism (1839–2046 AD)* [Video essay].

reproduces an aspiration towards Western models of development, while the latter risks romanticising a past that is equally removed from the complexities of contemporary India.

> Noidafuturism emerges from this dissatisfaction. Drawing from the ideas explored through Gulf Futurism by Sophia Al-Maria and Fatima Al Qadiri,[3] I want to consider futurity through the conditions of societies categorised as "developing nations". Rather than imagining futures through technological aspiration or cultural nostalgia, Noidafuturism sits with the complexity of building futures in places where colonialism and its aftermath have disrupted existing structures of development, and where the West continues to package and export the very models of growth these societies are expected to follow.

## WHY NOIDA?

A city housing global giants such as Google, emerging Indian retail giants, expansive shopping malls and an infrastructure built around five-minute deliveries exists alongside agricultural land, forested stretches and village panchayats (local self-governing bodies that continue to administer village communities). Glass-fronted corporate offices and gated residential complexes rise beside older village settlements, while expressways and metro stations cut through landscapes that retain their agricultural histories. Luxury cars share roads with tractors, street vendors and cycle rickshaws; international coffee chains exist alongside local tea stalls, neighbourhood temples and informal markets. Farmers continue to inhabit buildings within these expanding urban landscapes, sometimes keeping cows tethered on upper floors for daily milk production. Beneath this rapidly developing infrastructure, caste hierarchies remain prevalent, while uneven development, land disputes and gaps in local governance expose the limits of the city's promise of modernity. These are not simply oppositions between the traditional and the contemporary, but conditions that produce Noida's particular form of modernity. Its hybridity is neither entirely planned nor entirely accidental. It is shaped by the coexistence of imported aspirations, inherited social structures, technological acceleration and agrarian histories. I would like to explore how these seemingly contradictory realities inform one another, and how futures might emerge from their coexistence. Noidafuturism therefore begins not with an imagined ideal of what India was or should become, but with an examination of what India is now.

> Having lived in several Indian cities, I recognise that they share similar contrasts, but I found these particularly pronounced in Noida, making it the most default-like ground from which to explore a more grounded, distinctly Indian form of futurism.

## DO WE NEED NOIDAFUTURISM?

This is a question I ask in the process of exploring the concept. Can Noidafuturism offer a way to understand the contradictions shaping contemporary India and the futures emerging from them? Can it help identify the consequences of the development models we continue to adopt, or does it risk reproducing the same hierarchies and aspirations it seeks to question? I am interested not only in what Noidafuturism might make possible, but also in its limitations. What does another futurist framework offer that existing ones do not, and is there a need for it at all?

> This keeps the uncertainty, but gives the questions a purpose.

3 Orton (2012).

# Case Study

TEXT

**"Looking for Asianfuturism: Asian American Science Fiction and Games of Color"** by Edmond Y. Chang, in *Techno-Orientalism 2.0: New Intersections and Interventions*.

CRITICAL RESEARCH QUESTION

HOW DOES EDMOND Y. CHANG'S THEORISATION OF ASIANFUTURISM ILLUMINATE AND COMPLICATE THE POSSIBILITIES FOR INDIAN REPRESENTATION, AND HOW MIGHT A CRITIQUE OF HIS ARGUMENTS INFORM ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO IMAGINING INDIAN FUTURES THROUGH INDOFUTURISM?

Chang examines how Asian American science fiction and video games can challenge Western-dominated technological imaginaries. Through speculative fiction and game design, he explores how race, culture, embodiment and identity inform alternative futures and forms of world-building. He argues that Asian representation must go beyond including Asian characters in existing futuristic narratives, questioning the dominance of whiteness, heteronormativity and neoliberal capitalist fantasies of belonging.[4]

My first tension emerges from the relationship between the chapter's



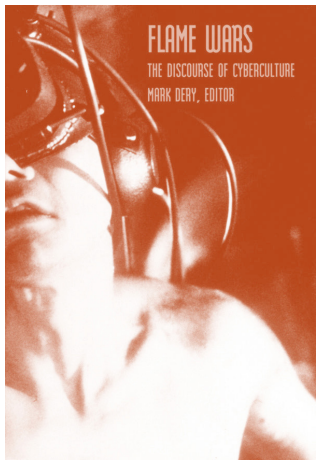

*Techno-Orientalism 2.0*, edited by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, Greta Aiyu Niu and Christopher T. Fan

4 Chang (2025).

specific focus on Asian American science fiction and its broader discussion of Asianfuturism. Although Chang identifies the Asian American context in his title, I find the distinction between Asian and Asian American narratives insufficiently developed. Is he referring to the experiences of immigrants and diasporic communities, to people living in their countries of origin, or to both? As someone born in India and now living in London, I find this distinction significant. The experience of migration is not interchangeable with the experience of living in one's home country. These positions produce different relationships to cultural memory, identity and technological change, and therefore potentially different grounds for imagining the future.

While drawing parallels between Asianfuturism and Afrofuturism, Chang's description of Afrofuturism as centring "Black and Brown personalities"[5] raises a related concern about the conflation of distinct racial identities. Mark Dery's foundational essay "Black to the Future" situates Afrofuturism within Black cultural histories and experiences.[6] By grouping Black and Brown identities together without clarifying what he means by the latter, Chang risks treating distinct racial and cultural positions as interchangeable. As an Indian person who identifies as Brown and Asian, I find this particularly striking. Brown identity is not synonymous with Black identity, nor is it exclusive to the African diaspora. Chang invokes Brown identity within Afrofuturism while leaving South Asian experiences largely unaddressed in his discussion of Asianfuturism. This makes me question why Brown identity is brought into a framework rooted in Black cultural histories rather than explored within the Asianfuturist framework to which many Brown people, including South Asians, also belong.

To ground this critique in my own cultural context, I want to approach Asianfuturism through Indofuturism: India's speculative futuristic




*Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, edited by Mark Dery, includes "Black to the Future", exploring Black cultural experiences, science fiction and the possibilities of imagining futures beyond dominant narratives.

imagination and its representation in mainstream media and academic discourse. My initial observation is that many visible explorations of Indofuturism emerge from within India, leaving me wondering how Indians living abroad locate themselves within a broader vision of Asianfuturism that rarely accounts for their cultural context.

Indofuturism, particularly in mainstream Indian cinema, offers a comparison to the tension Chang identifies between representation and world-building. In his discussion of *The Tiger Flu*, *All Our Asias* and *Hazy Days*[7], Chang examines how speculative worlds communicate cultural and political ideas through their social structures, environments and mechanics, rather than representation alone. Applying this lens to Indofuturism, I question whether combining Indian mythology, precolonial imagery and futuristic technology necessarily produces a decolonial future, or whether it can become an aesthetic shorthand for Indian identity.

5 Chang (2025).

6 Dery, M. (1994) 'Black to the future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose', in Dery, M. (ed.) *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp. 179–222.

7 Lai, L. (2018) *The Tiger Flu*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press; Analgesic Productions (2018) *All Our Asias* [Video game]; Ren, M. (2016) *Hazy Days* [Video game].

Nag Ashwin's *Kalki 2898 AD* (2024)[8], for instance, combines the Mahabharata and Hindu mythology with dystopian science fiction and futuristic design. Felperin describes its visual language as "Indofuturist".[9] Yet the question is not simply whether Indian cultural references appear in a futuristic setting, but what these references allow the film to say about India's past, present and possible futures. The British Council's report *Arts and Technologies in India: Reimagining the Future* records a finding by Unbox Cultural Futures that existing Indofuturist narratives are "predominantly aesthetic explorations", with a risk of "romanticising or oversimplifying complex cultural elements".[10] This resonates with my concern that cultural reclamation can become a visual performance without sufficiently engaging with contemporary India's contradictions. However, *Kalki 2898 AD* also depicts resource scarcity, authoritarian power and the exploitation of women's bodies, complicating any claim that it operates purely at the level of aesthetics. If Indofuturism is to offer a decolonial alternative to Western futurism, it must do more than reclaim cultural symbols; it must interrogate the present from which its imagined futures emerge.

My work-in-progress project, *Do We Need Noidafuturism?* (working title), will locate its speculative future in contemporary India rather than in a precolonial, Indigenous or mythological fantasy that risks catering to a Western gaze. I am interested in how such fantasies can offer the appearance of decolonisation while leaving the colonial and neocolonial structures of the present insufficiently examined. My practice therefore remains intentionally oriented towards the West, investigating its exploitative impact on regions made vulnerable by its political, economic and technological structures. This creates a tension with Chang's approach, which seeks to decentralise Western frameworks of science fiction and imagine futures emerging from




*1. Kalki 2898 AD*, directed by Nag Ashwin, combines Hindu mythology and futuristic technology to imagine a dystopian Indian future.


Review
Kalki 2898 AD review – maximalist sci-fi epic mixes Mahabharata with Mad Max
★★★★☆
Amitabh Bachchan plays a mythological warrior in a withered dystopian city where desert car chases, CGI magic and a semi-divine dictator rule

2. Leslie Felperin's *Guardian* review compares *Kalki 2898 AD* to *Mad Max* and *The Matrix*, examining its fusion of Hindu mythology, dystopian science fiction and futuristic visual design.

Asian cultural histories, identities and forms of knowledge. While I agree with the need to challenge Western dominance, I question whether alternative futures must necessarily be rooted in Indigenous knowledge, cultural heritage

8 Ashwin, N. (dir.) (2024) *Kalki 2898 AD* [Film]. India: Vyjayanthi Movies.

9 Felperin, L. (2024) 'Kalki 2898 AD review – maximalist sci-fi epic mixes Mahabharata with Mad Max', *The Guardian*, 28 June.

10 Barua, K. et al. (2024) *Arts and Technologies in India: Reimagining the Future*. British Council, p. 20.

or precolonial ways of life. Chang's discussion of Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* illustrates how speculative fiction can challenge dominant cyberpunk conventions through materiality, embodiment and interdependence: "In contrast to novels like *Neuromancer* and *Snow Crash*, Lai is careful to reject the traditional cyberpunk use of the passive techno-Orientalized female body. Lai's universes are material, embodied, and often laborious and messy".[11] My question is not whether this approach is valuable, but whether it fully accounts for contemporary Asian identities whose relationships with cultural heritage are fragmented, indirect or shaped by modernity.

> Having grown up watching Japanese cartoons translated into Hindi, such as *Shin Chan*, *Hagemaru* and *Doraemon*, alongside American television, including Disney, I find it difficult to locate my cultural identity exclusively in a past I have not personally experienced. These influences are not external to my identity; they have helped form it. Homi K. Bhabha's theory of cultural hybridity offers a way to understand this relationship. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha[12] challenges the idea that cultural identity is fixed, pure or reducible to a single origin, instead examining how cultural meaning emerges through encounters, negotiation and ambivalence. Through this lens, translated media, imported technologies and cross-cultural influences are not necessarily contaminants of an authentic identity; they can be constitutive of it. What if hybridity, rather than heritage alone, is itself a form of cultural inheritance? My concern is that speculative world-building can become anchored to an idealised past, overlooking how globalisation has already reshaped everyday life, cultural references and technological environments. Rather than recovering an uncontaminated cultural identity, I want to explore how identity is continually produced through changing social and cultural conditions.

With *Do We Need Noidafuturism?*, I want to introduce the world to something it rarely sees: India of the now. My focus is Noida, a city shaped by its colonial past and neocolonial present, planned around an aspiration to replicate Western models of modernity. Yet this vision has unfolded unevenly across land with agricultural histories and social structures that persist in parts of the city. Noida's contradictions are its culture: gated bungalows alongside cows grazing on upper floors; a shiny but dusty sports car parked outside; a Google office sharing a lane with an astrologer and herbal medicine practitioner. These juxtapositions reveal how imported aspirations, inherited social structures and uneven development coexist. They are not anomalies outside



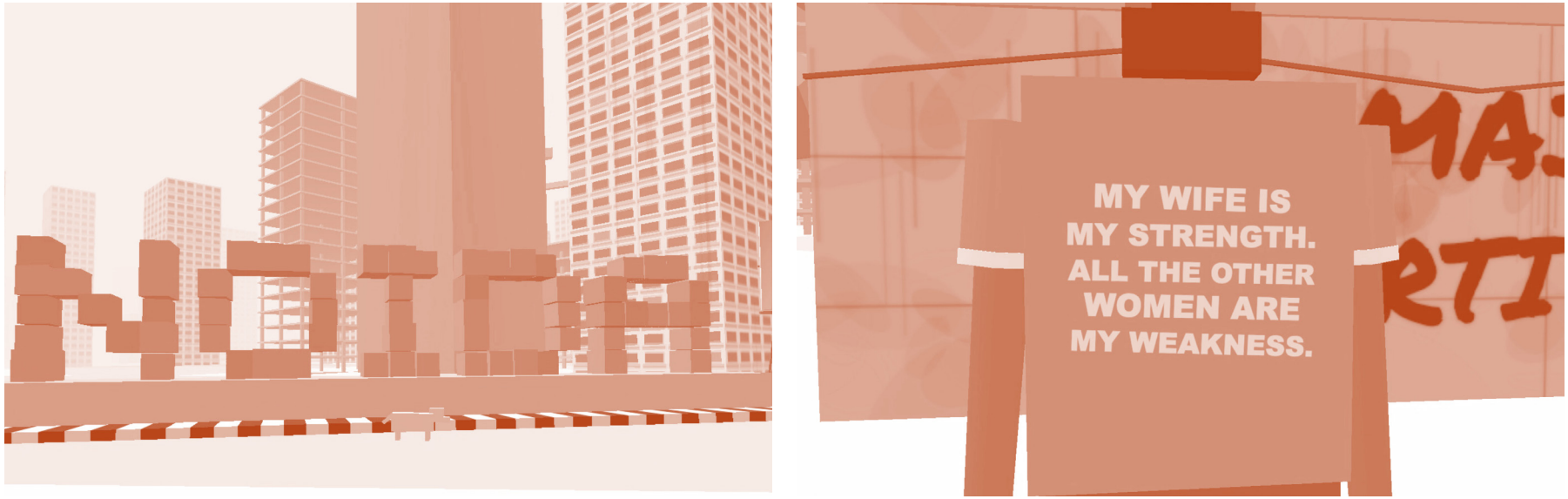

*Hagemaru* on Hungama TV India; how translated Japanese animation became part of everyday Indian childhood.

11 Chang (2025), p. 286.

12 Bhabha, H.K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.

modernity, but part of what modernity in India has become.

> Through Noidafuturism, I want to examine how these conditions shape our understanding of progress and the futures we imagine. Speculation cannot remain merely an aesthetic experiment; it influences what societies understand as possible, whether as a vision to aspire to or a warning. To imagine futures grounded in India, we must first confront the present as it exists, rather than reproduce the image of India that dominant cultural and technological narratives project.




Stills from my *Do We Need Noidafuturism?* project document Noida's overlapping cultures and urban contradictions.

# TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK

AT THE START OF THIS UNIT, I SAW MY ENQUIRY MAINLY AS A PROBLEM OF ABSENCE. I WANTED TO UNDERSTAND WHO SETS THE DEFAULT AND HOW PEOPLE LEFT OUT OF IT MIGHT GAIN THE AGENCY TO CREATE THEIR OWN. I ASSUMED THIS MEANT CRITIQUING DOMINANT SYSTEMS FROM THE OUTSIDE AND PROPOSING A MORE ACCURATE PICTURE IN THEIR PLACE. WORKING THROUGH THE REFERENCES, NOIDAFUTURISM AND THE CASE STUDY HAS MADE ME QUESTION THAT ASSUMPTION.

> SITUATING MY PRACTICE, AND HYPERSTITION IN PARTICULAR, MADE ME REALISE THAT REPRESENTATION DOES NOT ONLY AFFECT HOW PEOPLE ARE SEEN IN THE PRESENT. IF FICTIONS THAT CIRCULATE WIDELY CAN HELP PRODUCE THE FUTURES THEY DESCRIBE, THEN MISREPRESENTATION ALSO SHAPES WHAT GETS BUILT NEXT. MY FOCUS HAS THEREFORE MOVED FROM HOW I AM REPRESENTED TO WHAT THE FUTURES IMAGINED FOR PLACES LIKE INDIA ARE BASED ON.

DEVELOPING NOIDAFUTURISM MADE THIS MORE CONCRETE. MY RESEARCH QUESTION SPEAKS OF “MARGINALISED POSITIONALITIES”, BUT ONCE I BEGAN WORKING WITH A SINGLE CITY, I REALISED HOW BROAD THAT STARTING POINT WAS, AND HOW SUCH GENERAL TERMS RISK THE FLATTENING I WAS CRITIQUING. I CAME TO SEE NOIDA’S CONTRADICTIONS AS THE MATERIAL A FUTURE WOULD ACTUALLY BE BUILT FROM, RATHER THAN SOMETHING TO BE TIDIED AWAY IN FAVOUR OF A CLEANER IMAGE OF INDIA.

> THE CASE STUDY COMPLICATED MY POSITION FURTHER. I APPROACHED CHANG’S CHAPTER[13] HOPING TO FIND A FRAMEWORK I COULD LOCATE MYSELF WITHIN. INSTEAD, I FOUND THAT ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORKS CAN CREATE DEFAULTS OF THEIR OWN. ASIANFUTURISM LARGELY LEAVES SOUTH ASIA OUT, AND INDOFUTURISM OFTEN PRESENTS A VERSION OF INDIA SHAPED FOR EXTERNAL AUDIENCES. COMING FROM A MARGINALISED POSITION DOES NOT STOP A FRAMEWORK FROM FLATTENING OTHERS, AND THIS IS MY MAIN TAKEAWAY FROM THE UNIT. IT APPLIES TO MY OWN WORK TOO: NOIDAFUTURISM COULD JUST AS EASILY BECOME ANOTHER AESTHETIC SHORTHAND, WHICH IS WHY I HAVE KEPT ITS TITLE AS A QUESTION.

AS A RESULT, MY POSITION HAS CHANGED. I AM NO LONGER LOOKING TO THE PAST FOR AN AUTHENTIC IDENTITY TO RECLAIM. FOLLOWING BHABHA,[14] I SEE MY HYBRIDITY, SHAPED BY TRANSLATED CARTOONS, IMPORTED TECHNOLOGY AND COLONIAL AND NEOCOLONIAL SYSTEMS, AS THE CULTURE I AM WORKING FROM. I ALSO NO LONGER THINK OF CRITIQUE AND MAKING AS SEPARATE STAGES, AS BUILDING SOMETHING HAS OFTEN TAUGHT ME MORE ABOUT A SYSTEM THAN ANALYSING IT. AI, TOO, HAS MOVED FROM A TOOL I WAS SCEPTICAL OF TO A SUBJECT OF THE WORK: A SYSTEM ARRIVING IN PLACES IT DOESN’T RECOGNISE.

13 Chang (2025).

14 Bhabha (1994).

MY ENQUIRY HAS MOVED IN THE SAME DIRECTION. I STARTED BY ASKING HOW MARGINALISED POSITIONALITIES MIGHT CONSTRUCT ALTERNATIVE DEFAULTS. I AM NOW MORE INTERESTED IN WHAT THOSE DEFAULTS SHOULD BE BUILT FROM, AND HOW THEY CAN STAY OPEN TO REVISION RATHER THAN BECOMING FIXED THEMSELVES.

FUTURE PLANS

I PLAN TO DEVELOP NOIDAFUTURISM FURTHER THROUGH MY STUDIO PRACTICE. I HAVE ALMOST FINISHED AN INTERACTIVE CITYSCAPE OF NOIDA AS IT EXISTS TODAY, DELIBERATELY WITHOUT ANY FUTURISTIC ELEMENTS. THE NEXT STEP IS TO BUILD THE AI INVASION INTO IT, TO SEE WHAT A FUTURISTIC NOIDA MIGHT LOOK LIKE WHEN AI ARRIVES IN A CITY STILL NEGOTIATING AN IMPORTED IDEA OF MODERNITY. I WANT TO USE THIS TO TEST MY QUESTIONS RATHER THAN ILLUSTRATE THEM: HOW WOULD THE CITY TAKE IN AI, WHAT WOULD IT ADAPT TO OR RESIST, AND WHO WOULD BE LEFT OUT?

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO EXPLORE NOIDAFUTURISM THROUGH MORE TACTILE MEDIUMS, SUCH AS PRODUCT DESIGN, FASHION AND PHYSICAL COMPUTING. MUCH OF NOIDA'S HYBRIDITY IS FOUND IN ITS OBJECTS, CLOTHING, STREETS AND IMPROVISED TECHNOLOGIES, AND I WANT THE WORK TO BE SOMETHING PEOPLE CAN HANDLE AND WEAR, NOT ONLY VIEW ON A SCREEN.

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