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Sense 8 and the Praxis of Utopia

I dedicate this essay to all my former and future students taking the three-level Television and Society class in the Department of Communications Studies and Multimedia at McMaster University. You inspire me to think about utopia every time I enter the classroom, and to search for its various, contested, variegated, and complex incarnations in new media environments and in all forms, both new and old, of human communication. You may not know it yet, but you are a sensate cluster.

The 2015-18 Netflix sci-fi TV series *Sense8*, created by Lana and Lilly Wachowski (*The Matrix* (1999), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), and *Jupiter Ascending* (2015)) and J. Michael Straczynski (*Babylon 5* (1994-98)), is a grandiose experiment in the content, style, and form of television. Narratively, *Sense8* intertwines topics of transphobia, identity, intersectionality, violence, poverty, loyalty, love, memory, and orgiastic pleasures, with mushy melodrama, extraordinary fights, car crashes, psychic projections, and reflections on globalization. In terms of style, the show impressionistically crisscrosses various genres: the aesthetics of sci-fi dramas, conspiracy thrillers, Bollywood musicals, police-procedurals, and European films noir coexist throughout the show's twenty-four episodes. The creators admit that certain action scenes were filmed in as many as nine different locations, and then were montaged into a single tableau.[1] The result is multiple worlds—visually haunting, yet revealed in a deliberately slow and painterly manner—worlds meant to represent the magnificent kaleidoscope of human experience bridgeable only through unconditional (almost in the religious sense of the word) love. The opening sequence, for example, attempts to show, in Twitter-trending-style aesthetics, the multiplicity of human geography. This is certainly not accidental, inasmuch as through a grandiose utopian cinematographic gesture the show aims to depict a queer, global, multi-gender, post-national community which is on the one hand deeply immersed in the internet world of visual cultures and tactile interfaces, while on the other hand, is linked through psychic energy, body to body, and mind to mind, without the mediation of visual or visible technology. The Wachowskis' phantasy for the twenty-first century then, seems to be the assertion that the more digitally linked we become, the closer we get to the moment when one's mind can operate in another person's body. Thus, in the language of Wachowskis' phantasy, being more connected means being less alone. In fact, during a political speech toward the end of the series, one of the main characters, Capheus, summarizes the whole utopian kernel of the series: "Nothing good ever happens when people care more about our differences than the things we share in common. The future I hope for is the same as yours. A future in which our children grow up never knowing love as a wall. But only as a bridge." Indeed, the sensate utopia may be seen, as Alexis Lothian suggests, as "an alternative vision for globalisation" (94) where racial, gender, historical, or systemic injustices could be replaced by a peculiar empathetic bond, one that embraces human diversity, yet resolutely celebrates the full subjectivity of every person.

In terms of form, *Sense8* is a text that dwells in a *trans* universe: trans-gender, trans-genre, trans-subjective, and trans-physical. It is also, inevitably, a transmedia text, inasmuch as *Sense8* engages profoundly in what Jenkins et al. describe as "world building," meaning the creation of augmented narratives with complex, "immersive story worlds" that transcend the boundaries of the show itself (133). Here I refer to a description of transmedia by Jenkins et al.—focused on storytelling in the digital age—that goes beyond the conventional definitions of transmedia as mediations of content across different platforms. Linked to processes of media convergence, Jenkins, Ford, and Green's theories of transmedia emphasize the high levels of audience engagement (that reconfigure the whole entertainment industry by introducing licensing and franchising practices), and point to the increasing demand by audiences for complex, immersive, and extended worlds that in earlier media history could be satisfied only by soap operas (133). In that sense, Jenkins et al. recognized the aesthetics, amounts, and surplus characteristic for "spreadable" rather than "sticky" (134)

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1. For the challenges involved in visually creating the world of *Sense8*, see Wachowski, *Creating the World*, 2015 (behind the scenes documentary, minutes 1-15).

media of transmedia storytelling. From my perspective, though, what seems interesting here is how complex transmedia texts such as *Sense8* raise questions of a utopian community, namely questions that are cultural, political, and aesthetic, consistent with issues concerning industry and economic practices.

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Narratively complex shows that thrive in a transmedia environment capitalize on and monetize audiences' attention, emotional labor, and leisure time, and thus often track and profile fan interests. *Sense8*, following that logic, was a giant capitalistic endeavour: a storyline that unfolded on six continents, with a production budget that allowed shooting in the United States, Germany, India, Kenya, Iceland, Mexico, Brazil, South Korea, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy, and Malta.[2] It seems that the show was also part of Netflix's agenda to enter the global entertainment market as the player with the widest audience base. Perhaps the showrunners' attempts to address a diverse audience worldwide by creating a non-identitarian model for global connection may be considered a utopia doomed to failure, inasmuch as the show fails, in a Marxist key, to interrogate the conditions of its own production and distribution.[3] However, precisely in that regard, it is important to ask if *utopia*, understood here as the creation of alternate versions of reality (i.e. multiple and dispersed transmedia worlds that visually and narratively coalesce and deviate constantly), can be reduced to analyses of the industrial media complex along the lines of the Frankfurt school and postcolonial critiques that already inhabit the scarce academic discussions of *Sense8*. The utopian texts are always self-conscious about their playful, illusionary identity, and, in a sense, they are self-ironic, inasmuch as all utopian art masterfully navigates the etymological ambiguity of the word *utopia*, from u-topia (a place that does not exist) to eu-topia (in Thomas Moore's sense, "a

good place"). Precisely this ambiguity of the concept of utopia is what allows utopian art to combine reason with imagination in multiple eclectic ways to produce worlds that are both uncannily familiar and disturbingly distant.

To put it differently: my main argument is that the show addresses utopia in experimental and novel ways, profiting artistically from the on-demand features of Netflix storytelling, to present an intellectual challenge to a world that is in desperate need of imagining other forms of time, connection, and community. The stakes of this form of utopian imagination are, of course, both aesthetic and political. Utopian texts, such as *Sense8*, confront our current hegemonic and seemingly only way of experiencing the world, by presenting a temporal, aesthetic, and existential challenge to it. These texts carry the utopian passion for what Emilio Ambasz calls "alternative futures" (Sorkin 108), that is, imaginaries that are neither pure illusions (and therefore subject to sublimation as all art is in the classical Freudian reading), nor immediately available, transmissible realities. In that sense, *Sense8* is a peculiar confrontation of the Real—or what I call here *utopia* as *praxis*—inasmuch as it brings the impossible unimaginably closer to us, while still being playfully conscious of the fact that utopias can be both horrific (i.e. *u*-topic) and pleasurable (i.e. *eu*-topic).

The etymological ambiguity of the term utopia is certainly reflected in the multifarious incarnations of the genre in literary, artistic, cinematic, and televisual artifacts, as well as in the proliferation of terminology related to it: anti-utopia, dystopia, and recently computopia (signaling phantasies of computer domination over human agency). While the utopias of the past—Moore's *Utopia* (1516), Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1624), Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888), and Wells's *A Modern Utopia* (1900)—had the

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dual function of reprimanding humanity for its injustice and irrationality and showing that an alternative way ahead was possible, the messages of hope were quickly lost when confronted by the horrors of the two world wars, and the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The unbridled technological innovations of the twentieth century led to the emergence of the utopian narratives of Fordism, fascism, and communism, which instead of offering visions of a better life, brought quite the opposite, and inspired some of the most influential anti-utopian and dystopian fictions of all time such as Adolf Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and George Orwell's *1984* (1948). In his influential analyses in *Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945) and *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), Karl Popper, appalled by the excesses of technology and modernity, firmly declared "the death of utopia" when defining attempts for its social engineering as the fastest road to totalitarianism (*Open Society* 167-74). While it is true that utopia has thrived in historical periods of profound crisis and transformation—the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial and French Revolutions—as a subversive counter-narrative, it seems that its present being in all of its artistic forms is in crisis (despite the fact that the world today presents ample conditions for utopia's production).[4] Unlike dystopia,[5] utopia has always been a particularly difficult genre for film and television makers. Excluding a couple of notable examples in classic cinema (the 1936 adaptation of Wells's *Things to Come*, and the 1937 film adaptation of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*), the images of happy humanity do not seem to translate well to the cinematic medium.

Intellectual reasons for the crisis of utopia are easy to discern: the collapse of reason in the trenches of the world wars and the demystification of all "grand narratives" ushered in a culture of irony, which was profoundly marked by skepticism toward the future. Moreover, the global reign of capitalism seems to have invalidated all other possible alternatives for organizing the social world (along that

line, North Korea or today's excessive versions of Islamic terrorism hardly qualify as enchanting versions of utopia). Let us not forget that utopia deals with comprehensive, exhaustive visions for the world's reorganization. Classical utopias are by default heteronomous: they depict a happy world that is completely impossible and improbable here and now. This world may be a result of the labourious application of rational principles, but it is a world, nonetheless, whose achievement is endlessly postponed. *Sense8*, on the other hand, is a renewed version of utopia. First, it is a rare, successful televisual engagement with the genre of utopia; second, it is an attempt to think about utopia not as a type of pure heteronomy (which is elsewhere, unavailable, external, and subject to multiple representations, and which, in essence, places utopia beyond representation), but rather as a space of autonomy as praxis, that is, a horizon in the making, singular, and yet entirely dependent on the contingency of human agency and imagination, and therefore resistant to domestication; and third, it is a utopia that has not been based on rational thinking (and therefore it is not per se a technocratic, Enlightenment-inspired utopia), but is instead based on sensual connections.

Utopian Community

The show tells the story of eight strangers scattered around the globe who are mentally and emotionally connected after being "birthed" as "sensates" into a trans-subjective cluster by Angelica Turing (Daryl Hannah), their sensate mother figure. Culturally, spiritually, and biographically, the eight main characters could not be more different from each other: a transgender blogger and "hactivist" in San Francisco, struggling with family and societal recognition (Nomi); a compassionate Chicago policeman (Will); an Icelandic DJ with a tragic past living in London (Riley); a closeted Mexican film star, torn between his intimate life as a gay man and his public personification of male machismo (Lito); a Berlin-based petit gangster and lost soul (Wolfgang); a joyful bus driver in Nairobi supporting his AIDS-infected mother (Capheus); a pharmaceutical scientist in Mumbai stuck in an apathetic marriage (Kala); a Korean business woman and underground martial artist in Seoul thrown in jail as a scapegoat for her brother's financial crimes (Sun).

Despite their differences, however, these eight characters constitute a new, more sophisticated type of human being, linked through "psycellium," a psychic nervous system that allows the sensates to share bodily and emotional experiences, as well as to haunt each other's mental landscapes. The eight main characters are being

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4. For a comprehensive historical treatment of the genre of utopia see Kumar (7-18).

5. There are many great dystopias filmed in classical and contemporary cinema and television. Worth mentioning here are the *Metropolis* (1926), the various versions of *1984*, the *Matrix* series (1999 and 2003), and the hit trilogy *The Hunger Games* (2012-2015).

hunted by a powerful, international multi-government organization, which they confront at the end of season one, and throughout season two, as *one person*. As the showrunner Straczynski explains, the threat the group of sensates presents does not come from a community of radicalized subjects, but rather from a group of radically different individuals capable of acting as *one* (also encoded in a phrase on *Sense8*'s poster, "I am we").[6] Precisely this interplay between unity and multiplicity, along with the phantasy of instant, pure, unnoisy communication that is at the centre of all reflections about community, is what defines the show's intellectual investments. As John Lessard observes, these are precisely the questions that are important in terms of understanding the mobilization of online communities by transmedia forms of storytelling (3-4).

While utopian communities can rarely be found these days on television, in literature, or film, cyber-utopians believe that they exist on the internet. From Douglass Rushkoff (41-57) to Clay Shirky, a whole branch of techno-utopian scholars trust that the internet has the potential to stage—on a worldwide scale—the citizen-focused public sphere of the Greek polis. Indeed, it seems that the Wachowskis' take on community has some similarities with the techno-utopian project. While in 1999 Neo from *The Matrix* could transcend the menace of Agent Smith by

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6. In a 2015 interview for *Creative Screenwriting*, J. Michael Straczynski observed that:

> the common coin of our shared humanity trumps whatever they want to throw against us to divide us. We wanted to do a show about connectivity and crossing cultural barriers and how would you react if suddenly there was someone in your head from Nairobi or India, and how would you culturally deal with each other . . . What if you could see that other person as if they were in the same room as you and that person could not only talk to you but you could have access to their memories, their thoughts, their skills? This would allow us to show that it doesn't matter where you come from, you're more alike than you are different (par. 6).

acting alone (since he learned to believe that he was The One), in 2016, the Wachowskis seemed to believe that only together, as participants of an emphatic community, could we encounter and overcome the dangers emanating from mysterious transnational conspiracies. It must be noted, however, that the Wachowskis' enchantment with the internet—revealed through Naomi's spectacular hacker skills—does not transpire so much at the level of the story, as it does at the formal level of cinematography, narrative organization, and progression. After all, even if *Sense8* attempts to project some kind of planetary utopia of connectedness, this projection, as discussed later, sometimes fails. *Sense8*, however, does succeed in playfully engaging ever-distracted internet audiences—sometimes by mimicking the experience of the browsing viewer by way of its disjointed storytelling, and at other times by projecting the connection between the sensates as a type of mental distraction. The utopian community of *Sense8*, then, is one of distracted individuals.

Sense8 is made for internet audiences and peculiarly reproduces in its storytelling the browsing experience of the viewer. Most episodes (particularly in the first season) constantly cut between the lives of the eight main characters, mimicking the split attention of the viewer with a second screen in their hands: checking notifications on a smart device, changing the channel, and in general attending to something else while still watching and engaging with the show. Similarly, the sensates' experiences of each other are represented as a sort of magnificent interruption, almost a mad interference within the flow of quotidian activities.[7] As the cluster becomes more conscious of its mental talents, the visual and narrative incarnations of the eight-sided psyche become more experimental and risky. They culminate in a couple of eight-member psychic orgies shot on four continents, and artfully montaged together into a one-of-a-kind televisual representation of shared pleasure. In another iconic scene—in episode ten of the first season—amid the sounds of an ecstatic performance of Brendel's Piano Concerto No. 5, Riley's memory of her own birth brings flashbacks of that same existential moment to the other seven members—amniotic fluids, women in labor sweat, birthing pools and swimming pools, rain, the dripping of hospital IV's, and swamps of blood—all metamorphose into a grandiose liquid-inspired metaphor for human connection through pain, achieved via the excess of cinematic images. As Sijia Li thoughtfully concludes: "This is what it looks like to have an orgasmic overload of media, characters, and settings. Not switching between them, but watching them simultaneously—all

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7. This is what Lessard defines as "erotics of distraction" via a discussion of Nancy's "inoperative community" in his analysis of *Sense8* (1-2, 9-10).

together, all at once" (par. 5).

Two essential and somewhat conflicting notions emerge here regarding utopia. For the sake of analytical clarity, I will differentiate between them by naming them utopia as *heteronomous community*, and *utopia as autonomous community*.[8] *Sense8* navigates between these two versions of utopia masterfully, offering, in my view, its own third vision of utopia—a peculiar, hyperlinked combination of both—which I have called praxis. The distinction between heteronomy and autonomy that appears in Kant's *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* is often derived from the following passage: "If the will seeks the law that is to determine it anywhere else than in the fitness of its maxims for its own giving of universal law ... heteronomy always results" (441). While there are different philosophical discussions around the capacity of human agents to act autonomously and heteronomously,[9] there is a general agreement among Kantian philosophers that autonomy is related to freedom of the will (i.e. acting autonomously is acting according to the laws that the subject has self-legislated), while heteronomy is essentially linked to states of unfreedom (i.e. heteronomy involves acts of submission to external authorities: these could be gods, states, nations, or any kinds of ideologies related to utopias of wealth, eternal life, or racial purity). It is important to note that both heteronomy and autonomy—understood as political, aesthetic, or social principles—have historically produced various models of utopias and social engineering, which, along with the glorification of freedom, have also inflicted the worst instances of enslavement of the human spirit.

Utopia as Heteronomy

This is the kind of utopia which, by twisting Habermas's "ideal speech situation," can be defined as a non-coercive form of connection governed by empathetic bonds rather than rational consensus (43-115). The danger, of course, is that regardless of whether the organizing principle of community is reason or feeling, its exclusivity and singular authority runs the risk of turning this connection into a dogmatic structure, a heteronomy. Whatever emancipating and non-oppressive radical kernel of pure empathy a social system may have, precisely because its foundation is a closed singularity, it is always susceptible to becoming the worst type of exclusive identity. Think about the historical violence of race, empires, nations, and capital: why should the logic of the *cluster* be different? In the second season of *Sense8*, for example, we encounter other clusters of connected individuals who are militaristic, manipulative, and hostile toward the main protagonists.

More importantly, it is precisely the other clusters that have betrayed the radical revolutionary project of empathy by entering into power wars and collaborating with conspiratorial structures. Even inside the community of eight, extreme empathy is never problematized. As Sijia Li notes, the show misses the opportunity to ask a whole set of questions about difference and connection that are foundational to the series' aspirations to address them, not only in an aesthetic key, but also as issues of social communication (par. 14). What if the cluster had to deal with a member who is unworthy of empathy, a racist or a homophobe, a person of no extraordinary skill, or without an exciting backstory? While it is inspiring to be drawn into the visually haunting worlds of the main characters, one should not forget that they are constructed as superheroes, in the sense that there is some kind of excess that defines who they are. Is empathy, then, reserved only for those who are already somehow alike, or is it possible for its boundaries to be endlessly stretched? Nonetheless, *Sense8* seems somewhat aware of these shortcomings in its narrative: in a self-ironizing gesture in season one, episode 9 (minutes 14-16), we are warned that love inside the cluster, which is characterized by commitment and care beyond imagination, is the worst kind of narcissism. Even superior human beings, then, cannot escape the hubristic vanity of love—the almost divine drive towards total, unconditional, sacrificial love. The series proposes that what makes us "all too human" is the fact that we are not capable of precisely this type of absolute borderless love.

On the other hand, the sensates' heteronomous community can be understood through an analogy of Bataille's descriptions of the community of lovers and the paradoxes it contains.[10] The community of lovers has a closed and elective character, but it is also excluded from the world of exploitative economic production and

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8. I use the terms *autonomy* (a space of freedom) and *heteronomy* (a space of submission), as they are famously defined in Kantian ethics (52-67).
9. For comprehensive discussions of the concepts of autonomy and heteronomy, see Korsgaard (1996, 3-43) and Allison (2011, 13-71).

10. For a comprehensive comment on Bataille's works in English, see Mitchell and Kemp Winfree (1-17).

instrumental exchange; the community of lovers is thus defined by the intensity of contact locked in the orgasm, the laughter, and the shared tears. For Bataille, the ecstasy of fusion, which is anarchic and formless, yet productive of an existence not marked by possession, should be the real political principle of community. The ecstatic moments of togetherness that Bataille identifies—laughter, orgasm, and tears—allow us to be suspended with others in a non-identitarian, incalculable bond. These moments of fusion are also moments of peculiar utopian sacredness, inasmuch as they are outside time, outside the logic of production, and yet profoundly marked by an obsessive desire for connection with an outside; they are a drive toward the other, understood as someone or something different from the hegemonic social order and the hegemonic social time that discipline us right here and right now.

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At the same time, the whole concept of the cluster can be interpreted, of course, as a playful wink toward the type of online, on-demand television that Netflix creates. The omnipresent, omnidirectional choice of television content (or, in fact, *any content*), on any device and at any time, presents us with multiple chances to learn about the magnificent, marvelous, and endlessly diverse human world. If *Sense8* is an exercise in the creation of mesmerizing cinematic images for television, then its creators also seem to believe in the power of these images to educate: the homosexual sex is beautiful (Lito); transgender people are intelligent, educated, and loving (Nomi); a promiscuous German petit gangster and a righteous, pious Indian scientist can fall in love (Wolfgang and Kala); sons might kill their fathers and have no remorse (Wolfgang and Joong-Ki, Sun's brother, are similar yet morally different characters inasmuch as the cluster love is what substitutes the monstrosity of Wolfgang with an oriole of saint-like, gloomy darkness); women can take pleasure in fighting while still being sensitive and vulnerable (Sun); bus drivers might run for political office (Capheus); black men in Nairobi may idolize white Hollywood stars like Jean-Claude Van Damme (Capheus and his friend); a perfectly ordinary Chicago policeman can fall maddeningly for a liminal outsider: the doleful, drug-consuming, blue-haired DJ from Iceland (Will and Riley). But are we in fact being shown characters who are truly global? Are they an authentic representation

of the breadth of human diversity? In its noble effort to place empathy at the centre of human nature, the *Sense8* utopia seems to fail to account for its shortcomings. In that sense, the aspiration to give shape, form, and voice to human multiplicity is a gargantuan and hubristic task doomed to failure. Interesting and gorgeous in multiple and bizarre ways, the *Sense8* characters come close to the internet audiences that follow their trials on Netflix: in an overload of televisual content, we tend to choose a safe type of diversity. Algorithmically clustered by Netflix as possible audiences for the *Sense8* series, we, like the main protagonists, choose to navigate inside a bubble of already well-calculated empathetic bonds. As *Sense8* was unable to continue into a third season because its algorithms failed to secure a wide enough bubble, this comparison perhaps suggests that these algorithmic communities—that is, communities that emerge through calculation—are built on shaky ground.

Utopia as Autonomy

On the other hand, *Sense8* complicates its own suggestion of failed utopia in a way that is not immediately obvious. Telepathic empathy is experienced by the sensates only in moments of the quotidian flow's extreme rupture. Thus, true *presence*—the moments of intense intimacy, like the telepathic orgies, or just the moments of shared togetherness—is conceptualized as an exodus from the normative brutality of the available physical world. Utopia as autonomy, then, functions not as a desperate attempt to hold onto a particular racial, gender, economic, or national identity, but rather as an ecstatic, erotic, and pleasurable exit from these identities. More importantly, the logic of identity itself is replaced by an openness toward the other as a naked human being, irreducible to any worldly—socio-cultural, economic, and political—characteristics. In that regard, the critique that *Sense8*'s world is falsely global, as far as it offers a selective or clichéd rep-

resentation of difference, is pointless. *Sense8*'s goal is not to reproduce its clichés naively—and some clichés such as the representation of Africa via the AIDS and tribal divisions without reference to colonialism may be difficult to stomach—but to undermine altogether their ontological significance. A real alternative to the oppressive world of boundaries—those drawn across history, race, gender, and capital—is the process of making these boundaries meaningless.

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Traditional communities built around identity politics are coercive and obsessed with difference as a divisive force. However, communities built around the pleasures of interruption, distraction, and ecstatic, allocentric connection are open to the world (they even constitute a world) in ways that may be foundational for a new political community ontology. Autonomy, therefore, emerges only through an ultra-sensual empathetic connection, a kind of ecstatic leap beyond the historical and cultural coordinates that ground traditional communities. As John Lessard notes, "*Sense8* not only problematizes a metaphysics of subjectivity and the correlative logics of containment, intentionality, and self-identity, but also espouses the possibility and desirability of remaining open, 'exposed,' to the distractions of alterity, which is to say, the opening, rupture, or interruption posed by manifold singularities" (11).

Utopia as Praxis

What makes *Sense8* a unique text in the genre of utopia is that it switches playfully and subversively between the heteronomous and autonomous modes of utopian thinking about community, time, and space, thus expanding the world that is available to us. While questions of identity remain central to the text, *Sense8* suggests that our reality, including the realities of our closed identity bubbles, is only one possible outcome of complex and different encounters open to infinite configurations. Eight strangers acting as one, then, is just a metaphor for eighty, eight hundred, or an infinite multitude of

infinitely different people prepared to make a sublime leap outside the boundaries of their limited worlds toward freedom, equality, brotherhood, and love. The utopian dimension shines through here: universal emancipation comes through empathy, and it is no less eventful than other kinds of revolutionary hope, particularly in light of the failure of other historical utopias. Precisely this act of destabilizing the world as it is, by rendering it fragile, contingent, and somehow less-present, in favour of a world that *might be but is not yet*, is what makes *Sense8* a revolutionary text. But there is more to this aspiration: the empathetic encounters that the sensates experience may be seen not simply as quotidian disruptions but rather as complex ethical ruptures in the realm of the Other. These encounters are *u*-topian, inasmuch as they are singular: there is no place or identity that holds them or defines them prior to their emergence, and for that reason, there is no available place here and now to receive and bear them. On the one hand, the sensates' encounters reveal existence to be open and contingent: the world we live in is not the only possible world, and therefore the future is not necessarily predictable, knowable, or calculable. On the other hand, *Sense8* brings us unimaginably closer to the promise of *eu*-topia, that is, in its infinite optimism—including its belief in the capacity of streaming television to educate audiences in the praxis of love—the show invites the viewer to gamble her security in favor of her extraordinary power to act.

Finally, *Sense8*, understood as a text that depicts the dreams, desires, and utopias of community and time, is also a colossal attempt at imagining alternative temporalities. The rapturous encounters, the telepathic orgies, and the adventurous breaks into somebody else's timeline, carry meaning, not only as an escape from the world, but also as a bridge between the short *now*—defined by desires for immediate gratification through consumption, and climaxed in the profound crisis of our human capacity to postpone desire, to imagine and long for things and people that are not easily or immediately achievable—and the *longue durée* ('long time') of any dream awaiting its historical embodiment. Perhaps the strongest utopian feature of *Sense8* then is that it playfully subverts notions of *now* and *not now*, *here*, and *not here*, by bringing them close to us, and yet distancing them by presenting them as pure phantasy. This playfulness and drive toward unblocking the temporal imagination, an essential genre characteristic of utopia, is what places the text of *Sense8* among the utopic fictions that are not only critical of our present, but also care greatly about whatever shared future is in front of us.

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