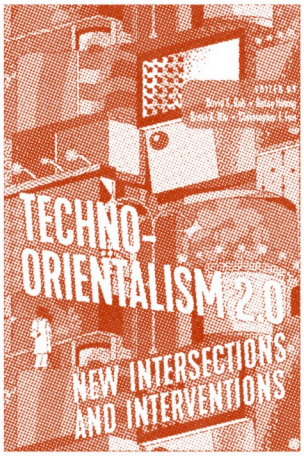
Working Through Chang's Argument

Examining the Points Where My Tension Emerges

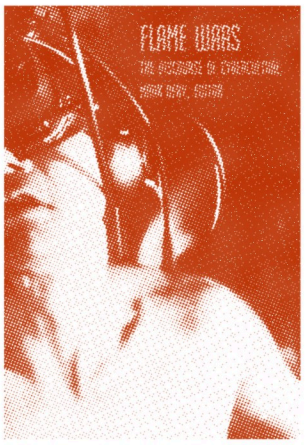




Techno-Orientalism 2.0: New Intersections and Interventions, edited by David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, Greta Aiyu Niu and Christopher T. Fan, examines how technological imaginaries reproduce racial stereotypes and shape how Asian identities and futures are represented

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 (Chang, 2025).

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



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

While drawing parallels between Asianfutursim and Afrofuturism, Chang's description of Afrofuturism as centring "Black and Brown personalities" 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 (Dery, 1994). 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 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, Chang examines how speculative worlds communicate cultural and political ideas through their social structures, environments and mechanics, rather



The Tiger Flu by Larissa Lai is a feminist, queer speculative novel that challenges conventional cyberpunk through embodied identities and alternative social structures

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.

Nag Ashwin's Kalki 2898 AD (2024), for instance, combines the Mahabharata and Hindu mythology with dystopian science fiction and futuristic design. Felperin (2024) describes its visual language as "Indofuturist". 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.


Kalki 2898 AD review - maximalist sci-fi epic mixes Mahabharata with Mad Max

★★★★★

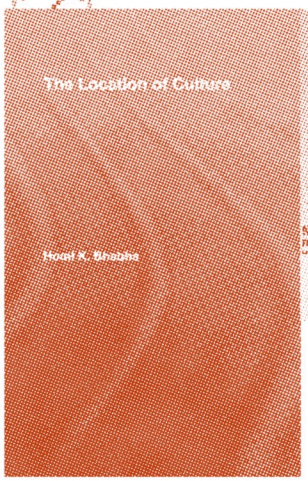
Amitabh Bachchan plays a mythological warrior in a withered dystopian city where desert car chases, CGI magic and a semi-divine dictator rule

Leslie Felperin's Guardian review compares Kalki 2898 AD to Mad Max and The Matrix



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

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" (Barua et al., 2024, p. 20). 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.



The Location of Culture by Homi K. Bhabha challenges fixed notions of identity and cultural authenticity.



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

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 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 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" (Chang, 2025, p. 286). 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 (1994) 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 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

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