

Commentary (Gray Kochhar-Lindgren (University of Washington Bothell))

A low hum permeates the ruins of the "store," that quaint old word we like to hang on to because it reminds us of the vids of early in the last century that we've absorbed into our neural pathways. Porches and rocking chairs. Lakes at sunset. Old people-thank goodness they, like stores, are a thing of the past-holding hands and smiling with clean, white teeth. The "stores"-and how such a term, with its nostalgia, makes me chuckle-have all been absorbed into the network, so that we, too, have become nodes-very complex indeed-of buying and selling. Things move into this space, hybrid and posthuman like we ourselves, and then move out. Some of them come, still, from beyond the margins of the digitopolis, where there are still said to be out-moded humans at work in the sun and the rain, but most are produced, vatted, and conveyed from right here within the world of nanoflics. I myself-though these words sound as hollow as "store"-was forged at one of the late-model Wal-Marts, a self-automated and reproducing System Kaufhaus, one that had moved beyond selling to consumers to producing its own consumers (though some would argue that such a distinction has always been moot). It's all a wired feedback loop and it all gives the most exquisite, the most *delectable*, pleasure. We still, of course, like to wander, to browse, to window-shop-mobility is a pleasure in itself-but where would we be without the inbuilts, the constant stream of informatics that orients our every move? That is our air, our water, the pulse of what used to be called "sex." We, however, have come to live by a new rhythm, one unimagined by the "store" of the biosphere, dependent as it was on the organism and its all too transient flesh. It started slowly enough-the telephone and answering machine, the RFIDS and the biometrics, the explosion of cameras, the datamining, the smart-carts and the *cartes de credit*-and then, bundled, it was *eaten*, taken into the flesh. It, as it were, *offered* itself to us, and we to it. What glorious symmetry of hand and eye. And, now, here in the museum of the archive-as if there is, or ever were, anything else-what fun it is to look up the old pictures-scuffed and yellowed by time-of the greeters, the buffers late at night, the swarms of shoppers always a bit desperate, a bit hungry, the little blue vests, the original thought-experiments of Krishnamurthy collected into binders: all such a humming, buzzing part of the great *type-writer* that we call the culture of our own.