



**POSTHUMAN EXISTENCE IN ARTIFICIAL WORLDS: SPACE, TECHNOLOGY,
AND IDENTITY IN *PASSENGERS***

Dr. K.R.. Shiva Shankaran¹, Dr. Praveen Kumar² and Dr. Shalini Infanta³

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai – 603203, Email Id: shivashm@srmist.edu.in.¹

Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai – 603203, Email Id: praveenp@srmist.edu.in.²

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Faculty of Science and Humanities, SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, Chennai – 603203, Email Id: shalinil@srmist.edu.in.³

Abstract:

The spacecraft Avalon in *Passengers* (2016) is examined in this paper as a technologically mediated setting that creates posthuman subjectivity by fusing corporate infrastructures, automated systems, and artificial intelligence with human life. Based on N. Katherine Hayles' posthumanist theory, the study contends that rather than autonomous individual action, the movie depicts human identity as being formed through informational processes, technological mediation, and distributed cognition. Through algorithmic governance, automated service networks, and hibernation technologies, the Avalon functions as an enclosed artificial environment where human bodies are converted into data-regulated entities, obfuscating the distinction between humans and machines. The study illustrates how subjectivity arises within a system of technical regulation that reconfigures embodiment and agency by examining the ship's architecture, service infrastructures, corporate control over time, biological processes, and social interaction. Stratified forms of posthuman existence are created by automated surroundings and hierarchical spatial architecture, where corporate control and computational authority influence identity. Thus, the Avalon is shown in the movie as a posthuman lifeworld where survival, embodiment, and consciousness are all created by technology. In the final stages, *Passengers* shows how closed technical systems alter human experience by substituting digitally distributed forms of agency for liberal humanism ideas of autonomy. By highlighting the moral and political ramifications of technologically controlled living in late capitalism space imaginaries, the research presents the movie as a critical investigation of posthuman existence in artificial worlds.

Keywords: Hibernation technologies, subjectivity, posthuman and spatial architecture.

Introduction:

The Spacecrafts, domes, bunkers, and other closed systems are example of sealed structures that science fiction has traditionally utilized to convey anxieties about capitalist enclosure and technology modernity. The spaceship Avalon, a huge interstellar cruise liner carrying 5000 migrants and 256 crew members to the colony world homestead II, is one of the most carefully designed constructed worlds in the modern cinema, according to director Morten Tyldum's

2016 film *Passengers*. Humans are converted into stasis-preserved cargo for the 120-year journey, suspended in corporate time until they are required at their destination. Time becomes infrastructural, manufactured, and monetized as a result of this temporal dilatation, which itself represents a change in agency from humans to corporations.

The story of the movie, which centres on Jim Preston, a mechanic who awakens ninety years too early, raises moral questions of survival, consent, and loneliness. Beyond this personal drama, however, is a more expansive ideological framework: the Avalon as an independent planet-corporation hybrid, a corporately controlled biosphere. The spacecraft serves as a floating commercial township as well as a vessel, as the concept suggests. It is a privatised planetary ecosystem that projects contemporary forms of global capitalism into deep space.

The claim that the Avalon represents three overlapping dimensions is made in this paper:

- Spatial control: Restricted zones, automated enforcement, and hierarchical architecture.
- Economic stratification : it is the use of tiered service systems to precisely replicate class structure.
- Biopolitical governance The administration of bodies, life cycles, and temporal existence by a comprehensive organisation.

The Avalon is transformed into a whole environment through these frameworks, exemplifying what cultural theorist Fredric Jameson refers to as "late capitalism's spatial logic," in which architecture itself turns into a means of social production. The Avalon encloses not just people but also futures, turning each passenger into a commodity whose temporal and biological life is determined by the company.

Literature Review - Sealed World, Biopolitics, and Neo Colonial Space Travel:

This research uses theoretical frameworks from a number of disciplines to conceptualise the Avalon as a socio-political system.

1) Sealed.-World Narratives in Science Fiction

Numerous academics, including Donna Haraway and Darko Suvin, have highlighted how science fiction spatialises ideological systems to produce "cognitive estrangement." Sealed-world stories, such as *Silent Running* to *Snowpiercer* and *2001: A Space Odyssey*, employ entire landscapes to highlight ingrained inequalities and social immobility. This genealogy includes the Avalon, a technologically sophisticated vessel with an intentionally imperceptible yet pervasive internal sociopolitical structure.

2) Cruise – Ship Capitalism

According to academics like Ross Klein, modern cruise ships are floating neoliberal republics run by private companies rather than democratic institutions. They rely on intricate luxury architecture, covert labour, and rigid labour hierarchies—all of which are replicated on the Avalon.

3) Posthuman Subjectivity – N. Katherine Hayles

By highlighting the integration of humans with intelligent technology and information systems, N. Katherine Hayles' concept of posthuman subjectivity undermines the liberal humanist notion of an independent, self-contained individual. Hayles contends in *How We Became Posthuman* (1999) that subjectivity is not a simply biological state but

rather arises through the interplay of embodiment, information, and technological mediation.

4) Biopolitics and corporate power

The Avalon regulates sleep cycles, reproductive schedules, meals, health practices, and even emotional states, according to Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, which is the control of populations via the regulation of biological life. Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" also strikes a chord: passengers' biological autonomy is suspended for corporate convenience, leaving them in a situation halfway between life and death.

5) Neo – Colonial Migration Narratives

Corporate entities transport people, capital, and ideology to other territory; space flight as colonisation mirrors historical patterns of settlement. The mentality of extractive colonial businesses like the British East India Company is reflected in the Homestead Company's colonisation of far-off worlds. "Science fiction's colonies often look backward to empire as much as forward to utopia," observes Mark Bould.

The Avalon appears as a capitalist micro-planet whose confined environment exposes the ideological saturation of contemporary life thanks to these theoretical alignments.

Avalon as Space Cruise: Architecture, Access, and Spectacle

The Avalon's public areas are meant to resemble an upscale resort: a central circulation spine is surrounded by recreational areas including swimming pools and movie theatres, a grand concourse lined with eateries and bars, and panoramic windows viewing the stars. These spaces serve as zones of spectacle where travellers are welcomed to experience space as scenery—an extension of the "exotic vistas" promoted by earthly cruises, now transformed into cosmic views—thanks to their brilliant lighting, wide visual fields, and simple modernist architecture. Intimate drama is sewn into corporate architecture as the movie regularly shows Jim and Aurora walking through or living in these areas, framing their bodies against large windows.

However, the distribution of this openness is selective. First-class suites, with their roomy interiors and balconies overhanging the atrium, contrast strongly with the ordinary cabins where the majority of colonists sleep in drab rows. The movie subtly codes access to various portions of the ship by cabin class. Jim's low-tier status initially limits him to basic cafeteria meals and restricted facilities. This is an example of how service levels—from food and entertainment to concierge assistance—are algorithmically adjusted to ticket category. Thus, the Avalon materialises class difference both geographically and procedurally: higher-paying passengers inhabit private spaces and vantage points that provide comfort and symbolic elevation, and architecture becomes a tool for stratifying experience.

This logic of spectacle and control also applies to the ship's most remarkable architectural element, its revolving ring, which creates artificial gravity by centripetal force. On the one hand, it highlights the technological innovation that allows life to exist while in transit, inspiring appreciation for the engineering achievement; on the other hand, it immerses the passengers in a system that they are powerless to change, a circling machine whose gravity, day, and night rhythms are imposed from above. This environment's seamlessness and meticulous hiding of machinery and support systems beneath spotless surfaces serve an

ideological purpose: The video dramatizes how corporate design can make relationships of control and reliance both enjoyable and invisible by anesthetizing infrastructure.

Time, Debt, and Corporate Control of Life

The idea of a 120-year journey in which travellers are put into induced slumber emphasises time as a resource under the Homestead Corporation's control. By buying a ticket, colonists essentially rent out a century of their biological time to the firm, believing that they would be woken near arrival in a far-off colony where opportunity and property are likely to be waiting. Thus, corporate logistical cycles take precedence over the temporal horizon of a typical human life: planetary growth, resource extraction, and interstellar travel take place on a timeline that transcends individual subjectivity. This time bargain is disastrously shattered when Jim awakens ninety years early, revealing the disparity between personal vulnerability and business guarantees. The automated systems declare that "hibernation pods do not malfunction," and customer support interfaces only provide general assurance instead of solutions, underscoring the passenger's imprisonment inside a network of protocols that are unable to handle actual emergencies. The Homestead Corporation is essentially out of legal reach due to decades-long communication delays to Earth and the opaqueness of its patented technology, which shield it from responsibility.

The movie expands on this by incorporating economic dynamics into daily life: even though the colonists are purportedly travelling to a fresh beginning, on-board purchases, such as enhanced meals and opulent experiences, are charged to passenger accounts, promoting further spending. This dynamic is similar to cruise ship operations, where a complex ecology of add-ons, such as meal packages and excursions, generates additional money while tickets only cover basic admission. Such dynamics are evident in *Passengers*, where a character's financial profile determines their on-board opportunities and access to certain luxuries needs premium status, implying that debt and wealth disparities continue even when travelling to a purportedly egalitarian colony.

The hibernation mechanism itself is the most striking example of the company's control over life. Homestead essentially owns both the passengers' employment in the future colony and the conditions of their existence along the journey by suspending their physical processes for corporate timescales. The malfunction that awakens Jim and then Aurora highlights the vulnerability of this techno-biological arrangement: a single system failure can permanently change a person's course in life, but there is no way to seek compensation because those impacted are confined to a closed space far from any legal venue. As a result, the sealed world serves as a place of legal exception where corporate power is mostly unchecked.

Posthuman Subjectivity and the Technological Lifeworld of the Avalon

The Avalon represents what Hayles describes as a technologically mediated environment in which human subjectivity is inseparable from computational systems. *Passengers* exist not as autonomous individuals but as components within an informational network that regulates their biological functions, movement, and consciousness. The hibernation pods convert human bodies into data-regulated entities, reducing life to programmable processes controlled by machine intelligence. Identity becomes informational rather than purely embodied.

The ship's automated service systems, android workers, and algorithmic access controls create a condition of distributed cognition, where decision-making is shared between humans and

technological systems. Jim's inability to override the ship's protocols demonstrates the displacement of human agency by computational authority. The Avalon thus functions as a posthuman environment in which subjectivity emerges through technological mediation rather than individual autonomy.

Technology and Human Existence Mediation

1) The Control of Life and Hibernation

By stopping physiological processes, hibernation technology enables humanity to withstand interplanetary travel. This is an example of how biological time and mortality can be controlled by technology.

Human life turns into:

programmable, reversible, and dependent on technology

The posthuman reconfiguration of embodiment is reflected in the transformation of the body into an object controlled by machines.

2) Artificial Intelligence and Human-Machine Communication

Human interaction is mediated by the ship's robotic technologies and artificial intelligence. Social interactions are replaced by automated services, illustrating how technological settings alter emotional experience.

The movie does, however, highlight automation's drawbacks. The narrative crisis, which implies that technology cannot take the place of human agency, is brought on by technical failure even in the face of sophisticated technologies.

3) The Vulnerability of Technology

By showing a malfunctioning system, the movie casts doubt on the advancement of technology. The fragility of technological civilisation is shown when a small malfunction puts thousands of lives at danger.

Posthuman anxiety is shown in this:

→ Risk arises from reliance on technology

→ Systems of technology are nevertheless prone to errors.

→ Human survival becomes vulnerable.

Settler Expansion and Corporate Empire

The Homestead Corporation monopolises interplanetary expansion. Although settlers are promised a prosperous future, the company makes money from:

- travel expenses,
- infrastructure for settlements,
- distribution of land, and labour cycles over generations.
- Instead of spanning countries, the corporate empire spans worlds.

Homestead II, the Avalon's destination, is promoted as a pristine new world ready for human development, mirroring stories of frontier settlement and terraforming that are well-known from both science fiction and colonial history. The film's promotional materials portray the endeavour as a chance for individual rejuvenation and escape from an environmentally harmed Earth by showcasing rustic cottages, verdant landscapes, and contented colonists. This discourse is consistent with what critics characterise as neo-colonial illusions of "empty" areas accessible for corporate development, where indigenous claims—whether non-human ecologies or previous inhabitants—are obliterated under the slogan of opportunity.

Passengers condenses a larger history of imperial migration, in which ships carried settlers and workers to colonised areas under conditions of uneven risk and reward, by portraying colonisation as a cruise-like experience—luxury passage followed by frontier homesteading. The majority-paying passengers aboard the Avalon, together with a crew and a number of automated technologies, reflect a corporate version of this pattern: a privatised infrastructure of growth where a multinational corporation controls both travel and settlement. A project that also offers profit through real estate, services, and planetary resources is given moral urgency by the ecological catastrophe on Earth, which is mentioned in passing in references to "ecocide" and biosphere collapse.

Such a situation begs the question of whose lives are envisioned as recoverable through off-world colonisation and whose are abandoned on a damaged Earth from the standpoint of neo-colonial theory. Although the film doesn't go into great depth about the passengers' demographics, the expensive tickets and first-rate services imply that Avalon's colonists belong to a reasonably affluent class that can afford to flee. Therefore, the sealed world of the ship reinforces a two-tiered model of planetary citizenship divided between mobile, investment-bearing bodies and the immobile surplus population left behind. It also reproduces class hierarchies internally and serves as a mobile enclave of selected lives en route to a new planetary enclave.

System Failure and Crisis: When the Capitalist System Collapses

More than just story devices, the Avalon's failures highlight how brittle and repressive closed capitalist regimes are.

1. Systemic Disintegration as Exposure to Classes:

The façade of perfection crumbles when Jim finds mistakes throughout the ship. Gravity becomes unstable, food synthesisers malfunction, and automatic doors break. Achille Mbembe contends that technical control always runs the risk of being necropolitical, when the system starts to endanger rather than save life.

2. Hidden Labour and the Reactor Core:

The collapse of the reactor serves as an example of the invisible labour needed to sustain capitalist utopias. Only because employees like Jim or invisible team maintain intricate infrastructure do passengers feel comfortable. Jim's deadly manual entry into the reactor chamber serves as a metaphor for how capitalism depends on selfless labour.

3. The Ethical Reformation of Aurora:

Aurora is initially a privileged Gold-tier traveller, but a catastrophe compels her to face the systemic inequity of the ship. She understands how the ship lowers maintenance costs for people and how corporate processes have shaped her life path. Her choice to help fix the Avalon and save Jim turns into an act of defiance against the system that governs them.

Narrative Focus, Ethics, and Controlled Life

The way the movie handles Jim's choice to wake Aurora is one of the points of contention in the reviews of *Passengers*. Many critics contend that the story uses an act that is equivalent to abduction and murder as the starting point for a redemptive relationship. For the sake of this essay, however, that moral dilemma also highlights the limitations imposed by the sealed world design: Jim's decision is influenced by the Avalon's isolation, lack of institutional redress, and power imbalance between individuals and corporations. Jim's predicament illustrates how regulated existence in a society where all processes are computerised and there is no practical way to leave the ship can erode moral agency.

The movie's conclusion, in which Jim and Aurora fix the reactor, save the ship, and decide to spend the rest of their lives together onboard the Avalon, runs the risk of re-personalizing what is really an indictment of infrastructural and corporate power. A pastoralised concept of adaptation is shown in the final photos, which show a converted concourse with plants and a cabin constructed in the centre of the ship.

Two people have changed a corporate interior into a quasi-natural home. From one perspective, this could be interpreted as a utopian reclaiming of space from the company; from another, it implies that the privatised appropriation of common areas for domestic life is the only way to resist the sealed world while maintaining the larger logics of cruise capitalism and neo-colonial expansion.

Even in this seemingly idyllic setting, the narrative architecture nevertheless encodes regulated life. Unaware that their survival hinged on a crisis and repair in which they had no influence, the thousands of colonists continue to hibernate. The ship's interior has been transformed by decades of unauthorised residence when they awaken at the conclusion of the voyage, but the corporate trajectory—to transport corpses to Homestead II for settlement—has not changed. In this way, *Passengers* exposes the moral and political consequences of surrendering human futures to closed corporate worlds while also reinscribing the colonisation project's inevitability.

Conclusion:

Through exploring the relationship between space, technology, and identity, *Passengers* provides a nuanced depiction of posthuman existence in artificial worlds. The movie shows how human subjectivity, embodiment, and social relationships are radically altered by technological innovation. Automation, artificial intelligence, and technological infrastructure govern human existence in the starship Avalon, which serves as a posthuman home. According to the study, both freedom and confinement are produced by artificial surroundings. Humanity is able to overcome biological and planetary constraints because to technology, but it also causes loneliness, moral quandaries, and existential fear. By highlighting the brittleness of automated systems and the enduring value of human agency, the movie challenges technological idealism. The movie concludes by arguing that rather than eradicating the human condition, posthuman existence exacerbates its core issues of morality, loneliness, and the pursuit of purpose. Human identity is still based on moral obligation and emotional ties, even

in virtual environments. As a result, the movie presents posthumanism as a shift that reinterprets what it means to be human in technologically mediated contexts rather than as a substitute for humanity.

In the end, the Avalon creates posthuman people with technologically constructed identities rather than just controlled subjects. Hayles' contention that the posthuman arises through informational and technical mediation is illustrated by the dispersion of human action across artificial environments, corporate infrastructures, and computational systems.

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