

# THE DATAFIED SELF: NETWORKED CONSCIOUSNESS AND EMBODIED REALITY IN PATRICIA LOCKWOOD'S *NO ONE IS TALKING ABOUT THIS*

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34293/shanlax.9789361632587.ch013>

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## Abstract

Digital humanities is a budding research field which infuses digital technologies with literature and culture. In the present digital era, tracing humanity in a person has become scarce and even humanity is also digitalised through online platform. This digitalisation has deleted the humanity that is lurking within the human beings which obviously lead to a lifeless mechanical life in reality. The deleted version of humanity should be retrieved from the human beings through various studies that are taken up by the researchers to highlight the importance of humanity and limited usage of technologies as well. The present article studies the concept of datafied self in the novel *No One Is Talking About This* penned by Patricia Lockwood published in 2021, which is a Man Booker Prize-shortlisted novel. The present research is framed in such a way that the protagonist searches for her humanity that she has long lost and later she realises the significance of living a life in reality which is unpredictable. She also expects others to initiate a change of returning to the reality from the digitalised world. The novel also interrogates the core principles of network society, datafication, and the concept of "quantified self" by using methodologies like close reading, network theory, and media archaeology. The novel is divided in to two parts and the article deconstructs the first half as a literary simulation of a social media "feed," illustrating the construction of a distributed, data-driven consciousness. The second half is analyzed as a profound rupture, where the unquantifiable reality of a child with a rare genetic disorder dismantles the protagonist's networked identity. This article argues that Lockwood's work performs a vital humanist critique, challenging the hegemony of data-driven epistemologies and reasserting the primacy of embodied, mortal experience, a crucial ethical consideration for the Digital Humanities field itself.

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## Introduction

The concept of Digital Humanities can be defined as scholarly research which amalgamates digital tools and technologies with humanities to study the intertwining of technologies in human lifestyle. Digitalisation is at its peak at present, and along with it humanity has also been digitalised in contemporary society. Everyday life of people has been transformed into a data which can simply represented as datafied self. The present generation has moved far away from a realistic life and they are active only in online portals and applications which has reduced the quality of human life. This kind of losing oneself in technologies are addressed by various researchers and novelists to highlight the significance of socialisation and the deprivation of humanity in reality.

Contemporary literature has emerged as a crucial laboratory for this inquiry, not merely thematizing the digital but formally incorporating its logic and aesthetics. Patricia Lockwood's critically acclaimed novel, *No One Is Talking About This*, stands as a pinnacle of this genre. It is a work that breathes the air of the internet, known to its protagonist only as "the portal". The present article argues that *No One Is Talking About This* is more than a novel about online life; the unpredictable and unstable life of human beings in the contemporary society is also touched upon in this study. The study also critically analyses the system of datafication and networked attention where people seek attention through portals by sharing their life happenings. By treating the novel not just as an object of analysis but as a theoretical interlocutor, this paper will demonstrate how Lockwood's formal choices provide a human-scale critique of large-scale digital phenomena. Her novel forces a confrontation between two competing paradigms of knowledge and being: the datafied self of the network and the analog self of the body, a confrontation with profound implications for humanistic study in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Research Objective

The present research is guided by the following primary objectives:

1. To analyze the novel as a functional model of a social media network, demonstrating how its fragmentation, pace, and language replicate the cognitive and social effects of the "attention economy."
2. To examine the construction of the protagonist's identity through the lens of "datafication," arguing that her selfhood is composed of external, quantifiable units of digital discourse.
3. To situate this literary critique within broader DH discourse, suggesting that Lockwood's novel highlights the ethical necessity of balancing data-driven analysis with an acknowledgment of all that resists quantification.

### Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

#### Digital Humanities and the Study of Subjectivity

N. Katherine Hayles, in *How We Think: Digital Media and Contemporary Technogenesis* (2012), argues that human cognition is not a static entity but co-evolves with its technological environments. This concept of "technogenesis" is essential for understanding the protagonist's "networked consciousness," a mind that thinks in memes, algorithms, and viral feedback loops. Similarly, José van Dijck's work in *The Culture of Connectivity* (2013) on the "platform society" provides a framework for interpreting "the portal" not as a neutral space but as an engineered environment designed to commodify attention and sociality.

#### The Datafied Self and the Attention Economy

The concept of the "quantified self," as explored by scholars like Deborah Lupton, refers to the practice of self-tracking and optimization through data.

Sarah Lee in her article "The Quantified Self: The Future of Personal Data" defines that "individuals increasingly seek to leverage technology to gain insights into their daily lives. At its core, QS involves the systematic collection and analysis of personal data to inform decision-making and drive self-improvement." (Lee 2025) Macgill Davis also in his article states that, "By self-tracking their activities, moods, and feelings, anyone can be in charge of their own data and the insights it brings. The Quantified Self community sees that as a move toward more common participation in "scientific advancement,"" (Davis 2022) This article expands this concept to the realm of social media, arguing that Lockwood's protagonist embodies a *socially* quantified self, whose identity and worth are measured in followers, likes, and linguistic virality. This existence is governed by what Tim Wu termed the "attention economy," a market where human attention is the scarce resource. The novel's first half is a literary map of this economy's internal experience.

### The "Post-Internet" Novel in Literary Criticism

*No One Is Talking About This* has been widely reviewed and situated within an emerging canon of "post-internet" fiction. Critics like Parul Sehgal have brilliantly captured its emotional arc, noting how it "begins in irony and ends in deep, deep feeling" (The New York Times, 2021). Lauren Oyler and James Wood have praised its linguistic innovation and its capture of the internet's "jargon and rhythm." However, while these analyses excel at thematic and stylistic commentary, they often stop short of treating the novel's form as a systematic, theoretical model. This article builds upon this foundational criticism by applying the explicit conceptual toolkit of Digital Humanities to argue that the novel is not just *describing* but *theorizing* the digital condition.

### Analysis

#### The Literary Feed and the Architecture of a Networked Mind

The digitalisation of daily routine is a feed that is given to the portal which is going to stay forever in the cloud space. The present generation has datafied all their personal experiences in the portal which can be represented as fractured identity in the digitalised environment. This digital ecosystem paves way for the good deeds like creating awareness and disseminating information globally but parallelly it brings its consequences along with it. In the same way, the protagonist in the novel *No One Is Talking About This* also feeds the portal with her life story and as a consequence of the feed, she feels prisoned and addicted to phone usage. The feed that she gives is termed as narrative units or data points which is short, disconnected paragraphs that mirror the relentless, infinite scroll of a timeline.

She was a person who spent her life on the internet. It had been a great awakening, and then it had been a great sleeping. Now she was just conscious enough to click. She posted a photo of the moon. Someone else posted a photo of the moon with the caption, 'We are looking at the same moon.' Someone else posted, 'We are looking at the same moon, but are we? The moon is a rock.' A fourth person posted a photo of a rock. (Lockwood 2021)

The above lines from the novel are a microcosm of the portal's ecosystem. It demonstrates the process of datafication: an experience (looking at the moon) is transformed into a data point (a post), which is then metabolized by the network through a process of ironic deconstruction, generating more data and, crucially, more engagement. The protagonist's consciousness is entirely subsumed by this cycle. Her internal monologue is a collage of viral discourse, a clear illustration of Hayles's technogenesis. She does not possess a self so much as she curates a data stream, her identity a product of the network's distributed agency.

### **The Quantified Self: Identity as Metric**

The quantified self is a creation of identity in the portal which is based on her mind, ideas and thoughts. This identity creation in internet is too shallow which at one point of time doesn't mean anything and seems to be void. As a debut user of portal, she feels happy and content, but as days goes by, she becomes addicted to the portal. Within the portal, value is not intrinsic but metricized. The protagonist's existence is a constant performance for an algorithmic audience. Her success is measured by her "reach," her wit by its "shareability." This is the logic of the quantified self applied to the soul. Lockwood captures the anxiety of this existence: "Were you, at this moment, the main character of the internet?" (Lockwood 2021) This question reveals the internalization of the platform's value system, where being is contingent upon visibility and viral potential. The self becomes a brand to be managed, a dataset to be optimized, perpetually vulnerable to the judgment of the crowd and the whims of the algorithm. This section of the novel serves as a poignant ethnography of a life lived under the regime of datafication.

### **The Unquantifiable Rupture and the Return of the Body**

The quantified self is too shallow for a person to create an identity and that identity is digitalised and globalised. This identity at one point of time doesn't give any happiness and becomes a fractured identity in the digital world. The novel's pivot is as brutal as it is transformative. The abstract, discursive reality of the portal is shattered by the concrete, physical reality of her sister's pregnancy and the diagnosis that the baby has Proteus syndrome, a rare genetic condition that causes overgrowth of tissue. This event introduces a form of "data" that the portal's system cannot process: the un-optimizable, vulnerable, and sacred body. The language of the novel undergoes a seismic shift: "The baby was a message, and the message was *Look*. The baby was a message, and the message was *I love you*. The baby was a message, and the message was *This is a body*." (Lockwood 2021)

This repetition of "The baby was a message" is crucial. It represents an attempt to process this new reality through the only framework the protagonist knows that of receiving and interpreting data. Yet, the "message" here is antithetical to the portal's data. It is not debatable, not shareable for clout, not subject to ironic reversal. It is a phenomenological truth that demands a different kind of attention: deep, focused, and loving. This is the novel's core humanist argument: that the most significant aspects of human life, love, grief, mortality, and care are inherently unquantifiable.

### **Network Reconfiguration: From Cloud space to Reality**

The unquantified self awakens only when a person is in experiencing an emotional outburst. Though human emotions can be transformed into words the depth of the emotions is realized only when it is experienced by that person. Until then no one can understand the emotions of a human being. The invisible wall between the reality and the digital world starts to deteriorate which obviously leads to internal conflicts. This conflict can be elegantly modelled using network theory from DH. The protagonist is one of millions of nodes (users) in a vast, decentralized system. Her connections are weak ties, her influence minimal, and her identity diffuse.

The emotional crisis forces a radical network reconfiguration with the protagonist. The distributed network collapses, and a new, centralized, high-intensity network forms within her. The family unit becomes the central node, and all emotional, temporal, and narrative resources are routed toward it. The protagonist's identity is no longer distributed across the portal but concentrated intensely on her role as an aunt, a sister, a caretaker. This structural shift is a narrative argument against the alienation of the distributed network. It posits that profound meaning is not found in virality but in the intense, localized bonds that the portal's economy of distraction inherently devalues.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, the research article addresses the research objectives such as the social media network, datafication, attention seeking and a balance between quantification and reality in the novel *No One Is Talking About This*. Patricia Lockwood's novel is a monumental achievement not only in contemporary literature but also as a work of critical thought within the Digital Humanities. By structuring its narrative as a data feed and then staging its catastrophic failure in the face of mortal love, the novel is a powerful critique of the datafication of human experience. It demonstrates with stunning emotional force that the quantified self is a hollow construct when confronted with the un-datafiable realities of the body, of care, and of loss.

For the field of Digital Humanities, Lockwood's novel serves as an essential ethical reminder. While our methods like distant reading, network analysis, data visualization that are powerful for revealing macro-scale patterns, they must be perpetually tempered by the knowledge of what they exclude. The novel champions the value of the singular, the embodied, and the deeply felt emotions and the very subjects of traditional humanistic inquiry. In doing so, it argues for a symbiotic relationship between the digital and the humane, suggesting that the ultimate purpose of Digital Humanities is not to replace close reading with distant reading, but to use the insights of both to better illuminate the full, messy, and glorious spectrum of what it means to be human in a digital age. Thus, the present article concludes by stating that though the technological advancements paves way for reducing man power and making everything feasible, the society must have control over the usage of the digital technologies. The contemporary society must value humanity and the presence of the human bonds should be valued by others.

Instead of living a pseudo life in the digital world, people should live a life in reality where all the emotions of people are given significance and must socialise with the society in reality.

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