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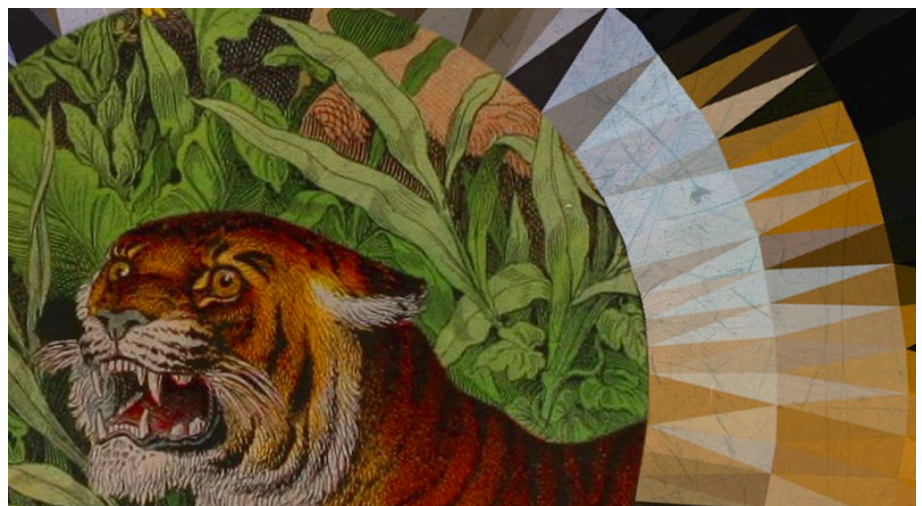
## Legacy in Blood

Transhumanist embodiment and disembodiment in  
Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu*

Bachelor's project in Comparative Literature

Supervisor: Knut Ove Eliassen

June 2020



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## Abstract

This thesis examines the portrayal of transhuman embodiment and disembodiment in Larissa Lai's 2018 novel *The Tiger Flu* as a struggle between right-leaning free market extropianism and radically embodied transhumanism. The subjects of this examination include the novel's radical portrayal of time and history experienced through embodiment, the secular religious functions of transhumanism and its expression and role in the novel, as well as the exploitative expansionist ideals behind extropianism and its opposition through embraced embodiment by the oppressed other. The works used for this examination are constituted from various critiques of transhumanism in social and literary spaces, historical texts, religious and mythological examinations, as well as critiques of Larissa Lai's prior works and one piece of visual art. This thesis demonstrates *The Tiger Flu's* diagnosis of the extropian movement's goals and its ideals as inherent traits of global free-market capitalism leading to the exploitation of the manufactured other and, ultimately, self-destruction. The theme of destroying individual bodies for a false salvation are shown to reflect and interact with the larger historical movements the novel deals with, epitomised in cyclical systems of oppression. Embracing embodiment is demonstrated as a revolt against these systems and a way of breaking from the cycle through the embodied experience of transhuman post-memory.

## Introduction

Questions regarding the research, development, and application of technological advancements for the ‘enhancement’ of human beings arise daily in the public sphere, as the merits and risks of both speculative and deeply, immediately relevant scientific and technological advancements are weighed and legislated – policing living bodies and what can and cannot be done to or with them. This rising relevancy and the apparent growing urgency with which these questions are discussed can unmistakably be linked to the movements of transhumanism and posthumanism. As these are widely defined terms, I will be narrowing them down by employing the working definitions used by Joshua Raulerson in *Singularities: Technoculture, Transhumanism, and Science Fiction in the Twenty-first Century* in my following analysis:

Posthumanism consists in the general view that *Homo sapiens* is in the process of being – and probably *should* be – superseded by one or more superior species; that is, posthuman beings evolved from machine intelligence and/or from technologically augmented humans. (Raulerson, 2013, 31).

[...A] ‘transhuman’ is a person in transition to a posthuman state, while transhumanism [is a] movement organized [...] around the pursuit of technological interventions that will directly facilitate the transformation of humans into posthumans. [A scenario which is] generally supposed to play out through biological, cybernetic, and/or mechanical modifications to the body, or through the outright disembodiment of human consciousness into something like sentient software (Raulerson, 2013, 31).

Driven by these movements, the fields of biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and cybernetics – to name a few among many – forge ahead at speeds which can boggle the mind of many of those trying to both keep pace with them whilst simultaneously taking the time to explore the deeper criticisms they illicit. Raulerson acknowledges this in the preface to *Singularities*, noting the difficulty faced by writers of science fiction – and projects such as his own of critiquing said work – in trying to keep up and remain relevant in their observations. Despite this troubling momentum, he emphasises that though “[the] facts on the ground will continue to change, [the] larger historical trajectory to date holds with what [he describes in his] pages.”, (vii).

At the extreme end of this trajectory we find extropianism, which – alluded to by their namesake of extropy – is a movement within transhumanism that places itself in direct opposition

to entropy, hailing progress – particularly scientific progress – ‘as an instrument of deliverance’ from entropy in all its forms. Death, chiefly among them, is seen as “[...] an illness which science and technology can, and one day will, cure” and the path to curing death runs parallel with their endeavor to drive up the technological momentum and direction needed to break ties with biological, embodied existence altogether (Raulerson, 2013, 31). Based in the assumption that the essence of a person is solely the information contained within their mind, the ‘Platonic ideal of ‘pattern’ embraced by extropianists eschews any part the rest of human experience – be it embodied, social, or spiritual – has to play in the constitution of humanity (42). This opposition in beliefs and ideals over where humanity resides, referred to henceforth as pattern-identity or patternism versus body-identity, sees extropians dismiss material, embodied existence – along with all its inherent complexities – as insignificant dead-weight to be discarded and replaced with clean, efficient immateriality. Though extropianists are not alone in seeking technological salvation from entropy and the decline of their bodies and the environments they inhabit, their activity is marked with an unmatched, near-religious zeal for unimpeded exponential growth and progress, embracing the right-leaning free market as their vehicle of choice for bringing about their ideal world, and outrunning the consequences of expanding consumption of diminishing resources by flooring the pedal of progress and “expanding faster than the consequences can catch up” (50). Katherine N. Hayles diagnoses this drive towards the salvation of disembodiment as partially deriving from a sense of the imminent apocalyptic downfall of “a world despoiled by overdevelopment, overpopulation, and time-release environmental poisons”, and the sense that the world is rapidly becoming uninhabitable by human beings” (1999, cited in Raulerson 2013, 47). Salvation, then, for extropians comes in the form of the ‘Singularity’ alluded to by the title of Raulerson’s book; the event in time in which the exponential curve of technological advancement explodes upwards at an incomprehensible rate and human existence becomes unrecognisable from its former self (8). However, this salvation is not a universal one, as Raulerson points out:

[...] the concept of Singularity is both genealogically linked and structurally integrated with imperialistic, free-market ideologies of the sort whose function has always been to censor and elide representation of technological capital’s repressed other (Raulerson, 2013, 22).



The 2018 novel *The Tiger Flu* by Larissa Lai enters the discussion surrounding biopolitics and the extropianist ethos by presenting a world which uproots both the universality of a capitalist apocalypse and its impacts – exactly through the eyes of some of these repressed others –, as well as both the modern patternist movement and the ideological grounds it is based on. Through its portrayal of the pattern-identity/body-identity dichotomy, Lai’s novel diagnoses the underlying ideology of extropianism as misguided and (self)destructive, as the figures of the novel are forced to deal with entropy and decline either through embracing embodiment and self-directed evolution as Lai’s Grist sisters do, or tumbling into uncertainty in fanatic extropian fervor. By extrapolating the effects of the end of oil and major socio-economic and ecological collapse – placing the end of oil at the year of publication –, Lai blurs the timeline of history and brings both the future and the past into the present tense of the reader as the involuntary production and policing of (trans)human bodies in historical past for the advancement of their oppressors is reproduced by the same ideologies in the speculative future.

I dance the dance of nuclear fission, of oil [...] of wheels and automobiles, when they were like living creatures drunk on the rotted bodies of creatures long dead. I dance for the tiger flu, [...] I dance for stem cells, devilled eggs, cloning, and mutation. All the long path of chance and science, money and murder that Old Glorybind taught me was my messy legacy. Although I can’t say I understand it, I know its songs, [...] My body knows something that my mind can’t refuse (Lai, 2018, 70)

This passage from the novel simultaneously leads us through the history of the Grist sisters – the group of clone women Lai’s protagonists are a part of – as it also leads us into exploring the vital role embodiment plays in their story. The Grist sisters know and acknowledge not only the bloody history of their bodies as a product of genetic experimentation in service of capitalism and progress – grown and sold as laborers for the HöST Light Industries scale microchip factories –, but also acknowledge the body as a vital component of themselves as they experience that history through their bodies. They are very literally an embodiment of opposition to extropianism and its historical ideological origins, as “[they], the women, the integrity of their bodies their first principle, advance marching together into another world.” (Lai citing Monique Wittig’s *Les Guérellières*, 1971 in the preface to *The Tiger Flu*, 2018).

## Embodiment vs. disembodiment

Robert F. Harle (2002) writes in *Cyborgs, Uploading and Immortality – Some Serious Concerns* of the unified system of mind, brain, and body, inseparable from each other without causing significant trauma and change, as these work in a tandem of feedback loops, maps of the body in relation to itself and its surroundings, and the social forces acting upon it (75). By separating these systems and looking at their connections to each other, Harle demonstrates their unity in their flow into each other and how the aforementioned map of the body is an essential part of the mind, noting that:

From the earliest period in an entities life and development, the mapping of the body, both its existence in space and the interrelationship of its constituent parts, occurs continuously. [...] To be sure bits can be removed from this system (up to a limit) and it will continue to function but not exactly as before the bits were removed. If we removed poor old Harold's legs instantly, the next instant Harold's mind would be slightly different than before the amputation. [...] In time, the brain would construct a new map of the body, *sans* legs, and as a consequence, Harold's mind would be considerably different from the pre-amputation mind at a fundamental level. (Harle, 2002, 75-76).

Through this line, Harle argues that attempting to remove the mind from the body and its systems whilst still maintaining it in any similar form is an impossibility, as the body also constitutes part of the mind, puncturing the extropian ideal of and belief in the bifurcation of messy flesh-matter and the pure and pristine mind. In fact, Harle takes the mind further beyond the brain and the body it works within and out into the world beyond its own flesh and into collectivity, suggesting that the mind is “all that a person is literally; feelings, memories, consciousness [...], the body [...] and the external environment [it experiences]”, exemplifying that “if I am talking to Harold, Harold is part of *my* mind; his words, gestures, appearance, *everything* that is communicated (experienced) between us and remains encoded in my *brain-body* system constitutes part of my mind.” (Harle, 2002, 76). Kirilow demonstrates this collectivity of the mind in the above excerpt of the novel; as she is in a state of ecstatic, uncontrolled dancing, her body reacts and moves against her conscious will to pop song relics of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – music it has never heard before – and through her body she experiences the past as the present. “[...] I fall into a movement I never knew, feel the feel of all the old ones living and dying and living again” Kirilow notes in her present-tense

narration; “[the] harps, zithers, and guitars of the time past, the time present, all pumping humping volume” (Lai, 2018, 71). Though the launch of the twin satellites Chang and Eng happened more than a hundred years before Kirilow was born, “in her mind’s eye” the image of the sky-bound missiles is conjured by the music and the dance. The stories and songs her ‘mother double’ and other sisters have shared of their own histories and those of others spring from the memory of her body despite her conscious effort to deny its effects.

As an aside for later, this not-fully chronological experience of time Kirilow displays through her body is extended to the reader through the novel’s estranging structure, where the rhythmic alternating switch between Kirilow Groundsel’s first-person present-tense narration and the third-person present tense narrative following Kora Ko switch and overtake each other in when they are placed on the modified Chinese calendar of solar terms which always precedes each jump in time. In combination with the immediately disconcerting presence of a new timescale, that of Time After Oil, along with the modified Chinese calendar under a new name – United Middle Kingdom cycles –, the Gregorian calendar listed last of the three becomes warped and estranged. An English-speaking, Western audience so automated in the perception and keeping of time, is alienated from their own systems of time then simply by pointing to the Gregorian calendar’s status as a construct, and a non-universal one at that, with the ordinarily obscured reference to its very human namesake and instigator, Pope Gregory XIII. Thus, the novel blurs the rigidity of the present moment by alienating them from their common perceptions of time and facilitates the reader’s ability to perceive both past and future time as at least partially contemporary.

Returning to Harle’s (2002) arguments of the collectivity of embodied life, the Grist sisters demonstrate this in ways which vary from the rather overt ways their shared genetic makeup and post-humanity unify them, to the subtler social flows of influence portrayed in Harle’s conversation example. All originating from the same woman’s genetic material and produced through their asexual reproduction – as ‘litters’ of ‘pups’ birthed by their ‘doublers’ –, they see their sisters in themselves and themselves in their sisters, despite their minor variations deriving from other external influences, and this is further embedded in their physical selves through their regenerating ‘starfish’, as their ability to regrow parts of their body and thus give their sisters replacements when theirs fail or are damaged. As Kirilow mourns her starfish lover at her funeral pyre, her mother-double emphasises their collectivity:

'She's with you all the time,' says my mother double. 'Look around you, Kirilow.' All around the fire my sisters gather, [...] any of them could be Peristrophe" (Lai, 2018, 89).

These two elements of their transhumanity – starfish and doublers – are what allow them to remain independent and free of the corporations and society of humans which created them, as well as staving off the ecological deterioration brought about by the very society they escaped from (21). This freedom also extends to the sharing of information and history already touched upon as an extension of their brain-mind-body collective, as Kora Ko notices the effects of spending time and interacting with her newfound sister Kirilow:

[...] she is as lovely as Our Mother in her manifestation of the moon goddess Heng'e. Why does Kora think such things? Knowledge of Our Mother, if not fervency for her worship, must be rubbing off on her from spending so much time with Kirilow (Lai, 2018, 300).

Becoming united with Kirilow and thus joining the last remaining Grist sisters her genetics connects her to, she joins in their collective embrace of their embodiment and learns new things previously kept away from her. This freedom in embracing shared embodiment is contrasted by the information black-out maintained and profited from by the technocrats controlling Chang and Eng, where virtually all knowledge of the time before the decline is held; handed out piecemeal for a price though the cybernetic scales citizens can purchase and hook into their brains after the privatisation of the great satellites (208). Kora begins the novel actively seeking new scales to add to her 'halo' cybernetic interface in order to increase her knowledge and thus her survivability in her hostile world "as soon as she can afford it" (12). These cybernetic enhancements offered by Isabelle Chow and her HöST corporation are indeed expensive and limited in how many you can fit into a halo rig, with capacity upgrades held behind yet another paywall. And yet, in a manner alluding to some contemporary models of intellectual property distribution favouring subscription over licensed ownership, Kora notes that the information held on Chang is no longer available to her social class and is exclusively accessible to the very elites of "the glass towers of Saltwater City" (12). It is a society where purchasing information does not make it yours, and even the image of the moon is obscured by the polluted acid clouds of industry and commodified, and the twin satellites have more or less appropriated its role in the sky, with the distant pale blue light of Eng replicating moonlight whilst Chang has begun to interfere with the tides. An emblem, then, of

Kora's subjugation by HöSt, Kirilow sees the halo and its 'scales' as a filthy intrusion on Kora's body – with large black scale beetles running across them – and worries about the condition of her brain “with all those dirty twigs plugged into it” (182). In the novel's concluding pages Kora has overturned this intrusion – after becoming quite literally a 'tree' of knowledge and life – and become a central participant in the collective sharing of knowledge and history for the New Grist village, and the last remnant tendrils from HöST – the very company who forced her ancestors to build them and nearly destroyed the Grist sisters for their own scientific gain – is still with her but unable to exert any control over her, serving only as a reminder as she instead “wills it to dim” (329). It is worth noting that the novel is not universally opposed to such cybernetics, as Kirilow even finds the scale forcefully implanted in her head to be of help when she pilots the batterkite to New Grist Village, but only once she is free of HöST's control after Isabelle Chow's death and can employ it for her own means and on her own terms. Just as with the other forms of transhumanism in the novel, it is the terms through which they are sought and employed, as well as the values behind them, which are shown to either lead to genuine progress and liberation or delusion and self-destruction for their practitioners; and for those following extropian ideals, the novel diagnoses them as definitely on the path to the latter.

Before I can further explore the ways in which embodiment is liberating for the Grist sisters I need to explore the motives and methods of their opposing capitalist extropian forces trying to exert control over them. Their primary means in the novel are based on deception and the false offering of salvation, obfuscated by aesthetic means and information control. The employment of these methods will be explored in turn, beginning with Isabelle Chow.

Though Isabelle Chow and her fellow extropianists claim freedom as their revered goal – freedom from the slow deterioration of the tiger flu and their environments chief among them –, their underlying ideology has them set on a doomed track from the start. Both the Grist sisters and Isabelle Chow are facing an entropic decline at the beginning of the novel and face much the same problems. Their societies are deteriorating from the tiger flu killing men in droves on one side and from the death of the Grist sisters' last remaining starfish and doubler on the other, prompting the opposite ventures of Kirilow seeking a new starfish to restore the body of the collective and Isabelle's misguided quest to save her people by separating their essential parts from each other. These are both responses to the 'impending feeling of doom and gloom' Hayles identified as the necessary breeding ground for extropianist sentiment, but the way they respond to that doom

reflects the dichotomy of body-identity and pattern-identity which shows the extropian response as flawed (1999, cited in Raulerson 2013, 47). Isabelle here very much functions as a foil to Kirilow, with the loss of their lovers in the first and second parts of the novel functioning as the catalyst for accelerating their actions towards their goals, and their shared emphasis on the religious aspects of their quests. Although they are both doctors of sorts trying to save their peoples, their religious dedication to either body or pattern puts them in opposition and it is through this conflict in religious terms which Lai most clearly demonstrates their inherent values as well as the underlying historical conflicts which are the legacy of those values.

### **Beware false profits: Transhumanism as secular religion**

Though most transhumanist and extropian movements resist or even strictly oppose any connotations or associations to religion or the spiritual they share a great deal of the functions normally found in religion. Brent Waters argues that transhumanist movements are a new form of religion, one which “[...addresses questions about] what endures after psychological enhancement or uploading or what the ‘post’ in ‘posthuman’ actually entails ‘by offering implicitly religious answers’” (Waters, 2006, cited in Labrecque, 2017, 250). Cory Andrew Labrecque writes about the ‘secular religions’ of Quebec and how the province is a fertile breeding ground for new elements such as transhumanism to take root and grow, fulfilling much of the same function in the void left by Roman Catholicism after a grand secularisation of Quebecois society “brought about a sense of ‘existential rootlessness’” (234). Though this transhumanism presents itself as a radical new direction, Labrecque notes the ways in which its ability to gestate and grow within the province derives not so much from its branding as a break with the old, but rather from its compatibility with Quebec’s “deep-seated Catholic heritage” (234). Pointing to the same functionality as Waters, Labrecque argues that the Quebec is “fertile to groups that have specific ties to Judaism, Christianity, and/or secular humanism” and – citing Palmer – that transhumanism’s “[employment of] recognisable Church language” whilst “at the same time disdaining ecclesial positions that were becoming more and more contentious in Quebec society” works to form a “cultural continuity with both [the Christian and conflicting scientific worldviews transhumanism] attempts to reconcile” (2004, cited in Labrecque, 2017, 240-241). Just as there is an evident refusal in Quebec to “abandon their cultural heritage [largely] formed by the Catholic tradition” – making it easier to embrace a

form of transhumanism which echoes it –, Lai presents a similar scenario of the future Pacific Northwest, extrapolating the region’s religious mixture of Chinese mythology, Buddhism, Catholicism, among many others, and showing how the novel’s extropians appropriate and synthesise their symbols and practises for their own means, and shows how their incomplete mimicry symbolises the cloaked danger of their movement (241).

The figure of Isabelle Chow builds herself as a saviour from the flu and the other deterioration of Saltwater City and its surrounding Saltwater Flats, offering citizens emancipation from the danger and gloom their environment and the flu pose to their selves and their bodies by way of an upload to Eng, discarding their bodies in favour of pure consciousness. This narrative of a saviour is – much in the same way as transhumanism in Quebec – constructed in line with the cultural heritage of Saltwater City and its surrounding area, recognised contemporarily as Vancouver of British Columbia. As the name given to Vancouver by early Chinese immigrants, Saltwater City has – like the calendar primarily used in the novel – been redefined in Chinese terms by the significant historical presence of Chinese immigrants in the area (Yee, 2006, 7). As a cultural meeting point between Pacific Asia and the European colonial efforts of Canada, as well as the Indigenous peoples of the region, the future version of Saltwater City Lai has written reflects the amalgam of these cultures as they’ve blended and grown and become something new which still carries the threads and outlines of the form they had before this dramatic mingling. \*The information blackout referenced earlier in this text could very well have been an accelerant for this process, in the same way as much of contemporary language has lost or gained new meanings and connections, such as dollars being replaced with new currencies and forgotten by the youth, or Kora Ko believing the ‘beef’ served to her is the name of the animal and not its flesh (Lai, 2018, 65-82). This amalgam takes the form of Our Mother, the deity worshipped by humans and Grist sisters alike, whose many aspects incorporate the facets and figures of old religions.

Three of these figures are of particular use in analysing Isabelle Chow’s figure as an extropian religious leader, namely the Bodhisattva Tārā, the Virgin Mary, and the goddess Heng’e (contemporarily known as Chang’e) of Chinese mythology, all of which are linked with the moon and are among the aspects of Our Mother present in the shrine to Isabelle which Kora Ko comes across. Isabelle employs the aesthetics of these three aspects as a way of aligning her movement with the diverse cultural continuity of the area, however, she fails in fully reflecting the spiritual essence of these aspects, as Kirilow notes upon seeing her in the garb of “the Goddess of hope”

she sees it as “a costume hiding something both sinister and sad” (306). Though there are certainly more cultural connections to further deities in the novel, it is sufficient for the purposes of this thesis to analyse the three mentioned above, which will be addressed in turn.

### **Tārā**

The Bodhisattva Tārā – referred to in the novel as Green Tārā, one of her many facets – is a figure embodying the “quintessence of compassion”, born from the tears of the Bodhisattva Avalokite’svara from seeing the suffering of humanity “afflicted by diseases, wars and famines” and being unable to give help with any meaningful effect. Springing from the pond accumulated from Avalokite’svara’s tears in a blue lotus flower “[...] she was clad in the silks and jewels of a princess and her hands, expressing boundless giving and refuge, held deep blue lotuses.” (Purna, 1997). This lotus, along with the positioning of her hands are her most common identifying symbols:

The *utpala* opens at sunset, blooms and releases its fragrance with the appearance of the moon, with which it is associated. [...] Because of its prolonged life it is also taken as a symbol of longevity [...] and] promises relief from suffering by day and night (Purna, 1997).

The lotus works together with the other symbol of her hand’s positioning in the “*mudraa* of Giving Refuge” as well as the meanings of her name, reading as “she who saves” and “she who ferries across”, to connect her to Isabelle Chow. The partial replacement of the moon by Chang and Eng noted earlier holds particular significance in this regard, as the pale blue light of Eng – calling to mind Tārā’s blue lotus – is both a symbolic reminder in the sky of Isabelle’s promise of salvation from the plague and a virtual prolonging of life as well as the physical manifestation of that promise; her uploading process giving refuge to the diseased and famished populace on her ‘Quay D’Espoir’ (‘Quay of Hope’). A further point backing this up is the fact that the Mid-Autumn Festival held in the New Origins Archive in chapter 42 – a festival dedicated to the moon goddess Heng’e (Chang’e) – is held in Chang Hall, a chamber built to follow the arc of Chang’s trajectory, and among the stars painted on the ceiling Kirilow notes that “[his] bearing is holy as the moon’s” (Lai, 2018, 310).



Also Enlightenment draws a line of comparison between the two women; as two ferrywomen guiding the suffering, Tārā is noted by Purna (1997) to guide “the spiritual seeker” out of compassion “across the ocean of existence [...and] towards Enlightenment itself”, whilst Isabelle Chow’s form of enlightenment is materially based and shows the beginnings of where her extropian enterprising bent muddles her divine image and purpose. The drug N-lite (phonetically a clear allusion to enlightenment) manufactured and sold by HöST and Isabelle Chow in many ways has a false, synthetic form of guiding the suffering “across the ocean of existence”, as it is shown to be highly addictive to those who take it, as the visions it provides –for many – has them lost and “stoned in history”, away from their suffering bodies (Lai, 2018, 40). As the drug necessary for exchanging information between minds and mainframes of information it is also what is necessary for upload into Chang or Eng, and despite Isabelle’s own admission that it is an incomplete substance it is given to the suffering populace as a poor facsimile of their promised enlightenment and refuge.

This discrepancy between their forms of salvation is further emphasised by the end goals of Buddhist and Extropian efforts, as Tārā’s form of Enlightenment is, according to Purna (1997) “a deep inner experience which has no color, nor form, nor sex”, deconstructing the Ego through its facets, whilst extropians such as Isabelle seek first and foremost to enhance and immortalise their Ego. The ‘Great Inventor’ Isabelle Chow with her insistence upon being able to perfect the upload process given more time and resources and denying the possibility that it may be impossible to perfect reflects the words of extropianist futurist Hans Moravec; that “[...] so long as human creativity and entrepreneurship are allowed to flourish unimpeded, even ‘the laws of physics will seem to melt in the face of intention and will’” (1988, cited in Raulerson, 2013, 50). Through this discrepancy it becomes clear that as a saviour Isabelle is incomplete in her attempt to follow into the cultural line of Tārā, as her treatment of Chang and Eng further demonstrates. Purna (1997) notes that Tārā is a deity “transcended [beyond] the polarity of masculinity and femininity” but chose to take on a womanly shape “to work for the benefit of sentient beings in the form of a woman” as there had been none before her. This, Purna argues, is perhaps to balance to her followers and “[...]help them], whether men or women, [to] better value and integrate the more ‘feminine’ spiritual qualities as part of [their] development towards a state of nondualistic androgyny”. Isabelle’s failing here is rooted in the highly gendered nature of Chang and Eng, serving as symbols for their masters.

The feminine Eng referred to using the pronoun ‘her’, is very much a reflection of Isabelle herself, being both described as radiant but distant figures, hidden from the view of the general populace. Isabelle, often clad in a robe the same colour of Eng’s light, is kept away from the world outside the ‘glass towers’ of HöST Light Industries and the rest of Saltwater City’s elite for the majority of the novel, only appearing briefly in the recordings Kora finds in her shrine or through her projection into Kora’s mind in the Pacific Pearl Parkade, just as Eng and her databanks of information are kept from those very same people. Her counter, Chang, is directly opposite in this manner, representing ‘his’ master Marcus Traskin and his tiger men sick with the flu. Kora observes this opposition as she rests in Isabelle’s shrine:

If Eng is self-effacing, Chang is bloated, angry, and sick. He leans towards Earth way too intimately (Lai, 2018, 56).

Chang reflects – like Eng does Isabelle – Marcus Traskin and his tiger men, residing in the Pacific Pearl Parkade. They are out amongst the people making their presence known and directly affecting the populace, in myriad, often unwanted, and very physical ways as their deteriorating bodies create a threatening masculine drive. This connection is introduced in the very first chapter with Stash Sacks’ violent attempted rape of Kora Ko after his recently having begun to feel the deteriorating effects of the flu. This forceful insistence on affecting women’s bodies by the tiger men is repeatedly demonstrated throughout the novel, and Chang very much reflects this, as seen through Kirilow’s eyes as she notes when

[...] he hangs directly over Grist Village, too round and too low in his deteriorating orbit. His gross gravity tugs at my liver and makes me queasy (Lai, 2018,33).

This sensation of Chang’s physical presence, along with the threat of his deteriorating orbit promising the destruction of life on the planet if his path is not corrected by a rocket serves as a symbol and constantly returning reminder of the threat of the tiger men.

Marcus Traskin’s connection to the decaying satellite and their strong presence to the public is contrasted to Isabelle and Eng’s distance in that Marcus acts as a hub for information sharing; using the extensive amount of knowledge-bearing scales interfaced with his body, making him

“[...] the largest public mainframe in Saltwater Flats” (208). Although this could appear to be an act of altruism, the underlying reasons are far from crediting such a merit, as Marcus’ motives are based in the masculine competition of the free market, and the pursuit of profits, through for example the sale of the N-lite required to be able to interface with and access his knowledge base, as well as his later offers of uploading the sick and frightened populace to Chang.

Marcus and his associates’ pursuit of profits is a point which will be elaborated upon later, but for now, it is sufficient to demonstrate the gendered oppositions at play between the two paired actors of Marcus-Chang and Isabelle-Eng and how it delegitimises Isabelle’s construction of herself as an avatar of Tārā. In the climax of the novel at the Mid-Autumn Festival, Isabelle lets her compassion and role of giving refuge give way to the gendered conflict symbolised in Chang and Eng’s dichotomy, and forsakes everyone supposedly saved on Chang’s virtual cities in an act of personal vengeance by destroying them. Purna (1997) writes that: “What distinguishes [Tārā] is her explicit rejection of the exclusive dichotomy between ‘male’ and ‘female’, and this must be allowed for in any attempt to appreciate [Tārā’s] full significance”. Despite her promise of salvation and ferrying of the suffering through the image of Tārā’s compassion, Isabelle Chow’s façade of Tārā foreshadows the hollowness of these promises and hints to the internal issues within extropianism which make it a mislead and destructive movement.

### **The Virgin Mary**

The second aspect of Our Mother Isabelle aesthetically replicates to place her movement into the cultural timeline of Saltwater City is that of the Virgin Mary. Standing among the figures of the Isabelle shrine her cultural significance is immediately entrenched by Kora Ko’s improvised prayer to her which mimics the Lord’s Prayer (NRSV Matthew 6:9-13). An excerpt reads:

Hail Isabelle, full of place  
 Richer than the moon  
 Give us this day our daily cans  
 And lead us not into the flu  
 [...] (Lai, 2018, 53)

Here again, the Great Inventor is positioned as a saviour, though this is the most overt positioning of Isabelle as taking on the Virgin Mary’s cultural heritage all of the remaining ways in which she

does this are much more obscure throughout the novel, reflecting the shift towards a heavier emphasis on Chinese heritage. Though there are errant symbolic connections such as Isabelle appearing in blue robes – the colour historically associated with the Virgin Mary’s garb and attributes – and the roses produced by her uploading process, it is the Assumption of Mary into Heaven which is most clearly reflected in Isabelle’s actions in the novel’s climax at the feast of the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Mary’s Assumption has been celebrated by Catholics with a feast on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August for centuries, commemorating the elevation of her pure soul and body by God into the Kingdom of Heaven after her death. The connection between the two feasts is made clear by their timing, as although the Mid-Autumn Festival has no set date on the Gregorian calendar it always occurs on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth lunar month of the Chinese calendar when the moon is full, just as the feast of the Assumption occurs on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the eighth Gregorian month (Wikipedia, 2020b).

The further similarities of the two feasts will be elaborated on in the next section on Heng’e, but for now, I will further analyse Isabelle’s connection to Mary’s Assumption. Though Isabelle dies during the feast, it is foreshadowed that her mind – her pattern in the extropian sense – could have been saved and uploaded to Eng. Despite not going through the LiFT – the machinery shown to upload the mind and leave the body reconstructed as fish and roses – the reappearance of Peristrophe Halliana in the Dark Baths demonstrates this. Having died far off and even before the violent collection of the Grist sisters, she still appears to Kirilow in the connection the Baths give her to Eng. The apparition of Kirilow’s mother double explains:

Eng accepts downloads, but Isabelle also makes retakes of her own with a scrap of DNA, a bit of code, and the essence of pure emotion concocted from our very own forget-me-do combined with distillates from other plants, animals, and minerals. Their being expands through the feelings of those who love them. (Lai, 2018, 293).

This process, though still incomplete is supposedly a way of making the experience of the uploaded “[...] more real than [they] were before [...]”, creating a pseudo-Heaven where people can exist in their undying and pure minds, free from the ails of earthly existence. It is fair to assume that Isabelle’s mind is either already backed up or that her attendants will make a copy from her DNA and – in a white gown similar to that worn by Mary in many depictions of her Assumption – Isabelle has herself made her Assumption into Eng (Cabezalero, ca. 1665). However, as made clear by

Kirilow's encounter with Peristrophe and her mother double Glorybind, what Isabelle has created by separating mind from body or synthesising a whole mind from scraps is faulty and uncanny, or even deceptive in their attempts to sway her. Kirilow's religious belief that "[...] body and mind exist in harmonious balance [...]" and that the death of the body means a final death for the person as they were, appears to be confirmed – following the arguments of Robert F. Harle – as all Isabelle has made, like her portrayal as a divine saviour, is naught but a façade; "[...] a costume hiding something both sinister and sad" (Lai, 2018, 294; 306).

A further comparison to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary adds to this argument as both Mary's soul and body were brought to Heaven, whereas Isabelle left hers behind, symbolically breaking with her emulation of the Catholic Saint.

### Heng'e

The myth of the moon goddess Heng'e – one of the most well-known and well-established deities of Chinese myth – is one which has varied a fair deal since its emergence, but the elements of her myth that have remained mostly steady are her consumption of an elixir of immortality and her subsequent escape to the moon. This brings up immediate connotations to the uploading process to the pseudo-moons of Chang and Eng, but it is first worth noting how her name, much like other language has changed over time in the novel, has been altered by Lai from her contemporary one, Chang'e. However, this change has clear historical connotations, as Yang, An & Turner note:

Chang'e was originally called Heng'e, though later the name Chang'e became popularly used. Since the character *heng* in her name happened to be the same character used in a certain Han emperor's name, Heng'e's name had to be changed to Chang'e or to a different Chinese *heng* character due to the taboo of sharing an imperial Han name (Yang, An & Turner, 2005, 86-88).

This reversal to the earlier name of Heng'e mirrors the original change from Heng'e to Chang'e as the old taboo of her name has been left aside, mirroring a disconnecting distance from China their immigrant culture has grown. One could argue that the reversal away from Chang'e comes from its phonetic similarity to Chang in the 'English' spoken in Saltwater Flats society, following the novel's theme of re-experiencing the past in the present; old but changed. Regardless, for the sake

of aligning with *The Tiger Flu* I will henceforth be referring to the goddess by her name given in the novel.

The early versions of the tale of Heng'e portray her as having stolen the elixir of immortality – in some versions from her husband, Yi – and being punished after consuming it and escaping to the moon by being turned into an ugly toad. Yang, An & Turner note the common iconography of the toad appearing “[...] on the moon, standing on its hind legs, holding a pestle and pounding the elixir of immortality in a mortar”, an act she has to continue indefinitely as punishment for her actions (88). However, over time, sympathy with her lonely and sterile existence on the moon has changed the perception of the goddess as well as the myths surrounding her, and “[today, Heng'e] symbolically represents women's beauty, gentleness, elegance, and quietness” and other traditionally assigned feminine qualities (89).

There are two contemporary versions of Heng'e's myth which both provide an origin story of the Mid-Autumn Festival; one in which Yi is a hero given the elixir for his heroic deeds, and Heng'e drink the potion to save it from theft by Yi's apprentice; the other – which is of greater interest to this thesis – posits Hou Yi as a tyrannical king, granted the throne after the same heroic deeds and quickly descending into despotism. After he acquires the elixir of immortality to extend his rule, Heng'e steals it to prevent the people from suffering continuously under his cruel rule. The account tells further that:

Hou Yi was so angry when he discovered that [Heng'e] took the elixir, he shot at his wife as she flew toward the moon, though he missed. [Heng'e] fled to the moon and became the spirit of the moon. Hou Yi died soon because he was overcome with great anger. Thereafter, people offer a sacrifice to [Heng'e] on every lunar fifteenth of August to commemorate [Heng'e's] action. In spite of her different motivations and causes for flying to the moon, [Heng'e] is described as a kind, smart, and self-sacrificing lady in both of these versions. (Yang, An & Turner, 2005, 90).

This passage allows us to reveal that although Isabelle Chow builds herself in the image of the self-sacrificing Heng'e ascending to her pseudo-moon of Eng to and bringing relief to the people, her act of vengeance during the very feast meant to commemorate Heng'e's sacrifice reverses and blends her actual role to that of Hou Yi. After Chang is taken from her, and eventually the LiFT as well – one of her keys to immortal life on her pseudo-moon Eng – she arranges for the nuclear

missile to strike down Chang and all those kept within in vengeful anger, and, as Hou Yi, she is quickly thereafter struck dead in her consuming fury (Lai, 2018, 317).

Utilising the façade of these three goddesses discussed above Isabelle constructs her extropian idealism as refuge and salvation for the people of Saltwater city and its surrounding area, managing to fit her movement into the cultural continuity of the region and gain a following. However, as I have demonstrated in the examples above this construction is primarily based in aesthetic mimicry, and where that mimicry starts to fail nearing the climax of the novel is where one can fully see the discontinuity between her extropian values and goals and those of her imitated divinities through the cracks in the façade. These failings culminating in hollow mimicry of divine salvation foreshadow the misguided extropian ideal of being able to effectively sever a person's mind from their body and maintain them in a perfected pure consciousness; a sentiment demonstrated by Harle (2002) to be a false and fruitless belief.

### **The split unity of extropianism**

However, it would be remiss to focus any analysis of extropianism in *The Tiger Flu* on Isabelle Chow alone, as the manifestation of extropianist values in the novel is twofold, and – crucially – in conflict with itself. Understanding this internal opposition is vital to understanding Lai's diagnosis of extropianism and will be aided by the symbolic significance of Chang and Eng Bunker, the conjoined twins whose fame popularised the term 'Siamese twins' (Wu, 2012, 1).

The connection between the brothers' names and those of the twin satellites is an obvious one, and a biographical foray into the lives of the Bunkers further confirms this. Whilst Eng Bunker is noted to have been of good health right up until his death, his brother Chang experienced severe health problems following a stroke which left him partially paralysed. Chang's brother Eng was – like the 'backup mainframe' sharing his name was meant to be – a supporting figure for his ill twin, and when he was told one morning that Chang's illness had claimed him he reportedly called out "Then I am going!" and passed away mere hours after (40). Chang Bunker's story is reflected in the poor, deteriorating state the satellite given his name is in for all of *The Tiger Flu* up until and including his destruction, as well as the tiger men who he represents. This conjunction alluded to by the twin satellites' namesakes paints the opposition between Isabelle and Marcus Traskin and his successors as a conflicted unity; two manifestations of extropian ideals in competition with

each other which ultimately leads to the split and subsequent destruction – to bring back a term – of their collective self.

Hans Moravec – as stated earlier – positions the free, unregulated market as the ideal vessel for bringing about the growth and progress of science and technologies necessary to facilitate an extropian Singularity event where exponential growth in scientific progress inevitably evolve humans from their current form and into a new, superior existence (Raulerson, 2013, 50). The world created by Lai in *The Tiger Flu* is an extrapolation of the consequences of free-market capitalism and its unyielding need for growth, best captured in the actions of men like Marcus Traskin and his associates, referred to collectively henceforth for the sake of simplicity as ‘money men’. Together with Isabelle, they make up the majority of corporate players who hold control over Saltwater Flats and its populace. As the other side of the same coin, where Isabelle seeks the unhindered and unending growth of innovation and science the money men in the novel chase ceaseless economic growth and profits, damning the consequences. Though there are no explicit explanations for the collapsed ecosystem and its socioeconomic ramifications in the novel, the hints at the end of oil and the collapse of the dollar appear to trace a line back towards capitalist exploitation and consuming expansion as the root cause, and when the more recent origins of the eponymous tiger flu are revealed it solidifies that line (Lai, 2018, 278). Following this thread in the novel reveals Lai’s diagnosis of extropianism’s free-market ideology and its cyclical self-destructive nature of competition and infinite growth.

### **Free markets of bodies**

Originating from the cloning of once-extinct Caspian tigers and spread through the addictive wine vinified from their bones, the tiger flu is at first a side-effect of for-profit cloning and biotech companies returning the past to life to expand their markets; its penchant for affecting men much more easily than others alluding to the deeply masculine nature of enterprise, in its desire to control and expand.

Competition, the lauded avatar and vessel of this system mars the narratives of those involved with the production of the tiger wine and thus the flu, leading to a cycle of infighting and betrayal as the allure of growth and profit inevitably grows too strong to control for all those



involved, as the flu, the symbol of their efforts, slowly consumes them. Sketching a timeline of the tiger flu and the competition of its interchanging money men demonstrates this cycle, beginning with the theft of a wife. Kora's father Kai Wai elopes with his brother Kai Tak's wife, allowing him instead to take the Jemini cloning facility responsible for cloning the Grist sisters and the Caspian tigers required to make more wine. This revelation comes at the same time Kora's brother K2 reveals to her that production of tiger wine never stopped; that their family's greed is the reason the current wave of tiger flu keeps getting worse, even pointing to the cyclical nature of it "[...] happening over and over again [...]" (226). He blames the illness of himself, Marcus Traskin, and all the other tiger men on this greed, and enacts his vengeance by having Kora's mother Charlotte and Kai Wai taken away and forcibly uploaded. K2 Ko is emblematic of the cycle he himself identifies, at first lauding Marcus for being a hero offering the cure and salvation from the tiger flu in the form of the upload to Chang, but then seeing the potential for profit in controlling the production and distribution of tiger wine – an inheritance he sees himself as next in line for now that he has eliminated Kai Wai and Charlotte. Seeking further expansion after he is invited to run the cloning facilities with Kai Tak he discards fully any notion of the heroics of offering salvation to those sick with the flu and surrenders completely to the allure of profits and power:

Now that Everest is dead, Kai Tak's invited me to run Jemini with him. That means we can clone as many test subjects as Marcus wants for the LiFT upload. And we control the wine factories. That means we can infect as many desperate flu birds as we want. And Marcus Traskin controls the cure. So we can make those suckers pay and pay and pay some more to save their precious little minds, if not their bodies. We built a perfect money machine. [...] In time, we will capture Eng too. We will be Kings! (Lai, 2018, 229).

Yet, the cycle continues as Kai Tak also succumbs to the flu he made his riches off producing, and the convoluted bloodline of the Ko family reveal Kora to be the true heir to the Jemini facilities which prompts Marcus to attempt his switch of allegiance from K2 to Kora, ending in his destruction by K2. The internal conflicts within the money men and the Ko family symbolise the self-destructive nature of their ideology, as either through forceful upload, firing squad, or the flu which built their fortune they are in turn destroying themselves as they bring down the world around them. This nature is shown through both manifestations of extropianism in the novel, as demonstrated by Isabelle's murder and consumption of her close friend Elzbieta, a woman she

shares both aesthetic and onomastic roots with (Wikipedia, 2020a). Having already connected the two sides through her destruction of Eng's competing twin Chang, Isabelle continues the cycle, in a climax in which their mirrored appearance in divine white clothing, where Elzbieta is noted to be dressed in the white robes of Heng'e – one of the aspects of Our Mother Isabelle has most clearly taken upon herself – and so making the consumption of the flesh of the competition an act of self-cannibalism. The desperate need for growth and success ingrained in the extropian ethos echoes in Isabelle's words from the first projection found at her shrine:

Don't you know it's a contest for the world now? Someone's got to win, and if it's not me, then I'm as good as dead. HöST is as good as dead. That's the way it works these days, you know? (Lai, 2018 54-55).

This contest is both the cause and expression of the disunity of the collective body inherent in their ideological systems where natural environments and bodies are disconnected from vitality and instrumentalized for the fervent requirement of continuous growth. Their imperialist tendencies are clear, and in the end, as Lai portrays them, on a path to their own demise. In trying to outrun the consequences of their ideology's exploitation the only way to escape is to keep accelerating faster than they can catch up, but the inherent misgivings and disunity in their movement as a whole are shown to hamstring their efforts. Their need for profit and exponential growth see them consuming their own consumers, before themselves being eliminated by internal competition. Along with Raulerson's observation that "[...extropians view] self-transformation as [...] and evolutionary imperative, implying not merely economic but interplanetary expansion: as we use up the resources at home, posthumans will 'move beyond the confines of the earth [...] to inhabit the cosmos.', the appearance of Eng in the final line of the novel serves as a grim ironic tableau of their misguided goals (2013, 51):

Far beyond the earth, in the deepest reaches of space, the old communications satellite Eng lurches along her still-deepening orbit, a long ellipsis that will take her a thousand years to complete (Lai, 2018, 330).

The expanding orbit of Eng, along with the allusion of Eng Bunker's death following the passing of his brother places an inescapable air of uncertainty about the satellite's future and the whole extropian premise of achieving disembodied immortality through uploading oneself as software,

as agents ranging from a rogue space rock to the entropic heat-death of the universe extropians fear presents it with a promise of eventual deterioration. As Harle notes, “[even] if the brain was permanently on-line in a vast network and sufficiently enmeshed to not be in one location, the network, in fact the world (galaxy, universe) is still subject to disillusion.” (2002, 81).

### **Embodiment as revolt**

As has been demonstrated so far, Lai has diagnosed the tendency towards self-destruction inherent in the capitalist values and practices embodied by the figures of Isabelle, Marcus, and their associates, and the consumption of their own consumers under the guise of the saviour. They have been shown to be wolves in shepherds’ clothing, bearing striking similarities to contemporary ‘green capitalism’ which appropriates the aesthetics of conservation even as their profits are driven by the same resource extraction and worker exploitation that is killing the planet; a cyclical exploitation both creating the problems which disproportionately affect exposed groups of people whilst at the same time selling a false solution. The upload as demonstrated above provides no proper escape as those uploaded are consumed in the process, and with the manufactured threat of the tiger flu hovering above their heads the lauded consumer’s ‘choice’ of the free market becomes singular. Lai shows the nature of the free market as relying on the exploitation and consumption of “technological capital’s repressed other” to propagate this cycle in the novel through the reliance and consumption of the manufactured working class of the Grist sisters. As identical clones derived from Chinese lineage made only for the purposes of cheap labour the Grist sisters function as a critique of global capital’s exploitation of ‘disposable’, instrumentalized and dehumanised Asian workers (Allan, 2015, 157). Even as they are eventually driven out from Saltwater City and are made diaspora the cycle continues; their dehumanised bodies are still shown to be a vital piece of the money-making machine of market interests, and the imposed universality is shown to be critical for furthering their machinations:

Isabelle Chow has created a new technology said to cure the mind of the body. But to us Grist sisters, it is simply a death-machine. It imagines the mind can be separated from the body. We don’t believe that. And it needs Grist sister DNA to feel real. It is why the Saltwater Grist was destroyed – through her relentless kidnappings and experiments. Before she murders you, she’ll extract your cultivation

techniques for forget-me-do so she can make more and better N-lite. You are in grave danger (Lai, 2018, 173).

Against these capitalist extropian forces exerting violence and disillusion over their transhuman bodies and manufactured otherness, embracing said bodies becomes an act of revolt through which the Grist sisters can reclaim the history contained within those bodies and form new bonds, independence, and a sense of belonging through their shared embodiment. Through their embodied experience of time and history explored earlier, they experience the memories of the past as the present, not only retelling the histories of oppression which is their legacy and refusing the control of their oppressors over their narrative through informational black-out but also presenting a challenge to status-quo understandings of time and history through which systems of oppression have constructed their own narratives.

The Grist sisters embody a sort of ‘postmemory’ of their progenitors’ “[...] traumatic knowledge and experience [...]”, “ (Phung, 2012, 5):

[...Not] the same as memory or recall, postmemory functions as an affective link with the past, and embodied “living connection” between generations (Hirsch 111). Therefore postmemory becomes a generative and at times involuntary, compulsory exercise in reactivating and reembodying the past, in cultivating a living connection” with the past through “imaginative investment, projection, and creation” (2008, cited in Phung, 2012, 5).

These compulsory exercises as experienced in the novel are – like Kirilow’s dance discussed earlier – deeply felt and experienced through their bodies. Kora, as both a starfish and member of the Ko family propagating the tiger flu she is the clearest meeting point of both the Grist sisters’ history and the history of exploitative oppression for growth and profit. As noted before she begins the novel reliant on the systems of extropian capitalists to gain most any information, in the form of scales, however, as she becomes familiar with the dual heritage contained in her body she is able to cultivate this ‘living connection’. In the New Origins Archive, she experiences the sensation of her body being violently dissected and as she screams from the pain “[she] becomes the scream [...], the scream of a decade past and the decade before that, the trail of tiger flu in reverse.” (Lai, 2018, 274). She screams the combined and interconnected story of her lineage back to the birth of the grandmother of Chan Ling – the original Grist sister – a history of the exploitation of Asian

othered bodies weaved into the accompanying heritage of conglomeration, legalisation, and extortion for the sake of national and corporate growth and profits. Some examples of note among them being the legalisation of using clone labour, the Opium War and the Japanese occupation of Hong Kong, the last of which draws connections to the biological experiments performed by the Japanese 'Unit 731' on civilian prisoners in their *Murata* project on mainland occupied China. These experiments featured the complete dehumanisation of their subjects and the instrumentalization of their bodies for the purposes of weapons testing, vivisection, the study of infectious disease, and the limits the human body could be brought to before forfeiting, for the sake of imperial expanding interests (Gold, 2004, 157). After the war, many of those involved with Unit 731 were taken in and protected by the US government in exchange for using their findings in their own biological weapons programmes (109). Secrecy of such forgotten knowledge of the same line of history which lead to the creation of Kora's own body is brought into the light and remembered in this painful experience of postmemory, where that very body is cut apart in much the same manner as the victims of Unit 731.

The Grist sisters' postmemory lets them experience the trail of history covered up by expansionist powers and the reliance those powers has on othered bodies such as their own – seeing through their facades and obfuscations like those used by Isabelle Chow and Marcus Traskin –, and by embracing their othered bodies along with all their 'bloody legacy' they are able to resist them and fight for their independence from their systems of oppression. As an example of one of these forms of resistance their othered bodies allow is demonstrated in Kirilow's reaction to experiencing the male gaze when she resides in Saltwater Flats. Just as their bodies are instrumentalized for the purposes of developing technologies for masculine capitalism they are also made objects for male sexualization as a facet of this exertion of control over their bodies, one which their village's independence based in their shared embodiment has allowed them to remain free of. Kirilow remarks as she is approached and followed by a man in the city:

I become aware of my own beauty in a way I had never considered before. We Grist sisters come from the same DNA. Only our ages and the differences of scars, haircuts, or minor mutations mark us as distinct from one another. We don't think about beauty, because there's no competition to be had. I never thought about my looks until this particular man looked. Is that how it's done in this decaying city? (Lai, 2018, 201).

This demonstrates their fight to resist as a continued one, just as they need to continuously re-embodiment the past history they never become entirely freed from the facets of their oppressors and need to assert their independence through their embodiment. Chan Ling, the original Grist sister, developed the methods for their survival through their doublers, starfish, and forget-me-do to ensure Grist's continued survival and independence by furthering their transhuman bodies to adapt to their situation. Their situation is, however, never quite a stable one and the Grist sisters need to continuously contend with the reaching effects of the oppressive systems which made them. The flaws in the identical DNA of their manufactured bodies hamstringing their longevity, and although they manage to work against this by embracing this shared genetic material which allows them to be sustained by transplants from their starfish, there is always another thing coming to threaten their existence (20). With time, they run out of starfish and doublers and their old oppressors reach them in the form of the flu taking away their last two before returning as HöST paramilitary forces gather nearly all the sisters who remain. With the history of the Grist sisters contained in their bodies, their consumption for the perfection of the LiFT upload project becomes yet another form of information censorship and historical erasure of atrocities. In the face of this entropy Kirilow and the other remaining Grist sisters have to embrace embodiment anew and unify their collective by once more taking a transformative hold of their own transhuman bodies and reclaiming their independence by creating a new form of starfish – the Kora Tree – who can sustain the Grist and thus the history they embody.

Even at the conclusion of the novel, a hundred and fifty-six years after their escape from the Mid-Autumn Festival and the founding of New Grist Village, the flu remains a threat, and the new members of their collective are reminded to not forget this. Their self-engineered medicines and new starfish trees have allowed them to stave off the flu and other forms of deterioration, yet it remains, along with the memories of pain and hardships. Like the flu, the memories and knowledge of their lineage it is entwined with remains an embodied part of them, retold over and over by the Kora Tree to new generations of Grist sisters as the history of their own bodies, encapsulated in some of her last words in the novel: “You must remember my pain, as I remember yours” (Lai, 2018, 327).

## Conclusion

As this thesis has demonstrated, Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* functions as a diagnosis of the extropianist movement, its underlying ideologies, and historical connections to the exploitation of dehumanized bodies through the perspective of the Grist sisters. By opposing the extropian movement both in the view of the unity of brain, mind, and body, as well as through the exposure of the exploitation and oppression which marks their past as well as their present. This is made possible by Lai's constructions of time and history perception blurring the line between present and past and the Grist sisters' insistence on embracing their bodies which hold these perceptions as they are threatened by those who would see that history erased.

Through Harle's (2002) critiques of transhumanist upload fantasies, it is clear that the extropian ideal of 'pattern' and maintaining a purified consciousness in a disembodied form is a misguided pursuit, one which following Lai's construction is built on dangerous roots – as Raulerson (2013) agrees with. The corporate interests of the novel present themselves as saviors from the flu and entropy of their society, offering the upload in the aesthetic guise of religious and public altruism. Yet, as has been illustrated above, the promise would still with the best of intentions have been misguided and still lead desperate people into an uncertain and half-complete existence on Eng or Chang which, by the destruction of the latter, is shown to be nowhere near the 'realer than real' 'life after life' foretold by the billboards advertising their salvation. However, Lai demonstrates the extropian discarding of the human body goes beyond mere personal uploads, as foreshadowed by Isabelle Chow's twisted manifestations of the divine beings Tārā, the Virgin Mary, the moon goddess Heng'e, and shown in the cycle of competition and greed producing and profiting from the tiger flu. These powerful corporate actors exploit and consume repressed bodies for their obsession with their own growth, an obsession which Lai shows through the eponymous tiger flu to be a destructive and ultimately self-consuming drive. As opposed to the freedom and liberation envisioned by extropians in the separation of mind and body, this separation, symbolised in the internal divisive force amongst their representations in the novel is shown by Lai to be an act of self-destruction.

In the face of oppressive forces that rely on the consumption and exploitation of the other both in the means and for the goal of destroying the body, the fierce insistence on embodiment

made by the Grist sisters becomes a revolt against their oppressors. Embracing their manufactured otherness has been shown as the key to their freedom and independence, as the postmemories they share reveal and aid in resisting the interconnected forces of free-market capitalism and the extropian movement, as well as in surviving the detrimental environmental and pandemic dangers caused by those forces via their self-directed transhumanity. The Grist sisters' non-conventional experience of time and history both shudders the foundations upon which their oppressors stand by refusing to adhere to their constructed narratives, and choose their own path, and, though their future remains as uncertain as any, Lai demonstrates their insistence on the integrity of their bodies as their path to liberation from those who would oppress them.



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