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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Posthuman Future: Technological Embodiment in *Meru* by S.B. Divya

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Abstract

S. B. Divya's *Meru* (2023) envisions the posthuman future where technological embodiment is used as an extension of the idea of being human. The Alloys in the novel are genetically modified beings with technological extensions. They rule the space, and humans have been confined to Earth because of their incapabilities. These Alloys are extensions of humans, moving from body and mind to the sworld around them. This paper examines Judith Butler's idea of Performance, where characters interrogate the boundaries of identity, cognition, and embodiment. It also elaborates on Andy Clark's extended mind framework, which challenges the idea that thinking is a mental process. Following the theoretical insights of both Butler and Clark, this paper focuses on the shift away from the traditional concept of inbuilt function of the brain and body and extends it to their respective environments, illuminating the concept of identity, cognition, and embodiment in S.B. Divya's *Meru.*

Keywords: Performance, Extended mind, Technological anxiety, Posthuman future

Introduction

Divya Srinivasan Breed, popularly known as S. B. Divya, who worked as an electrical engineer in various fields, including pattern recognition, machine intelligence, high-speed communications, digital music, and medical devices (Divya, 2013) with a major in Computation and Neural Systems, was born in Pondicherry, India, and later migrated to the US. She is also a spectacular writer and uses knowledge of her occupation to create some marvelous speculative plots right from her first written short story *Strange Attractors*, debut novella *Runtime* (2016), debut novel *Machinehood* (2021) to her recent publications of *Meru* (2023) and *Loka* (2024), which are part of her *The Alloy Series.* Her works mainly track the themes of human enhancements (Bluestocking, 2016), sentient robots and their rights, embodiment in gig economy (Vallas and Schor, 2020). Divya is a significant figure in the world of science fiction as she marvelously explores the interconnectedness of technology, humanity, and posthumanism. Her works challenge the traditional notion of what it means to be a human. She constantly, through her works, questions the rigidity that exists around identity. Her plots are often grounded in real scientific principles, thanks to her education and career in related fields, giving the needed credibility to her writings, making them thought-provoking as well as plausible. In an era of technological advancement, her works serve both as a cautionary tale as well as an optimistic point of view on the future.

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This paper explores Butler's idea of performativity and how external forces act as an extension of human identity. The theory of Extended Mind by Andy Clark, used in this paper, deeply focuses on the involvement of technology in making sense of self for the humans and posthumans of the contemporary age. *Meru,* the work this paper is concerned with, meticulously brings out these ideas. The alloys, with their advanced capabilities, have access to the galaxy, while humans are confined to Earth. This disparity raises questions about fairness, access to opportunities, and the future of human-alloy relations. It highlights the human and AI labor rights, as well as privacy and the nature of intelligence. The humans are prohibited by the alloys the accessing the repository, which contains all the genetic data. It raises questions about the future of AI, genetic engineering, and the potential consequences of these technologies. The book talks about the agency of the human and posthuman characters, who experience the world through their intelligence, their body, and its interaction with the environment. The novel highlights the concept of embodiment and its functionality in characters' lives. The idea of embodiment "is contextual, enmeshed within specifics of place, times, physiology, and culture, which together compose enactment," and it is "akin to articulation in that it is inherently performative, subject to individual enactments" (Hayles, 1999, pp. 196–197). The rapid increase in technology makes technological embodiment a very important aspect of today's life.

Embodiment: Navigating Human, Humanness, Challenges, and Reinforcement of Traditional Human Experience

According to Don Ihde, writer of the book *Postphenomenology* (1993), a body is something that is simultaneously solid and virtual, motile and cultural. For him there are four main human-technology relationships in the form of: embodiment: an experience through technology, ex- mobile interface, hermeneutic: a human relationship of a technology, ex- an artwork that uses a screen and motion sensing technology, alterity: a relationship of human otherness which has identity of its own, ex- AI and background: technology which is not in focal attention, ex- light bulbs (O'Brien, 2017). Embodiment counters the traditional viewpoint of thinking that the mind and the body are separate; instead, emotion is deeply connected to the body and the environment we live in. It is not only restricted to our sense organs but instead expands beyond the biology, to the understanding of who we are, our presence, and how we interact with each other and the environment we inhabit. "Embodied cognition theory" by Andy Clark in his book *Supersizing the Mind*, challenges the idea that thinking is a mental process; instead, our daily interaction with the world shapes our understanding of the information. We experience the world through our bodies, and these are not objective but subjective (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Butler talks about "phenomenology" given by Merleau-Ponty, in which she highlights that the human body actively constitutes reality through experiences of human consciousness and actions. "The body is an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities" (Butler, 1988). And along with this, the social norms, culture, tradition, as well as exposure to the material world and specifically technology, can influence how we perceive our bodies.

The rise in technology in contemporary times has led us towards an era of technological embodiment. Ihde, throughout his writings, "considers how different technologies change, adapt, correct, limit and extend the functionality and ontology of human experience" (O'Brien, 2017). But even these extensions are filtered and limited. A blind man can feel the texture of the pavement through his cane, but cannot know the colour or its warmth or coldness. And philosophers like Andrew Feenberg write that the cane also tells the world that the man is blind (Selinger, 2012). This also puts light on the idea that what the traditional way of identity formation thinks to be normal is challenged, as embodiment also includes neurodivergent and disabled people to be considered normal (Richardson, 2020). Our bodies are vital when it comes to our sense of self, and our

self-expression is what frames our identity. This creates a sense of interconnectedness, an interplay among physical spaces and objects influencing our actions and feelings.

The flooding of virtual, augmented, and mixed reality, the Avatars, the AI assistants remove people from reality into digital spaces, and this challenges the traditional idea of embodiment being biological (Richardson, 2020). These digital spaces allow people to even have deep emotional connection. There are prosthetic limbs, implants, chips, and mechanisms that can effortlessly complete the functions of the human body, blurring the line between organic and artificial embodiment (Hyzy, 2025). These add-ons are not separated from the self but rather become extensions of the self, reshaping both the limitations and perception of our physical body and human ability. But, this ability of AI to cultivate human communication and emotion also raises a question regarding the loss of human uniqueness (Hyzy, 2025). The digital world provides freedom to curate identity and experiment with it, which often leads to disconnection from personal self. This form of embodiment shifts from physical to psychological. Cloud computing, brain implants, and memory aids are promising enough to assume that the process of thinking might externalise itself in the near future.

Geographer Nigel Thrift (2008, p.10) argues that the human body has an ability to co-evolve with its surroundings, adding them to its biological form, creating a hybrid with different capabilities. “We all have and are a body. But there is a way out of this dichotomous twosome. As part of our daily practices, we also do (our) bodies. In practice, we enact them” (Mol & Law, 2006, p. 45). Judith Butler inquires whether their empathy is authentic and how far is this technology transparent about synthesized performances. In this era of technology, being human is no longer limited to biology; instead, it is about adaptation, ethics, and the relationship between humans and machines. Humanity needs to both advance and preserve its humanness.

Technological Embodiment: How Technology Manipulates Human Experiences: In Reference to Judith Butler (Performance)

Judith Butler presents her argument on gender and identity in her essay “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution” (1988), where she states that gender is not biological, not something inbuilt but a social and a performative act “produced through discourse and social interaction.” “Identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1988). This culture, traditions, society, and environment drive an individual to act in a certain way, formulating a labeled identity (Gender and Embodiment, 2024). She challenges the concept of gender being a fixed identity and rather calls it fluid. Gender, according to her, is formed by **“**stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 1990). The way people move, dress, and interact reinforces the gender norms shaped by cultural expectations, making them seem very normal and not at all socially constructed. This created identity is not just psychological but “embodied” (Wehrle, 2021) deeply, through “habitual bodily practices” (Butler, 1988). “We tend to think of our body as a given, but its meaning evolves all the time” (Hacking, 2007, p. 93). She defines embodiment as a place that gains importance and meaning because of cultural and historical practices. “The body is a historical situation… a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation” (Butler, 1988).

Technological embodiment is the amalgamation of human and their experience with technologies, where digital systems and machines become extensions of human minds and bodies. It explores human interaction with technology, which shapes perception, cognition, and identity (Megarit, 2023). Technology also acts as an extension of human thought, which leads to influencing memory, decision-making, and problem-solving. Avatars and digital personas provide users with an experience that challenges the default notion of being present physically as well as the authenticity of the identity. Technological embodiment deduces the differences of destabilizing categories of the body by focusing on the spread of the embodiment

through technology. But it cannot be denied that as technology becomes more embedded in human life, questions arise about autonomy, privacy, and identity (Malhotra, 2025). AI-driven interactions, deepfake technology, and digital surveillance impact how people perceive themselves and others (Malhotra, 2025). These digitalised identity paves the way for digital embodiment, where codes and data influence the construction of the self. It provides a unique lens to explore fluidity in identity, which humans otherwise find very rigid.

AI, which acts as a memory aid, or assistants that act like external cognitive sources, are highly advanced and, with their interactive skills, transform decision-making and problem-solving to be very easy for humans. These digital entities are constantly upgraded as per the needs, highlighting that it is their exposure that constructs their identity. The fusion of body with technology, such as prosthetics, implants, brain machine interfaces, and interactions driven by AI, puts an interrogatory mark on what embodiment is in its true form or how it has come. Butler's idea helps bring our attention to these mechanical extensions and how far they influence our identity. Her concepts extend to digital spaces naturally, wherein identity is fluid, curated, and detached from physical embodiment. People in digital spaces "perform" and are accordingly perceived. Challenging the traditional concept of embodiment, she brings forth the possibility of experimenting with identity, which isn't otherwise possible in the real world. AI mimics human identities but is shaped through discourse and repeated engagement, raising questions about whether AI can "perform" identity. These digital spaces reinforce certain behaviours and expectations, shaping how individuals interact and express themselves. This blurred line between the real and online identity helps us question whether this is real or just another performance (Hyzy, 2025). It also raises questions about identity and authenticity (Malhotra, 2025). Butler's idea points out that their construction of self is through a discourse similar to humans, whose identities are similarly constructed. This also pinpoints how these social norms can be embedded in the technology as well.

Andy Clark's Idea of Embodiment (The Extended Mind) in SB Divya's *Meru*

Andy Clark follows on Butler's idea of embodiment when he emphasises that our minds are not just confined to the brain but the whole body and its experiences (Clark and Chalmers, 1998). Clark, together with David Chalmers, in their paper "The Extended Mind," say that, as long as the external objects perform acts of the internal process, serve the same purpose, it is a part of the extended cognitive system. It questions the traditional way of thinking that the mind operates on its own, that is, independent of the body (The Extended Mind in Science and Society, 2024). Clark's idea was criticised, and hence, the criticism was addressed in his book *Supersizing the Mind: Embodiment, Action, and Cognitive Extension*. In this book, he explores how several external tools like notebooks, computers, and even prosthetics have become an important and sometimes crucial part of our thinking. He discusses "Embodied Cognition", "Situated Cognition," and "Extended Mind" in great detail. He says that our minds are embodied as whatever we think, perceive, and accordingly act is because of the physical body and our deep interaction with our environment.

Both Clark and Butler reject the traditional concept of embodiment, which says that "Embodiment is all the many and various ways that we (self and other) accomplish relations to being in possession of the bodies that we are" (Titchkosky, 2007, p. 13). Clark questions the boundary between mind and environment, whereas Butler differentiated sex and gender; in both cases, moving away from the traditionally inbuilt function of the brain and body and extending it to their respective environments. Clark says that technology and environment act as an extension to cognition, whereas Butler says that culture and environment formulate the identity of a person; both argue that external forces are very much influential in this process of thinking

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and further being. When embodiment is incorporated with technology, the body and the action it performs become technologically embodied.

Meru's story is about a twenty-two-year-old and her pilot who are about to change the future of the human species. A science fiction novel with rich detail and emotional depth, written by S.B. Divya, is set in a future where human life has been restricted to Earth for five centuries. These humans have posthuman descendants called alloys who freely explore the galaxy (Divya, 2023). This restriction brings in humans the feeling of inferiority, which further turns into resistance, whereas it gives alloys power over these humans, making them superior, shaping both the identities accordingly. The Alloys are vast in shape and size, an amalgamation of technology and mutated variations of different species, having life span of centuries, who are capable of producing humanoid "incarns" (Divya 2023, p. 4) of themselves when in need to come to earth (Folk-Williams, 2023). These alloys aren't merely superior to humans but act as their cognitive extension, which serves as an adaptive tool to facilitate human survival. "Alloys had an incredible variety of genes that spanned all kinds of life-forms. Humanity, on the other hand, had narrowed their options over time, choosing security and comfort over risk and diversity" (Divya 2023, p. 3). These alloys are the version of extended human cognition.

The story follows Jayanthi, a human adopted by alloy parents, whose "DNA contains HbSS- sickle cell anemia, a disease long eradicated from earth…a conscious choice to revive an old genome," (Divya 2023, p. 3) and her alloy pilot, Vaha, as they venture to the newly discovered Earth-like planet, Meru, which has high level of oxygen and hence would need some changes brought in the atmosphere to support human existence. Jayanthi's medical condition makes her suitable for the project. Their mission is to test the habitability of Meru and explore the future of human-alloy relations. Jayanthi learns to combine chromosomes, introduce mutations and strategically edit genes in the company of Hamsa, whose "skills in producing alloys were widely recognised," (Divya 2023, p. 3) works on a genetic project where she intends to create a new species from an amalgamation of alloy's incarn and human chromosomes. This integration of human and posthuman intelligence shows a direct connection with Clark's concept of the extended mind.

For Jayanthi, the book addresses the struggles of finding one's place in a world where the lines between human and posthuman are blurred and serves an opportunity to rectify the ancient reputation of her species as avaricious and destructive, and to give humanity a new place in the universe. Her struggle for identity very much comes from what society sees her to be; they impose a certain type of performance on her. She finds herself outcasted among both alloys as well as humans. "They all knew who and what she was, and they had never felt comfortable with her circumstances- a human child born to two alloys, given "emtalk" capabilities, and lacking a surname. Like the dusk that bathed the sky, she occupied a liminal space. Of Earth but not like humans: of alloys but unsuited to life in space" (Divya 2023, p. 16). Her existence itself challenges the traditional notion of what it is to be human. She reflects on the limitations of being human on one occasion when she wishes "she'd been born an alloy, free to move about the universe, unconstrained by the need for habitable climate, atmosphere, and magnetic field. To have the intellect for research and discovery. To pursue any dream and aspiration. To become a "tarawan" and fulfil the truest purpose of any life form: gathering novel information, passing knowledge to successive generations" (Divya 2023, p. 48). She counts her shortcomings as a human, saying "we don't have extended memory or augmented senses. We can't live in a vacuum. We can't absorb solar energy. We need solid food and produce far more waste matter" (Divya 2023, p. 113) when she compares herself to Vaha. The alloys can operate within a highly advanced knowledge network, where knowledge is transmitted, processed, and integrated into their cognition (Folk-Williams,

2023). Here, it resembles Clark's idea where the difference between tool and cognition dissolves. Also, technology in *Meru* is not a tool but an important part of human cognition.

Other than Hamsa and Jaya's parents, the alloy most important to the story is Vaha, a pilot. Pilots have cargo and passenger carrying areas within their bodies (Folk-Williams, 2023). These genetically modified bodies allow them to exist in extraterrestrial environments, and hence, enabling them to expand their knowledge beyond Earth. Most alloys feel that humanity had mismanaged the ecology of Earth, as well as that of a potentially terraformed Mars, so now humans are restricted to Earth under alloy supervision, although there are groups of people who chafe at that and wish to advance humanity's position in the cosmos (Strickland, 2023). Jayanthi is a human woman with a unique history. Her parents are alloys, and they had been the ones to design Jaya's DNA. Even between human parents, genetic design and artificial wombs for gestation are the norm (Strickland, 2023). Jaya's alloy parents live on Earth in human-appearing "incarn" bodies, their true alloy bodies remaining in orbit. They are anthropologists fascinated with human history, and in a sense, they are experimenting with Jaya, retaining some historical genetic anomalies, including sickle cell disease (Strickland, 2023). These alloys serve the role of guides and mentors for the humans, influencing their thoughts, ability to think, and evolution. Jayanthi wants to be a "tarawan," a genetic designer, and is being tutored by another alloy, an alloy politician and Genetic Engineering specialist, Hamsa. She has received this intellectual ability lovingly with her alloy parents, advocating for the Clarks' idea that thinking is not limited to its biological brain but is extended to external cognitive supports. The presence of alloys gives these humans the opportunity to reshape human decision-making, allowing individuals to think beyond the limitations of organic cognition. The embodiment is also evident when Vaha is in zir true form and when zie shift zir consciousness to zir incarn. Zie experiences Jayanthi more closely, "seeing her in person and on the same scale allowed zir to notice fine details in her features that the camera views had missed-the texture of her hair, a slight tilt of her head when she had a question, the little mole by her left eye" (Divya 2023, p. 130). Zie sensed sounds more closely and clearly. "Sounds were another novelty, like the sharp breath Jayanthi took when Vaha had kissed her. Their shelter made hundreds of small noises. The enviro-suits rustled. Jaya's voice has a melody" (Divya 2023, p. 131).

The novel's extraterrestrial environment is also a form of extended cognition supporting Clark's idea. After the discovery of Meru, which has a very high oxygen content in its atmosphere, Jaya thinks of herself as a perfect candidate to test whether or not it will be suitable for other humans and is encouraged by Hamsa to do so. This shows how cognition adapts to the environment. For humans, and especially for Jaya, and more rigidly when she is sick, the Earth is restrictive, while Meru offers expanded cognitive opportunities, giving an altered gravity, atmosphere, and biology. "Jayanthi marvelled at how relaxed her body felt. The near-constant aches that had accompanied her for as long as she could remember had faded to the occasional twinge. *Is this how everyone else on the Earth felt? So… lightweight? So full of energy?* What would her childhood have been like with that kind of life?" (Divya 2023, p. 145) Cognition adjusts dynamically to external circumstances. This makes cognition very fluid. *Meru* offers an extraordinary take on Clark's theory of Extended Mind.

Posthuman Future and Technological Embodiment in *Meru*

The contemporary age is an age of technological advancement, where the world is seeing rapid growth in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and human augmentation, which is giving significant attention to the posthuman future. The line between man and machine is blurring with the rise in technological embodiment. The posthuman future challenges the notions of humanism, which stood for rational autonomous individual,

and rather it supports hybridisation, interconnectivity, and technological integration. It rejects the strict barriers between human and machine, culture and nature, organic and synthetic; it instead finds all fluid and adaptive, and technological embodiment supports this by enhancing the capabilities of humans instead of replacing them.

In the concerned novel, *Meru*, Alloys are not AI, they are biological living beings whom humans willingly gave the management, genetically engineered humans with the least destructive traits, living in a vacuum of space, evolved not naturally but through bioengineering, inheriting Homosapien DNA, augmenting AI traits (Folk-Williams, 2023). "Alloys were the ultimate warm-blooded creatures, with tightly regulated physiology for homeostasis" (Divya 2023, p. 116). They take DNA from several living beings and amalgamate them to create beings that are much more advanced. There are different types of alloys, with different appearances and sizes, and all are long-lived. The author makes sure to provide not only identity when it comes to alloys, using pronouns such as zie and zir, but also demonstrating the inescapable humanness of these creatures by how they have relationships with each other as well as humans. They take control over humans' survival, decision-making skills, navigation, and others. They are not separate entities but a living extension of humans for making humans' life rather easy, better, healthier (Folk-Williams, 2023).

Meru represents the striking technological advancement with the portrayal of genetically modified beings and other artificial enhancements as an important factor for survival. These beings navigate the whole of the cosmos, able to adapt to extreme conditions, all through technological embodiment. Their identity is no longer confined to their physical body but extends to the space they dwell in, and their identities are shaped by these scientific advancements. These beings are integrated with biological as well as synthetic elements to enhance their abilities. This propounds the idea that technological embodiment is capable of paving the way for human evolution.

The novel engages in the thought of how posthuman societies adapt to ecological challenges. In *Meru*, the characters inhabit a world where genetic engineering is used to survive harsh planetary conditions, reflecting the necessity of technological adaptation in an era of climate change. The planetary ecosystems in the novel serve as hubs of information, ensuring that cognition is not only restricted to the individuals but is thoughtfully spread to the whole of environment. This highlights that the brain, a distributed intelligence, like Clark says. This extended cognition provides the characters with an opportunity to explore more of their agency. The novel also raises questions about human autonomy when they are so deeply intertwined with technology. It interrogates if these technical entities control human limitations, or do they work separately or alongside humans, and how human individuality persists in this technologically expanded cognition.

Conclusion

S.B. Divya is a writer who, through her narratives, constantly challenges the traditional notion of humanity by presenting a very compelling vision of what the future holds. She discusses technological embodiment, which prevails in contemporary times in the form of AI, genetic engineering, and cybernetic augmentation, which shapes the identity and further agency of individuals. In *Meru*, humanity has evolved a lot and has engineered biological beings that can navigate the cosmos with ease, in a way traditional humans could never. They break all the restrictions and rigidity prevailing in a human society and give out a message of sustainable living, coexistence, and autonomy. From Judith Butler's performance to Andy Clark's extended mind, the book explores the concept of embodiment in the technically advanced world. These theories demonstrate that both abled and disabled bodies need technologies, be it prosthetics or mobile phones, making both bodies the same to each other, and their differences fade. It provides them with agency, but

simultaneously it also creates a concern for ethics. It raises questions about how much our body belongs to us. This poses a threat to the loss of uniqueness of the body. In a society where a very small unit of population is not impacted by technology or is not technologically embodied, the question isn't about how people interact with technology, but instead how they see technology as part of themselves while being technologically embodied (Meloncon, 2013, p. 67-81).

This posthuman future is not a distant reality; it is rather unfolding now. And technological embodiment is reshaping human existence by making people navigate complex and rigid structures of identity, ethics, and sustainable living, while coexisting. Be it the immersive experiences of virtual or mixed reality, the genetic enhancements, or consciousness driven by AI, all of this brings opportunities along with challenges. The key to winning here is to have ethical innovations, inclusivity, and adaptability. We'll have to embrace technological embodiment while making sure to preserve human values.

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