From Méliès to Ducournau: Transhumanist Bodies in French Cinema

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This dissertation examines the films of four French directors, Georges Méliès, René Laloux, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, and Julia Ducournau from the perspective of transhumanism. While the term "transhumanism" was not coined until 1957 by Julien Huxley, these filmmakers all, in their own ways, explore modes of bodily change and the limits of what it means to be human. Unlike the conventional definition that can be assimilated with or opposed to posthumanism, I define transhumanism as an attempt to transform and adapt human bodies with or without the help of technology. Chapter One demonstrates how fantastic moments of transformation in the films of Méliès, such as *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), *The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), and *Prolific Magic Egg* (1903), can be reconceptualized from the perspective of transhumanism. Chapter Two focuses on René Laloux's animated films (*Fantastic Planet*, 1973, *Gandahar*, 1987) that subvert the hierarchy between the abled and the disabled via techniques such as cut-outs, hand drawing, and watercolors. Chapter Three interrogates the relationship between animality and transhumanism in the films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Human bodies in his films are hybridized with plant and animal bodies (*Two Snails Set Off*, 2017), turned into animal meat (*Delicatessen*, 1991), or forced to mimic animals in order to survive (*Bigbug*, 2022). In the fourth chapter, I examine these issues in the context of transhumanism's traditional province: technology. Through an extended analysis of Julia Ducournau, especially her film *Titane* (2021), I show how she defamiliarizes human notions of metamorphosis across her films.

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Preface

I first want to sincerely thank my dissertation director David Pettersen, who has been guiding my PhD journey from the very beginning. I will not forget the precious five years I learned, talked, laughed, and cried with you. I have been usually in a hurry and somehow anxious for most of the time, and it was David who helped me to stay calm and stable. Also, I truly appreciate the dissertation committee – Professor Todd Reeser, Neepa Majumdar, and Nancy Condee. Professor Reeser inspired me to pursue separated bodies as my dissertation topic. I enjoyed those moments in the chair's office when Todd and I discussed films together. Professor Majumdar and Condee's advice helped me grow as a junior scholar, especially through their invaluable courses. Neepa's class on ethnographic cinema trained me on how to write effective abstracts and professional articles. Nancy's film theory course broke prejudices over theory courses – her assignment on book projects is still one of my fondest memories about coursework at Pitt.

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my family got bigger during my journey at Pitt. Pittsburgh really became my second home after I

left Seoul in 2017.

1.0 Introduction

In *I'm a Cyborg, But That's Ok* (2006), Young-goon strongly believes that she is a cyborg.[1] This belief causes her to cut her wrist and charge herself with a power cord at a radio manufacturing factory, and she ends up being confined to a psychiatric hospital. At the hospital, she refuses to eat because she is a cyborg and relies on licking the batteries for sustenance. Also, she tries to communicate with a fluorescent light and a vending machine, believing that her grandmother's dentures will give her the ability to communicate with them. Il-soon, another patient hospitalized for anti-social behavior and kleptomania, seeks to cure her anorexia by lying to her that he can install a Rice-Megatron inside her body, which is a device that can convert food into electric energy.[2] In order to make her believe him, he draws a door on her back with a pen and pretends to insert a fake machine in her torso.

Despite the potential humor of this scenario, Young-goon is actually a cyborg according to the feminist philosopher Donna Haraway's definition. If Haraway were a character in I'm a Cyborg, But That's Ok, it's possible that she would have happily supported Young-goon in pursuing her dreams of being a cyborg rather than hospitalizing her. In "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," Haraway argued that "women of color" can be understood as a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesized from the fusion of outsider identities.[3] Young-goon is in her own way an

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[1] "Young" means "zero" in Korean.

[2] "Il" means "one" in Korean.

[3] Donna Haraway. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the1980s," The Haraway Reader (New York: Routledge, 2004), 32.

outsider. Born to a poor family, she was raised by her grandmother, who was possessed with a schizophrenic thought that she was a mouse. Young-goon was hospitalized in a psychiatric hospital, where she bonded with a bunch of outsiders. In Haraway's terms, Young-goon has many identities – a cyborg with anorexia, a woman who tries to save her mouse-grandmother, and of course, a transhuman who desires to transcend her physical limits.

The depiction of nonhuman bodies in mainstream media is no longer a rare phenomenon. In a variety of films and TV shows, artificial bodies, such as robots, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, or clones, aspire to be human, save human characters, or even despise and attack them. There are many examples of media from all around the world with primary and secondary nonhuman characters, and they illustrate how these nonhuman bodies interact with humans and what they mean to humans. Since my time working in the South Korean arthouse film industry, I have paid attention to how French cinema has represented nonhuman entities. Despite the recent date of scholarly interest in questions of transhumanism, French cinema has represented nonhuman characters since its earliest years. This dissertation opens with the films of Georges Méliès, an early pioneer who inspired many filmmakers because of his interest in the genre of the fantastic and in explorations of the medium's expressive possibilities. Beginning with Méliès allows me to show that French cinema has long been interested in the dynamics between human and nonhuman characters, continuing to the present in the work of René Laloux, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, and Julia Ducournau.

While the *actualités* of Méliès' contemporary, the Lumière brothers and their many camera operators, focused on human bodies around the world, Méliès' films were distinctive in that they were not only about human bodies. In *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin*/*The Vanishing Lady* (1896), human bodies vanish only to be replaced by a skeleton, and in *Un homme de têtes*/*The*

Four Troublesome Heads (1898), Méliès annihilated his own proliferating heads when they no longer listened to him. In a film such as *L'œuf du sorcier/Prolific Magic Egg* (1903), an egg turns into a woman's head, then into a clown's. I interpret these transformations and mutilations in his films as anticipating the concerns of transhumanism, a term first coined by Julien Huxley in 1957.

According to Huxley, a transhuman is a person who can transcend their own limits. Nowadays, there are varied definitions of transhumanism by scholars such as Cary Wolfe, Rosi Braidotti, Nick Bostrom, Max More, and Ray Kurzweil, but let us begin with Huxley's formulation:

> The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps transhumanism will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature.[4]

Here, Huxley used the verb "transcend" to describe the actions of human beings, attempting to enhance and transform their bodies. While Méliès's films pre-date Huxley's definition by some sixty years, his films use the cinematic medium as a form of technology to enhance and transform human bodies, thus questioning what it means to be human.

Throughout this dissertation, I attend to moments of bodily transformation in French films from a variety of time periods in which human and nonhuman characters transcend themselves. Cinema as a form of technology is the main mode of transformation, enhancement, and transcendence, and my dissertation draws on recent work in animation studies, disability studies, animality studies, and gender studies to show how cinema acts on and in bodies. My dissertation

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[4] Huxley, Julien. "Transhumanism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8, no. 1, (1968): 76.

shows that cinema in general, and French cinema in particular, has been an important, yet underappreciated site where notions of transhumanism were explored and challenged.

When it comes to discussions of transhumanism, one cannot omit the proximate yet distinct term posthumanism. Some scholars prefer to differentiate transhumanism from posthumanism, while others see them as related or even equivalent. Cary Wolfe, the famous author of *What is Posthumanism*?, writes that transhumanism is an intensification of humanism and the opposite of posthumanism. [5] For him, posthumanism comes before and after humanism, before the embodiment and embeddedness of a human being were constructed and after an attempt to redefine the definition of human.[6] To Wolfe, posthumanism and transhumanism support conflicting beliefs, therefore, they cannot be used interchangeably. Wolfe is not the only scholar to advocate one over the other and conceptualize them as completely opposite. Rosi Braidotti, a philosopher and a posthumanist, distinguishes transhumanism from posthuman feminism, calling the former a "delusion"[7] and posthuman feminism "an intergenerational and transversal exercise."[8] Many scholars, such as Braidotti and Wolfe, try to distinguish posthumanism from transhumanism. Compared to Braidotti and Wolfe, Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual claim that cybernetic posthumanism shares with transhumanism the view of the human body as an accessory

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[5] Cary Wolfe, "Introduction," in *What is Posthumanism?,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xv.

[6] Ibid., xv.

[7] Rosi Braidotti, "The Critical Edge of Posthuman Feminism," in *Posthuman Feminism,* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 61.

[8] Ibid., 9.

that can be either improved (enhanced) or simply ignored.[9] This implies that posthumanism and transhumanism are not identical, but some parts of posthumanism share common ground with transhumanism. Cybernetic posthumanism is one of the earliest expressions of posthumanism, privileging the view of the human being as pure information patterns that could be transferred from one medium to another and while remaining unchanged.[10] Through these discussions, one can notice that there have been various attempts to redefine and reexamine the implications and significance of posthumanism and transhumanism.

The goal of this dissertation is not to choose one side and criticize the other. Rather, unlike Braidotti and Wolfe, I use transhumanism and posthumanism interchangeably to analyze bodily transformation in the French films in my corpus. I define transhumanism as an attempt to transform and adapt human bodies, with or without technology. For me, posthumanism is a mode of thinking that includes nonhuman entities, such as robots, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and creatures of otherness within the discussion of transhumanism. The biggest difference between transhumanism and posthumanism is that while transhumanism focuses on an individual adaptation that does not necessarily prioritize co-existence with other beings, posthumanists believe that humans need to transform themselves for the future of the whole planet. This does not mean that transhumanists ignore the well-being of other species, though. Transhumanism believes that the quality of life for every being will be enhanced once universal transformation is encouraged. The films in my dissertation will sometimes be easier to analyze through the lenses of posthumanism or

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[9] Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual, "(Trans/Post) Humanity and Representation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution and the Anthropocene: An Introduction," in *Transhumanism and Posthumanism in Twenty-First Century Narrative,* ed. Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 5.

[10] Ibid., 5.

transhumanism, depending on the attitude of the characters towards co-existence. Some characters care about other species and beings, while others only focus on their own bodily transformation or adaptation.

Regarding transhumanism's possible altruism, Nick Bostrom, a philosopher working on the ethics of human enhancement and superintelligence, states that transhumanism advocates for the well-being of all sentient life forms, whether artificial intelligences, humans, or non-human animals (including extraterrestrial species, if there are any).[11] Bostrom's notion of transhumanism challenges the speciesist critiques of Wolfe and Braidotti by insisting that transhumanism actually cares about nonhuman beings, unlike traditional humanism. This dissertation's take on transhumanism aligns with critics who prefer the term posthumanism when it refers to the attempt to find a way to co-exist with different species. At the same time, it looks at beings who sometimes do not care about co-habitation but focus on individualistic transformation and adaptation, like some transhumanists advocate for.

My definition of transhumanism prefers the verb "adapt" instead of "enhance." This choice expands and emphasizes human competence in the context of abrupt environmental changes, such as climate change, migration, the advent of new species, and the popularization of artificial intelligence. The word "enhancement" implies improvement, a linear transformation, and even a value judgment whereas "adaptation" does not necessarily have to be chronological or evaluative. To me, being able to adapt to a situation means being flexible, non-linear, and non-binary. I contend that transhumanism should be able to support adaptive and continuous transformations for human bodies, which may or may not be led by technology.

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[11] Nick Bostrom, "Transhumanist Values," *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30, Issue Supplement (2005): 12.

As a conceptual term, transhumanism contributes to the blurring of hierarchies between the transformations of different forms and bodies. Transhumanism encourages and empowers the consistent transformation of identities. The scholar Paul Preciado has articulated a notion of *countersexuality*, which aligns with my understanding of transhumanism. According to him, *countersexuality* means an attempt to become foreign to your own sexuality and to lose yourself in sexual translation.[12] Instead of using the term "transhumanism," Preciado mentions "gender technologies."

> I then started paying attention to the materiality of gender technologies. Architects and historians of design helped me to look at bodies and sexualities as specific effects of construction and visual techniques, including framing, collage, replication, imitation, assemblage, standardization, segmentation, spatial distribution, cutting up, reconstruction, transparency, opacity, and so on.[13]

His selection of words, such as visual techniques, collage, replication, and assemblage share common grounds with transhumanism and its realization in the formal techniques of cinema. Nevertheless, by specifying his focus of research as "gender technologies," non-gender related transformation is comparatively less noticed. This dissertation extends his notion of *countersexuality* by including nonhuman and artificial entities into the scope of my analyses.

Transhumanism also means to be able to accept foreign substances or technologies into one's body in order to transform, adapt, and modify.[14] For example, Preciado describes a future in

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[12] Paul Preciado, "Introduction," in *Countersexual Manifesto*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 8.

[13] Ibid., 3.

[14] Ibid., 8.

which everyone could print out their desired sexual organs with a 3D bioprinter. His suggestion of this malleable future corresponds to my definition of transhumanism. With advanced technology, more trans* people will be able to adapt their bodies to the organs of their choice, with less physical risk. The transhumanist future I dream of would facilitate such changes, ultimately contributing to the diversity and equality of all human beings.

Preciado's hopes for how biotechnology will scramble categories of sexuality parallel the hopes of transhumanists. Transhumanists want to use technology to benefit different groups, such as those defined by markers like physical ability, gender, class, or race. For example, Anders Sandberg, a futurist and transhumanist scholar, argues that morphological freedom should be a fundamental human right, which he understands as an extension of one's right to one's body, not just self-ownership but also the right to modify oneself according to one's desires.[15] One should be able to decide to modify their own body, regardless of their biological and social background. Sandberg explains that the debate over morphological freedom in our society has been divided into several subfields, such as medical privacy, women's right to their bodies, doping, reproductive rights, euthanasia, and the appropriateness of various medical procedures.[16] This also means that the range of transhumanist change is not designated only to certain groups of people, but everyone has a right to transform their bodies. Everyone has a right to be trans* as a human being, and transhumanism supports people's right to decide their identity, regardless of their social and cultural backgrounds.

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[15] Anders Sandberg, "Morphological Freedom – Why We Not Just Want It, but Need It," in *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future,* ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More, (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 56.

[16] Ibid., 57.

In this light, transhumanism is connected to intersectionality. Gender, class, and race are not separate from each other in the intersectional mode of thought pioneered by feminist critical race theory.[17] Abbie Goldberg and Genny Beemyn, who have been working on family diversity and U.S. Trans history, define the term "trans"[18] as an umbrella term for all individuals whose gender identity/expression is different from their sex assigned at birth, and thus trans includes both binary (e.g., trans women, trans men) and nonbinary (e.g., agender, gender fluid, genderqueer) gender identities.[19] By including nonbinary identities in the realm of "trans" instead of calling them "trans and nonbinary," there is room for shared concerns between gender studies and transhumanism. Being nonbinary can be becoming transhuman and posthuman at the same time. In the case of the film *Titane* (2021), which is the focus of my fourth chapter, a question can be asked: how can we define a woman who becomes pregnant with a Cadillac after transplanting a titanium skull plate? In Julia Ducournau's film, spectators encounter a human being who consistently changes their identities.

Most transhumanists believe in the power of technology to effect bodily change, including Ray Kurzweil, a computer scientist and futurist. He believes in a transhumanist future based on his calculations and theories. He defines a new notion, called the *singularity*, by which he means "a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep,

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[17] Preciado, 34.

[18] In the original text, Goldberg and Beemyn did not apply "*" after the term "trans", but their explanation of "trans" as an umbrella term fits with the term "trans.*"

[19] Abbie Goldberg and Genny Beemyn, "Introduction," in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Trans Studies,* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2021), xxvi.

that human life will be irreversibly transformed."[20] For Kurzweil, humans will never go back to the past once this singularity happens. He has a firm belief in the power of technology, just like Young-goon believes she is a cyborg. He set the year of singularity as 2045, adding that a nonbiological intelligence created in that year will be one billion times more powerful than all human intelligence today.[21] To him, nonbiological intelligence is the next iteration of humanity, and it is much more advanced than the biological brain.

Some scholars do not agree with Kurzweil about the infinite possibilities of technology and transhumanism. Gregory Stock, a biophysicist, and a writer, claims that predictions of the imminent fusion of humans and machines ignore the degree to which we are biological in nature and want to remain that way.[22] He admits that technology that will replace biological bodies is on the way, however, he emphasizes that mankind will still desire to remain in some way biological. While Stock discusses our own human will regarding a possibly inevitable change, Klaus-Gerd Giesen, a political scientist, decries transhumanism as a hyper-individualistic form of eugenics. He explains that transhumanists vehemently oppose any political regulation of technologies that affect human genetics, preferring to leave control to market forces and consumerism.[23] In order to expedite the process of creating a new humanity, some transhumanists believe that violating

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[20] Ray Kurzweil, "Chapter One: The Six Epochs," in *The Singularity is Near,* (New York: Viking, 2005), 22.

[21] Ibid, 120.

[22] Gregory Stock, "The Last Human," in *Redesigning Humans: Choosing Our Genes, Changing Our Future*, (Boston: Mariner Books, 2003), 29.

[23] Klaus-Gerd Giesen, « Transhumanisme et génétique humaine », *L'observatoire de la génétique,* no. 16 (2004) : https://iatranshumanisme.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/no-16.pdf, English translation my own.

regulations is necessary since genetic experiments will contribute to human progress. These beliefs point to the darker side of transhumanism.

Moreover, there have been several scholars who view transhumanism as ethically dangerous such as Jürgen Habermas and Francis Fukuyama. Habermas explains the relationship between genetic programming and moral conduct:

> With the genetic programming of human beings, domination of nature turns into an act of self-empowering of man, thus changing our self-understanding as members of the species – and *perhaps* touching upon a necessary condition for an autonomous conduct of life and a universalistic understanding of morality.[24]

Here, Habermas asserts that self-empowerment of human bodies changes the human understanding of the species, and this change influences conceptions of morality. However, a shift in the understanding of morality happens even without the self-empowering of humans. Human-made and natural disasters, such as wars, earthquakes, floods, and tsunamis influence standards of morality. Habermas' apprehension is understandable, but genetic programming does not automatically equate to a disruption of morality.

Francis Fukuyama, a political scientist, and international relations scholar, calls equality "the first victim of transhumanism," arguing that transhumanism will widen an economic gap between different societies, as well as cause a disruption in what it means to be a human.[25] The common feature between Habermas and Fukuyama's accounts is that they are afraid of

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[24] Jürgen Habermas, "The Grown and The Made," in *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. Hella Beister and Max Pensky. (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 47-48.

[25] Francis Fukuyama, "Transhumanism," *Foreign Policy,* no.144 (2004): 42-43.

transhumanism causing social and ethical chaos. Of course, the destruction of order is not the most welcome event in many societies. Nevertheless, what transhumanists want to achieve is to redefine and rethink the definition of human and to achieve an improvement in the quality of life in general, regardless of different interest groups. For my part, I understand transhumanism as a neutral term that allows me to analyze how bodily transformation diversifies one's understanding of their own body and rethinks the relationship between humans and nonhumans.

Cinema is a crucial place in which to analyze and change notions of human embodiment and transformation because of how the medium's technology is able to experiment with the forms of human and nonhuman bodies. From Étienne-Jules Marey's chronophotographic gun and Méliès experiments with special effects to hand-drawn and computer-generated animation, the plasticity of form is built into the medium. One theory that encourages me to regard cinema not just as an object of research, but also as a platform to understand the interrelations between humans and media is the concept of "terminal films" developed by Steen Christiansen. Christiansen defines terminal films as:

> films that portray a dissolving boundary between human biology and media technologies, participate in a larger cultural shift in how we perceive human ontology…My argument, that the concept of the human is dependent on media technologies, is located within a posthuman critical tradition, extending from the shared belief that the human is not a stable entity in the world but is rather continuously articulated within an assemblage of media, machines, and animals.[26]

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[26] Steen Christiansen, "Terminal Films," *Journal of the fantastic in the arts* 25, no. 91 (2014): 264.

Through this notion of *assemblage*, the films I study are thus as much a part of transhumanist transformation as they are representations and explorations of it. Starting with the films of Méliès, Chapter One discusses how Méliès was able to transcend the limits of human bodies through his film technology. Then, Chapter Two attempts to blur the boundaries between human and nonhuman characters, by showing humans being dominated, controlled, and exploited by them. By subverting an invisible hierarchy that exists in our society, such as disabled/non-disabled, human/animal, and ailing/healthy, the films of René Laloux observe how persecuted human minorities are articulated as an in-between of many categories. The films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet in Chapter Three rely more on media technologies and platforms such as CGI and Netflix. By actively collaborating with Netflix and referring to contemporary topics like COVID-19 and artificial intelligence (*Bigbug,* 2022), they correspond to a circumstance that Christiansen describes. Jeunet questions the concept of the human, completely dependent on media technologies, inside and outside of the diegesis. Finally, the films of Julia Ducournau present women who continuously transform themselves. They cannot be defined with a single word, but they intermingle with other species (*Titane*, 2021), peel off their skin like an extraterrestrial (*Junior*, 2011), or start devouring raw flesh (*Raw*, 2016). The characters I analyze in these four chapters never settle for an immobile state. They have to consistently modify, transform, or sometimes even sever their bodies, sometimes relying on technologies, sometimes entirely on their own. They are all innate transhumans, and these terminal films are telling us that we are also a part of their transformations and transcendence.

First, Chapter One, "The Transhumanist and Animated Bodies of Georges Méliès," observes human bodies that endeavor to transcend their own physical limits with the help of cinematic technology. During his early era, Georges Méliès focused on presenting transformative,

separated, and multiplying bodies to viewers through his early special effects and innovative editing techniques. Although he made films before the coinage of the term, transhumanism, his usage of body parts as dominant characters in films offers important reflections about transhumanism. In his early films, bodies are separated, liberated, and enhanced as if they were independent characters, aspiring to escape from Méliès' control. In other words, the body parts have their own agencies, and they illustrate the process of physical enhancement, which is emphasized by transhumanists. The play with body parts in some of Méliès' films is analogous to the discourse of physical enhancement that transhumanist thinkers will later articulate. Méliès can thus be understood as a transhumanist thinker *avant la lettre.* Rather than portraying interpersonal events in his films, Méliès concentrated on an internal, physical struggle within his body, such as his replicated heads going against him, or his legs and arms enjoying their freedom. Through filming and editing techniques he devised to trick the eye, such as double exposure and dissolve, Méliès' films encourage viewers to imagine their bodies and bodily transformation differently. I chose to focus on five of his early films - *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin*/*The Vanishing Lady* (1896), *Un homme de têtes / The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), *Dislocation mystérieuse*/*Dislocation Extraordinary* (1901), *L'Homme à la tête en caoutchouc*/*The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), and finally *L'oeuf du sorcier*/*Prolific Magic Egg* (1903).

Chapter Two, "René Laloux's Fantastic Adaptation of Nonhuman Bodies," studies French animation and its relationship to disability studies and transhumanism. The films of René Laloux help us better understand disability through presentations of disabled characters that play a key role in the plot. Linking disability studies with transhumanism contributes to the diversification of transhumanist subjects. Being disabled means that there is more potential for physical adaptation, which corresponds to the intention of transhumanism. Laloux utilizes animation, an intrinsically

imaginative format free from the realistic constraints of physics and biology to empower the disabled characters and to subvert the hierarchy between the abled and the disabled. Laloux was a creative thinker in French animation who had adhered to traditional techniques - such as cut-outs, watercolor, and pencil texture. He used animation as a medium to express artificial and unnatural movements of the characters, paradoxically showing how human bodies can be easily controlled, domesticated, and eradicated by nonhuman entities, regardless of their (dis)abilities. I chose four of his films - *Les escargots/The Snails* (1966), *Les Dents du singe/Monkey's Teeth* (1960), *La Planète sauvage/Fantastic Planet* (1973) and *Gandahar* (1987). These films demonstrate how fragile human bodies are in general. All human bodies are feeble, and they are easily devoured by giant snails (*The Snails*) and domesticated by blue gigantic extraterrestrials (*Fantastic Planet*) regardless of their physical abilities, genders, ages, and races. Laloux does not just argue that human bodies are not superior to nonhumans; he also empowers the disabled with abilities to recognize temporalities in a different way (*Gandahar*). By closely interweaving disability with transhumanism, anyone can be transhuman, regardless of their current limitations.

In Chapter Three, "The Confused Robots and Incompetent Humans in the Films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet," I focus on those nonhuman beings who are not interested in humans but only in transforming their bodies for survival. Although Jean-Pierre Jeunet mostly worked on feature films, they are full of creativity, with animation-like images, such as in *Amélie* (2001) and *Micmacs* (2009). He surprised the world with his post-apocalyptic, cult film, *Delicatessen* (1991). Originally, he wanted to film *La Cité des enfants perdus/The City of Lost Children* (1995) before this film; however, as a first-time filmmaker, he could not secure enough funding for it. After the huge success of *Delicatessen,* he was able to work on *The City of Lost Children,* where he presented various beings, such as a gigantic brain, cyborgs, and clones. Chapter Three discusses

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how the ideas of animality in the films of Jeunet contribute to the transhumanist discourse, by hybridizing human bodies to those of animals.

Animality studies encourage the objectification of human bodies, thereby letting us demolish the hierarchy between animals and humans. This is also a similar contribution that animal studies can make to transhumanism as disability studies did in Chapter Two. My two chapters on the films of Jeunet and Laloux engage with animal studies and disability studies to comprehend transhumanism as a multifaceted notion that involves not only normative human bodies but also diverse bodies. Bodies that have been hybridized, considered nonhuman, or declared as limited were usually understood as objects of transformation rather than subjects in media. Also, they have been described as beings who suffer from a complex, an obsession, or anger. Transhumanism prioritizes nonnormative bodies for transformation because they prove that transhumanism can help improve the lives of various groups, regardless of different genders, sexes, social classes, races, and species. It is not only humans who can enhance themselves; animals, extraterrestrials, cyborgs, robots, and artificial intelligence transcend their limits too.

Finally, Chapter Four, "The Bodies of Metamorphosis, Cannibalism and Hybridization in the Films of Julia Ducournau," focuses on the female bodies that experience consistent transformation, such as puberty, vegetarianism, and pregnancy. Here, I discuss the films of Julia Ducournau: *Junior* (2011), *Grave*/*Raw* (2016), and *Titane* (2021). For example, *Junior* illustrates Justine, a teenage girl's puberty with scenes of exuviation along with the secretion of mucus. These transformative moments are not necessarily the result of scientific development; however, I regard her transformation as a transhumanist metamorphosis, since she leaped into a new era of her life after the exuviation. She has become a different person after transcending her previous physical status: after confronting her transformation, her teacher confirms this, by saying "A new life

begins." Likewise, in *Raw*, Justine, (also played by Garance Marillier), turns herself into a cannibal after a series of stimulating events. Originally, she was a vegetarian, but her inherited disposition as a cannibal merges while she attends veterinary school with her sister. Borrowing Deleuze and Guattari's notion *becoming-animal,* [27] I analyze how her transformation is considered transhumanist. Transhumanism is not necessarily about transformation that comes from outside, such as scientific development, but is also immanent to beings. According to Deleuze and Guattari, becoming-animal is always about a pack, a band, a population, and a multiplicity. [28] This multiplicity has to do with the hazing ceremony in the film. The seniors force the freshmen to go through obligatory parties, unwanted physical contact, and most importantly, consuming raw rabbit kidneys. A series of hazing rituals stimulate her instinct to be fond of raw meat, such as her sister's cut finger and fish filets in the refrigerator.

Regarding Justine's transformation and her sister's consumption of Adrien, Justine's queer Arab roommate, there has been criticism about white protagonists exploiting non-white bodies. Through this dissertation, I nuance debates about the representation of identity in contemporary French cinema through my focus on transhumanism. For instance, a similar criticism can be made about Alexia, the white female protagonist of *Titane*. One could argue that by not hiring a non-white actress as the protagonist, Ducournau is not respecting diversity, equality, and inclusion. Nevertheless, transhumanism is not about presenting a fixed identity for a character. The film starts with Alexia, a young white girl who has a penchant for cars, but it shows her consistent

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[27] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 232-309.

[28] Ibid., 239.

metamorphosis from a young girl to a serial killer, a boy, a robot, and a mother to the car-human hybrid baby. By using her body as a womb to a new form of humanity, she transcends herself and the border between human and machine. In her films, Ducournau empowers the characters to construct and reproduce bodies by transforming their gender, sexuality, dietary habits, or physical appearances, thereby arguing that human bodies are enhanced through hybridization and metamorphosis.

I conclude this dissertation by addressing the rising interest in nonhuman bodies and transhumanism in contemporary media on streaming platforms, such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and HBO Max. The cinema that can be linked to transhumanism, such as horror, science-fiction, and fantastic may not be the most popular genre in France or other Francophone countries; however, the enhancement of film technology in general certainly promises increasing representations of flexible, fluid, and original bodies on screen. Our bodies are inherently diverse, equal, and inclusive. We just need to express how diversified they are, including the bodies of animals, cyborgs, robots, and artificial intelligence.

2.0 The Transhumanist and Animated Bodies of Georges Méliès

Toute rencontre est rencontre d'un visage.

Every encounter is an encounter of a face.

- Jean Starobinski

Cinematic imagination and technology augmented humanity's capacity to realize the impossible, visualize the invisible, and of course, entertain the spectators. It would be very difficult not to mention Georges Méliès when it comes to discussing early pioneers in the film industry. Even someone unfamiliar with Méliès would likely have heard of his most representative film, *Trip to the Moon* (1902). Because of Méliès's fame as an experimenter of early cinema, early scholarship on Méliès emphasized biographical information and historical facts about how he was able to produce all of his films. It was John Frazer who solidified the groundwork with his book Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès. Frazer is one of the few scholars who analyzed about seventy early films of Méliès separately. He did not analyze the films of Méliès with a specific perspective but explained their historical backgrounds and film technologies so that viewers and scholars could appreciate his works with helpful context. The French film critic Georges Sadoul also wrote a book about Méliès in the 1960s; however, almost half of it focuses on his life itself. Sadoul included various images from the films of Méliès and references to him.

It was not until the late 1970s that film scholars began to explore the gendered aspects of Méliès' films. For instance, Lucy Fischer, a feminist scholar who has also suggested the term, "cinematernity," severely criticizes Méliès' treatment of women on screen. In the guise of the

magician figure, man enacts a series of symbolic rituals upon woman in which, among other things, he expresses his desire to control her, to employ her as decorative object, to cast her as sexual fantasy.[29] To Fischer, Méliès starring as a magician in his films is a mere disguise to hide his distorted desire towards women, and women become his toys, completely under his control. In a related vein, Annette Michelson expanded the analysis of female bodies in cinema in general, relating female bodies to the very notion of fantastic. She compared Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's novel *Tomorrow's Eve* [*L'Ève future*] with the early films (1900-1906) of Méliès, arguing that the mutilations, reconstitutions, levitations, and transformations crystallize the female body in an ultimate, fantasmatic mode of representation as cinema.[30] By putting the female body in the center of stereoscopic desire, she describes Méliès as an inventor who plays with this philosophical toy: cinema.

Decades later, Elizabeth Steinbock discusses the abrupt sex changes in his trick films through her concept of *shimmering*, which includes stillness, motion, action, passion, clutter, emptiness, light and darkness in cinema.[31] By suggesting a new term, *shimmering*, they were able to integrate sex and gender changes with actual movements and conversions in cinema, starting from the films of Méliès. Similar to Fischer and Michelson, Gaby Wood also sees Méliès as a conjuror who controls the life and death of female characters in his films.[32] She paid attention to

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[29] Lucy Fischer, "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies," *Film Quarterly* 33. no. 1 (1979): 40.

[30] Annette Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Fascimile and the Philosophical Toy," *October* 29, (Summer 1984): 19.

[31] Elizabeth, Steinbock, *Shimmering Images: Trans Cinema, Embodiment, and the Aesthetics of Change.* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 8.

[32] Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2003)

the fact that the female characters were controlled and reassembled according to his orders, mostly put in a submissive position.

While the feminist critiques of patriarchy in Méliès can be valid, there is more at stake in Méliès' bodily transformations than mere misogyny. This chapter reinterprets Méliès' usage of fantastic as a possible linkage to transhumanism, rather than focusing on his surface-level exploitation of female bodies. I call his exploitation surface-level, because although it seems like he is taking advantage of female bodies in some of his films, however, what he achieves through such representations actually contributes to the discussions of transhumanism, which intends to blur the border between different sexes, genders, species, and identities. In other words, devoting oneself only to the surficial transformations and calling them not feminist risks misinterpreting the films of Méliès.

There is also a need to investigate his films in relation to French cinema in general, especially regarding the discourse of the French fantastic. The French fantastic is a key term to understand how Georges Méliès approached human bodies, which also throws epistemological and philosophical questions to the contemporary viewers at the same time. David Pettersen, who has been working on French cinema within the global context, regards the French fantastic as genre-flexible and epistemological when it comes to verifying "what am I seeing" and "how am I seeing it." What unifies the French fantastic's porousness with respect to other genres and modes is a consistent focus on epistemology, a pervasive uncertainty about what is happening on screen that may or may not be resolved.[33] That is to say, French fantastic does not just stop from

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[33] David Pettersen, "Les Revenants: Horror in France and the Tradition of the Fantastic," *French Screen Studies* 21 Issue 3 (2021): 245.

presenting captivating images, but it also questions us about what lies behind its presentation. This chapter aims to analyze the early films of Méliès through the lens of transhumanism, a term that I define as an attempt to adapt and transform human bodies in different environments, with or without technology. There have been attempts to discuss Méliès with the terms such as automata, transformation, metamorphoses and mutilation,[34] however, there was not any direct involvement with transhumanism so far.

There is ongoing scholarship on the relations between the body and the agency in French contemporary cinema. For instance, Julia Ducournau's *Titane* won the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 2021, and Netflix released their original film *Oxygen* in the same year. *Titane* shows hybridization between human and nonhuman bodies, and *Oxygen* depicts an urgent situation when a woman's body is trapped in a medical cryogenic unit with an extremely low oxygen level. Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Bigbug* (2022), makes a caricature of human bodies trapped in a house, due to the highly advanced technology that takes care of house chores and private affairs.

I contend that this trend of bodies in French contemporary cinema, which can also be read as a mixture of genres such as fantastic, science-fiction, and horror has important connections with the early cinema of Méliès. It is possible to regard Méliès as a transhumanist thinker *avant la lettre* who deformed human bodies to suggest a new human species. Although Méliès strictly regulates and controls the movements of the bodies, he lets the viewers peek at the possibilities of the separated body parts claiming themselves as independent beings. So far, the majority of scholarship has been mostly evaluating Méliès as a pioneer of early cinema or criticizing him for

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[34] See Pasi Väliaho, "Simulation, Automata, Cinema: A Critique of Gestures," *Theory & Event* 8, no. 2 (2005): doi:10.1353/tae.2005.0038.

his patriarchal biases, but I suggest that there is a need to inquire deeper into the question: why do the separated bodies of Méliès matter to us living in the twenty-first century? Do they still resonate with our everyday life?

First of all, I compare the fantastic and transhumanism, the notions that do not seem to resemble each other very much. If nothing else, the fantastic and transhumanism share an encouragement of consistent transformation. Irreversible metamorphosis is the very foundation of both the fantastic and transhumanism. In literature, many scholars lean on to the definition of Tzvetan Todorov, that is, the fantastic occupies the duration of uncertainty. It is hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event.[35] Hesitation is a central notion in his definition of the fantastic: to Todorov, hesitation also implies a continuing change. The viewers are not certain about what they confront and have not come up with a definite answer. In the world of the fantastic, this epistemological hesitation also influences the identity of a fantastic object, and usually it cannot be defined with one word. It can be a monster, a human, an animal, a thing, or a creature. If the hesitation stops and everything becomes crystal clear, the fantastic is over.

Therefore, one can say that the fantastic can open up transhumanist thought. In order to transform and modify one's body, first they need to come up with new modes of imagination. The creatures in the realm of the fantastic suggest human beings transgressing their borders and limits, or even surpassing them. Uncertain situations and hesitation are caused because the image of the fantastic encourages humans to cross boundaries and become a part of a new humanity. The bigger

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[35] Tzvetan Todorov, "Definition of the Fantastic," In *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach To a Literary Genre*. trans. Richard Howard. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 25.

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emphasis of transhumanism is its reliance on technology, as a tool to ameliorate human bodies.[36]

It was Michelson who called cinema "the philosophical toy," which was also the product of an era in which science and its technological applications could still be identified with philosophy.[37] Technological development and its concomitant debates in the realm of philosophy have already existed since the nineteenth century. After the twentieth century, the discussion on the bodies and technology was diversified, according to the advent of new terms, such as transhumanism and posthumanism. One significant difference is while the fantastic utilizes technologies for visual effects and pleasure, transhumanism utilizes technologies for the transcendence of physical boundaries. Connecting the fantastic to transhumanism can be a meaningful interdisciplinary approach in humanities.

To consider the fantastic and transhumanism together, I introduce the concept of animacies because, it gives us room to redefine bodies from a new perspective. By doing so, it becomes possible to discuss both human and nonhuman bodies when it comes to bodily transformation. Moreover, expanding this realm of "bodies" challenges our recognition of nonhuman agencies. The term *animacy* originally derives from linguistics, signifying the grammatical effects of the sentience or liveliness of nouns.[38] This means that animacy in a linguistic context expands the

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[36] Earlier, I clarified that my definition of transhumanism does not necessarily require technology. Nevertheless, in the chapter, I focus on obvious cases where the characters relied on technology in order to transform and adapt human bodies.

[37] Annette Michelson, "On the Eve of the Future: The Reasonable Fascimile and the Philosophical Toy," *October* 29, (Summer 1984): 3.

[38] Mel Y. Chen, "Introduction: Animating Animacy," in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

range of lively subjects and objects, including nonhuman and nonorganic beings. *Animacy* and agency are linked in English; for example, sentences such as "The man kicked the ball" are more frequent than sentences such as "The ladder hit the man."[39] In this context, one can see that it is more common for human subjects to do things to the objects, rather than the other way around at least in a linguistic structure.

Nevertheless, what I analyze in this chapter goes beyond this linguistic realm of animacy, which was what film scholar Mel Chen also intended in their writing. *Animacy* activates new theoretical formations that trouble and undo stubborn binary systems of difference, including dynamism/stasis, life/death, subject/object, speech/nonspeech, human/animal, natural body/cyborg.[40] From these binary divisions, one can find similarities to the descriptions of cyborgs suggested by Donna Haraway. Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms through which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves.[41] In my view, the notion of cyborg can contribute to blurring the borders between dualisms, and a prerequisite for the revolution of cyborgs and nonhuman entities is animacy. At least in the films of Méliès, there is no strict dividing line between human characters and nonhuman objects. It is possible to use the concept of animacy for the expansion of poetic/literary license in non-human objects. With the expanded application of animacy in fantastic cinema, one can argue that the nonhuman objects

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[39] *Cambridge English Dictionary*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), s.v. "Animacy," https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/animacy

[40] Ibid., 3.

[41] Haraway, Donna. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," *The Haraway Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39.

also have the similar forms of agency as humans do in the diegesis. By providing life and personality to non-human objects in literature, they become alive and free, unlike reality.

What enabled the films of Méliès to blur this border between human and nonhuman characters was the active usage of film technology. Of course, compared to the modern cinematography that uses CGI, Méliès's tricks required a certain amount of handiwork. Joel Schlemowitz, and experimental filmmaker and writer, explains that in in *The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), a black background allows for the additional exposure of the detached heads to rest upon a table. The tabletop is incorporated into the double exposure so that the heads can rest solidly on it without appearing transparent against the table's surface.[42] With double exposure, Méliès could multiply his own head into three,[43] and even make them do different facial expressions. Every time the camera stopped to adjust the location of the heads – because of the black background, it was easy to hide the actor's head with a black velour bag – Méliès had to duplicate his body positions so the next shot looks the same as the previous one. The purpose of multiple exposures was, of course, to captivate the audience with visual imagination and fascination.

This film does not provide any moment to sympathize with the severed heads. It does not talk about the pain of the protagonist when his head is cut, nor does it describe bleeding or death. Needless to say, one can argue that the early audiences had different expectations in film viewing, not to mention the contemporary audience's accumulated experiences of moviegoing. At the time,

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[42] Joel Schlemowitz, *Experimental Filmmaking and the Motion Picture Camera: An Introductory Guide for Artists and Filmmakers* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 83.

[43] They are four heads including the one attached to the body of Méliès. Also, it is intriguing that the original French title is *Un homme de têtes* (A man of heads), while the English title is *The Four Troublesome Heads*. The former focused on Méliès himself, while the latter emphasized the head themselves.

trick films like *The Four Troublesome Heads* were advertised and construed as recordings of famous magic tricks performed in popular magic theatres.[44] Referring to Slugan's explanation, audiences at the time of Méliès might have understood his films as mere reenactments of magic tricks, not focusing on the presentations of separated body parts and their play.

Consequently, it is impossible to view and analyze his early films from the identical viewpoint of early audiences. Slugan also adds that we, by contrast, imagine the fiction of the magician taking his head off.[45] What if we just admit this perceptive difference per se, and even go further with this imagination? As the early audiences might have enjoyed Méliès' films as prolonged versions of theatrical performances, the contemporary audience can appreciate them as expressions of how human bodies can be transformed and modified, with the help of modern technology and science. The term transhumanism did not exist in the early 1900s, however, these films demonstrate that the seeds of its ideas already existed. I contend that the French fantastic filmmaking of Méliès can be read in multiple ways, and now is the time that we can understand it as an aspiration to transcend one's bodily limits, with or without technology.

Not all of Méliès's films are about bodies, nor can they all be read through transhumanism. I have therefore chosen to focus on five of his films that can be most productively analyzed through transhumanism: *The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), *Dislocation Extraordinary* (1901), *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), and finally *Prolific Magic Egg* (1903). I start with a film where he experiments with the multiplication of his own head and end

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[44] Mario Slugan, "Introduction," in *Fiction and Imagination in Early Cinema: A Philosophical Approach to Film History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 12.

[45] Ibid., 12.

with a film where he tries a nonnormative reproduction with nonhuman subjects: an egg. Méliès diversifies his objects of transformation and magic by reenacting interspecific metamorphoses in *Prolific Magic Egg.* For this film, I borrow Mel Y. Chen's concept of animacy to clarify the interrelations between humans and non-humans. Here, he is not only animating humans but putting the egg at the forefront of reproduction and metamorphoses.

One of Méliès's specialties is that he actively uses filming and editing techniques to express the relationships between separated body parts and the torso. In *The Four Troublesome Heads*, Méliès tries to impress the audience with his trick of multi-exposure. He puts his head on the table and creates another head on his neck. With two fingers, he emphasizes that he has two heads. He tries to communicate with another head on the table, by greeting it or making gestures. Then he duplicates a head again: now there are three heads in total. Somehow, he is not satisfied, so he creates another. Now, there are three heads on the table and one attached to his neck. He tries to play banjo and the three heads sing loudly. Annoyed at their singing, the man decides to smash them with the instrument. After getting rid of the two heads at the same time, he even throws away his own head. Then, he re-attaches his last head on the table and is satisfied again. He even taps on his face to feel it. Finally, he disappears to the backstage.

This film was also introduced as *Four Heads Are Better Than One* in the 1903 Lubin Film Catalog. In fact, Frazer adds that Sigmund Lubin of Philadelphia was the most notorious film duper of early cinema. He was a major contributor to Méliès' difficulties before 1903, the date when Star Films were first copyrighted through the Library of Congress.[46] Ironically, Lubin titled this film *Four Heads Are Better Than One* as he kept copying Méliès' films, while Méliès originally titled

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[46] George Pratt, *Spellbound in Darkness* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1966), 74.

it *The Four Troublesome Heads.* He called the heads 'troublesome' because the heads did not listen to him carefully when he was singing in the film. However, I see the heads as rather docile since they were copied by Méliès without any resistance, and they were annihilated obediently. In other words, the heads did not wish to be born, nor desire to be annihilated. The term 'troublesome' comes from the perspective of Méliès because he was annoyed by their existence and eliminated them. Interestingly, this film also resembles the story of Frankenstein: a being is given life by a protagonist and instantly despised by his creator. Méliès repeats this creation and annihilation in many of his early films, highlighting his control over life and death.

In 1888, Méliès bought Robert-Houdin Theatre. With his experience in managing performances involving magic lanterns and tricks, he became interested in making moving images. After a refusal from the Lumières regarding the purchase of a Cinematograph he successfully obtained an Animatograph from Robert William Paul. In 1896, he built a studio in the garden of Montreuil. Gaby Wood describes the grandiosity of this studio:

> It was an enormous conservatory, the first permanent daylight film studio in the world, and the stage was built to the exact dimensions of the Robert-Houdin Theatre, with a pit three meters deep in the ground to allow for the same trapdoors and ramps. This was what separated Méliès from the Lumières: while the brothers were interested in making documentaries, for Méliès the possibilities offered up by the new medium were connected with conjuring.[47]

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[47] Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 175.

In other words, to him, cinema was not a medium to reenact movements in reality but to control the bodies of characters and spectators, like a conjuror controls his props, assistants, and the audience. During the early period, Méliès preferred to make most of his films inside this studio in Montreuil because it was easier to control. *The Four Troublesome Heads* is a perfect example of this repeated and strict body control, although the finalized version looks carefree and distracted.

In his early cinema, Méliès treated the filming location like a performance stage. For example, his frame of reference was the stage that can be seen in the sets which he designed for his films. In all of them the camera occupies the position of a spectator in the orchestra of a theater.[48] Katherine Singer Kovács also points out the absence of close-ups. The actors enter and exit either from the side wings or through vampire traps in the floor of the stage.[49] This means that every process of Méliès' performance is delivered in a full shot, and the disappearance of the protagonist is also a part of the plot. Even though his films rely on filmic techniques – such as multiple exposure and editing of the shots, the manner of developing the story is very theatrical. In the next section, I specifically analyze how Méliès used this theatrical setting in his films, with the example of *The Vanishing Lady*, one of his very first films in 1896.

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[48] Georges Sadoul, *Georges Méliès,* (Paris: Éditions Seghers, 1970), 36-38.

[49] Katherine Singer Kovács, "Georges Méliès and the Féerie," in *Film Before Griffith*, ed. John L. Fell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 250.

2.1 Seeing the Unseen: The Fantastic Moment of Awkwardness in *The Vanishing Lady* (1896)

Although Méliès became famous for cinematic trickery usually accompanied by movements, there have been attempts to connect him to the traditions of immobility in the nineteenth-century. Vito Adriaensens and Steven Jacobs argue that the early cinema of Méliès has connections to the nineteenth-century tradition of tableaux vivants, or living pictures. They define tableaux vivants as a theatrically lit composition, often based on a famous artwork or literary passage, of living human bodies that do not move throughout the duration of the display. It is interesting that they were comparing the works of Méliès to tableaux vivants that use human bodies to reenact still images. The pleasure of observing tableaux vivants lies in witnessing extreme immobility in the most vivid and live fashion. It is possible to find connections between tableaux vivants and the early films of Méliès since some of them such as *Le magician/The Magician* (1898), *Pygmalion et Galathée/Pygmalion and Galatea* (1898), and *La statue animée/The Drawing Lesson* (1903) thematize the transformation of objects or statues into living beings.

Here, I analyze a moment on which Adriaensens and Jacobs did not focus: an awkward moment of transition in the early cinema of Méliès that enables us to see the unseen seam in contemporary cinema. I consider the unnaturally edited moment that Méliès created for tricking the audience–when the lady vanishes–to be the most epistemologically fantastic moment in *Escamotage d'une dame chez Robert-Houdin/The Vanishing Lady* (1896). Evidently, the edited shots of Méliès are not as smooth and sleek as those of contemporary body genres. In fact, it is meaningless to analyze his films from contemporary standards. Paradoxically, this comparison enables a new visual discovery in his films because contemporary viewers find the comparatively rough editing more eccentric and fascinating. We are too used to watching sleek, flawless, natural,

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and flowing images on screen. Watching the films of Méliès in 2024 is similar to witnessing a glitch. Early trick shots - which belonged to the cinema of attractions' mode of filmmaking - were often made so as to be noticed by viewers by creating an effect of awe or surprise at seeing heads severed from their bodies or objects appearing or disappearing in the blink of an eye.[50]

The first shot of *The Vanishing Lady* starts with Méliès bowing to the audience; then he introduces the female assistant to them. He prepares a cloth, puts it under a chair, and lets her sit on it. This was a classical gesture in a staged performance to prove that there are not any traps installed under the chair. After that, he hides her with a bigger blanket, then when he removes the blanket; we can see that the woman is gone. Due to technological limits, between these two shots, we can partially see her skirt that could not be completely hidden under the blanket. To the modern eye, it looks very clear that Méliès stopped the camera and pasted the next shot, without the woman and Méliès holding the blanket. When he removes the blanket, there is nothing under it. He hits the floor with the chair, showing that he did not hide her under the floor. Then, he performs a magical gesture and creates a skeleton sitting on a chair. Méliès recovers the skeleton with the blanket again, and next, it finally changes into the original lady.

To the contemporary audience, the moment when the lady disappears allows us to find an obvious trace of editing, that is, it is similar to seeing a seam on Frankenstein's body. Before the lady vanishes, her skirt sticks out of the performing drape and after that, the whole shot of her is cut out of the film like a paper sticker. As soon as we see the shot of a skirt that could have been deleted with modern editing technology, we think to ourselves, "the skirt seems awkward. He

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[50] Martin Lefebvre and Marc Furstenau, "Introduction," in *Special Effects on the Screen: Faking The View from Méliès to Motion Capture*, ed. Martin Lefebvre and Marc Furstenau. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 8.

should have deleted it or hid it well from the beginning." It almost looks like it belongs to the in-between realm of the finalized film and the process of editing. Therefore, watching Méliès' films stimulates us to be affectively involved in screening and enthusiastically feel the texture of the celluloid. Although the edited scene looks rather rough and abrupt to our eyes, it materializes imagination straightforwardly, showing a human transcending space and temporality, even oscillating between life and death in a short period.

Regarding the disappearance of the lady, scholars have questioned Méliès' intention to choose a woman's body. Scholars regarded appearance and disappearance as the visual means of control over women's bodies in the films of Méliès. Karen Beckman, who worked on the historical and cultural context of "vanishing women," claims that by denying the vanished lady a full visual reappearance, Méliès removes the cloth to reveal a gruesome and charred skeleton in the chair where his assistant once sat.[51] Constance Balides argues that women were constructed as sexual spectacles even in early cinema, pointing out that the films of Méliès often play on the appearance and disappearance of characters and use the situation of a magician's act to show a woman's clothing being removed in *Les Apparitions Fugitives* (Méliès, 1904).[52] These scholars mostly refer to Lucy Fischer, who has defined Méliès as an inadvertent patriarch of a particular cinematic vision of women.[53]

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[51] Karen Beckman, "Insubstantial Media: Ectoplasm, Exposure, and the Stillbirth of Film," in *Vanishing Women*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 63.

[52] Constance Balides, "Scenarios of Exposure in the Practice of Everyday Life: Women in the Cinema of Attractions," *Screen*. 34.1 (1993): 20.

[53] Lucy Fischer, "The Lady Vanishes: Women, Magic and the Movies," *Film Quarterly* 33. no. 1 (1979): 30.

Nevertheless, Linda Williams insists that it is simply not accurate to privilege the disappearance of women in Méliès's films, any more than it would be accurate to privilege her magical appearance.[54] It is reasonable to interpret Méliès's trick as a denial of women's presence and autonomy, however, I suggest looking at the bodies per se, focusing more on continuous transformation itself. Williams also mentions that there are probably an equal number of magical appearances and disappearances of men in these films.[55] Instead of observing who disappears and appears, it is more crucial to recognize the fluidity of these disappearances and appearances.

In many of his early films, such as *The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), *Dislocation Extraordinary* (1901), *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), and *Prolific Magic Egg* (1903), the disappearances and appearances are not episodic. Instead, they are all connected like a plot; the bodies in these films keep transforming until the very end. Also, these transformations transgress the boundaries of genders, species, and identities without stopping. In *The Vanishing Lady*, it is a woman who disappears first, but she also experiences the status of a skeleton before coming back to her original body. When an artist performs on stage, the audience is aware of the director or the staff, but what they see on screen are the actors and actresses. I argue that Méliès is an assistant that facilitates swift transitions between different genders, sexes, and even species, not an omnipotent god who has all the power to control and dominate his characters.

John Frazer explains that there was no trap used in this film, like that of a staged magic performance. In *The Vanishing Lady*, the cumbersome trap was replaced by a stopped camera, allowing the woman to leave the set. The magician froze in place until the camera was rolling

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[54] Linda Williams, "Film Body: An Implantation of Perversions," *Ciné-Tracts* 3. no. 4 (1981): 30-31.

[55] Ibid., 30-31.

again.[56] This new trickery is clearly distinguished from staged magic performances and tableaux vivants. When people are directing a live show, they cannot stop the camera and set up the stage again. Unlike live shows and performances, films are cut, grafted, and edited numerously until they are shown to the audience. One can say that what we see on screen – the finalized version – is only the tip of the iceberg, considering the amount of time and money invested in filmmaking.

Previously, I associated the editing of Méliès with the bodily seams of Frankenstein the creature. There have been other scholars who saw him as someone similar to Frankenstein's creator, Victor Frankenstein. Gaby Wood argued that if the cinema, for Méliès, was an extension of the automata he repaired and set in motion in his foyer, then people on screen could be seen as androids too – mechanized men, distributed into tiny frames of celluloid, their movements broken down into mechanical functions.[57] We can infer that his films work through certain aspects of transhumanism, that is, transcending humanity through the technology of cinema. Méliès needed mechanized men to fulfill his dreams on the frames of celluloid. In Méliès' memoirs written in the third person quoted in Wood's book, Méliès says: "This new genre allowed him imaginative compositions, the most comical episodes, and, at the same time, the realization of things thought to be impossible. He found material which would satisfy primitives, but also intrigue scientists and give pleasure to artists."[58] Méliès wanted to transcend the limits of reality. He was not just into pleasing the audience and himself by filmmaking; he was also ready to intrigue and inspire

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[56] John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès*. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), 60.

[57] Gaby Wood, *Living Dolls: A Magical History of the Quest for Mechanical Life*. (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), 182.

[58] Ibid., 178.

scientists with his tricks. His characters on screen were not just illusions to entertain the audience, but mechanized men to fulfill his dream.

Wood mentions that Méliès bought Robert-Houdin Theatre from Emile's (Rober-Houdin's son) widow along with Robert-Houdin's original automata in 1888,[59] implying that Méliès was also interested in automated machines. To connect Méliès to later transhumanists, their main focus is not to love humanity but to transcend it to become a completely different being. Likewise, Méliès was not interested in understanding humans. Rather, he wanted to disguise them as something else. While transhumanists are more interested in the results of technological innovation, such as cloned bodies and artificial organs, posthumanists investigate them to better understand human beings. Regardless of the term applied, transformation and creation are Méliès's major topics.

In fact, there have been several attempts to connect the relations between fantastic cinema and transhumanism, but rather in an underdeveloped manner. Seth Giddings starts his review of the film *La planète sauvage/Fantastic Planet* (1973) with the following paragraph:

Presenting the unphotographable in photographic form has always been one of the primary challenges for – and pleasures of – SF and fantasy cinema. The macrocosms of space, the microcosms of the interior of bodies, speculative futures and mythical pasts, monstrous and alien bodies, fantastic technologies and spectacular metamorphoses have been cobbled together from paint and models, puppets and camera tricks and stitched into the flow of the real-time pro-camera event. From Méliès onward, such cinema has always been formally and technically hybrid.[60]

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[59] Ibid., 173.

[60] Seth Giddings, "Fantastic Planet (Review)," *Science Fiction Film and Television.* Vol. 1 (2008):176.

Here, he never mentions the term transhumanism, but it is not absurd to employ the term. The fantastic and transhumanism have something in common in trying to achieve the impossible through the possible. The fantastic heavily relies on imagination, and transhumanism cannot exist without the progress of technology. Technology cannot progress without radical acts of imagination. As Giddings already claimed, Méliès was a pioneer of fantasy cinema. With his editing and filming techniques, he attempted to prove that science could be a companion to fantastic cinema, before many other artists and scientists.

Revisiting *The Vanishing Lady*, it is important to point out that Méliès did not turn the lady into a skeleton directly, but he first made the lady disappear. There are three different kinds of tricks in this film: 1) Méliès makes the lady disappear. 2) Without a stage drape, he creates a skeleton on the chair out of nowhere. 3) This time, with a stage drape, he transforms the skeleton into the lady again. Frazer paid more attention to the second trick. According to him, this is an entirely different trickery compared to the first and third transformations:

> The first part of the trick substituted a film device for a stage device. However, when the skeleton appears out of nowhere, a different order of thinking is involved. There is no longer a stage drape to cover the action. The magical appearance is entirely dependent on the ability of the camera to interrupt and reconstruct time. The act of making the woman vanish was done several times before the appearance of the skeleton as if to prepare the audience for a new order of trickery.[61]

I agree with him that the second transformation is solely dependent on the ability of the camera. The first trick does resemble the ones from a staged performance. However, one can also say the

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[61] John Frazer, *Artificially Arranged Scenes: The Films of Georges Méliès*. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1979), 60.

second trick does not seem very groundbreaking to the contemporary eye. Of course, it is impossible to evaluate a film from more than a century ago with the same contemporary standard. Still, from a transhumanist perspective, the first trickery seems more intriguing in the way it is performed.

When the lady disappears after being covered with a drape, the drape operates as a medium to perform a trick. In other words, Méliès is making the lady disappear with the help of a tool (technology). In transhumanism, magic does not exist, but technology is the key method to alter the human species. The bodies need to be cut, reassembled, and reattached with the help of medicine and technology, to transform themselves into different beings. However, when Méliès creates a skeleton with his film technique, he simply swings his hands a few times, like a magician. The first trick seems closer to a typical "vanishing lady" trick in the magic theatre, while the second one was available due to the film technology.

From the perspective of transhumanism, the former is more logical compared to the second one. Andrew Pilsch, a scholar working on digital humanities and science fiction, explains that transhumanism represents a cultural shift in which the technologies changing the horizon of our lives have a significantly more intimate relationship to our bodies.[62] While the second trick shows how film technology can change the viewers' point of view on the sudden appearance of a new body such as that of a skeleton, the first one represents this cultural shift that Andrew Pilsch explained. For a viewer who encounters a moment when Méliès creates a skeleton for the first time in their life, this experience will be eye-opening and innovative. However, if one sees a similar

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[62] Andrew Pilsch, "Introduction," in *Transhumanism: Evolutionary Futurism and the Human Technologies of Utopia*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 7.

editing trick for multiple times, this is nothing new, but one of those average attractions. By demonstrating the process of a woman disappearing with a drape on her body, *The Vanishing Lady* illustrates the trial and error that human beings experience when it comes to enhancing or transforming one's body with technology. Technology changes people's perception of their bodies. As technology develops, humans can imagine more wildly about their bodies. The contrast between these two tricks demonstrates different perspectives in film analysis through the lens of transhumanism. First, one can concentrate more on the transformative phenomenon itself; such as the vanishing lady and Méliès regenerating her. Second, one can pay more attention to how these transformations were realized. Was Méliès using certain film techniques, such as editing, double exposure, or dissolve? For now, I begin with the first category, the epistemology of disappearance, transformation, and reappearance of bodies. Then, I move on to specific moments where Méliès relied on technical methods to trick the eyes.

In order to come back to her original body, the lady had to go through several phases of transformation. There is an oscillation of different identities – human – annihilated (absence) – skeleton – human again. Here, I interpret Méliès as a reverse Pygmalion figure in *The Vanishing Lady*. Adriaensens and Jacobs refer to Victor Stoichita's description of the 'Pygmalion effect': "the blurring of boundaries that occurs between model and sculpture – between original and copy – in Ovid's original tale and those of his many successors, most of which operate, like Méliès, within the connected realm of aesthetics, magic and technical skill."[63] Many literary works, such as those of Ovid, Hitchcock, and Méliès utilized this oscillation between original and copy to demonstrate the blurry borders between them. Allison de Fren also discussed *Tomorrow's Eve* as

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[63] Victor Stoichita. *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5.

a bridge between the Pygmalionesque concerns of nineteenth-century French literature and the animated deconstructed bodies (both real and artificial) of cinema.[64] This nineteenth-century novel is famous for popularizing the term android/gynoid, with its representation of endlessly dissected female bodies. Fren also annotates Michelson's claim on the possible relation between the early Méliès and *Tomorrow's Eve*, analyzing his film *Extraordinary Illusions* (1903) as an example. In this film, Méliès creates a living woman out of the separated mannequin body parts.

The reason why I call him a reverse-Pygmalion is that unlike Pygmalion in Ovid's mythology, he focuses on annihilating his creatures, rather than keeping them as his companion or partner. Many of Méliès' early films end with his successfully getting rid of his mischievous creations, after a series of misbehaviors, from his perspective. Stoichita states the myth of Pygmalion is not only a myth about the image (like that of Narcissus); it also deals with the image-work of art or, to be more precise, its *embodiment*.[65] What Méliès does in his films is *disorganization.* He multiplies heads, creates a skeleton, and lets separated body parts freely explore space, then reverses everything as it used to be. This undoing of performances, or a playback may seem like mere entertainments for the viewers, however, looking at those dismemberment and disassembly, it is also possible to understand these images as representations of human technologies that transform human bodies, at the level of image and imagination.

Time Travel has been a fascinating topic in science fiction. Ever since H.G. Wells published his novel, *The Time Machine* (1895), there has been numerous works on the characters who found or invented an apparatus or machine which enables time travel. Jules Verne, who is

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[64] Allison de Fren, "The Anatomical Gaze in Tomorrow's Eve," *Science-fiction Studies* 36. no. 2 (2009): 236.

[65] Victor Stoichita. *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5.

considered the pioneer in science fiction, wrote *De la terre à la lune/From the Earth to the Moon* in 1865. Although this novel was about an actual trip to the moon instead of time travel, it inspired Méliès to create *Le voyage dans la lune/Trip to the Moon* in 1902. I interpret the appearance of science fiction novels that deal with travel – whether to different times or places – as aspiration for transhumanism. If Wells and Verne provided literary context when it comes to exploring the unknown world with the help of imagination, it was Méliès who presented those ideals in a more direct, visceral manner with moving images.

Since the five films analyzed in this chapter are all less than three minutes, several moments in his films lack verisimilitude and take place without logic. If they were science fiction, it would have been possible to provide sufficient context for his experiments before describing how he was able to mutilate, replicate, or annihilate different body parts. However, everything happens in less than three minutes here: we do not understand why the bodies are separated or doubled. In *Dislocation Mystérieuse/Dislocation Extraordinary* (1901), the main character's intention could be interpreted in a range of different ways. A man tries to show something to the audience. The man is already aware of the audience in front of him, and he makes certain gestures to set our expectations. As he sits on a chair, his left-hand reaches for the bottle, and his right-hand, separated from his body, reaches for the cup. After grabbing the objects that they need, the re-united arms pour the liquid into a cup. However, in a moment they are separated again. This time, his legs jiggle without his intention. It seems like his legs also want to be liberated from his body. The man tries to smoke, but this time the head is separated from his neck, floating in the air. The hands and the legs look jealous – they want to fly freely in the air just like his head. Finally, as the man crosses his legs, his left leg succeeds in liberating itself. Both of his legs are now gone, and his upper body falls to the ground. He cannot do anything without them, but the gracious legs come

back to him. The man dances in joy, and at last, all the body parts: arms, legs, and head escape from his torso. Even the torso enjoys its freedom, tumbling and jumping freely. After enjoying their freedom, the body parts go back to their original place. The man says goodbye to the audience, carrying his head under his arm.

One can perceive the main character as a person who tries a self- experiment. When he cuts, grafts, and is implanted of human bodies, usually, he uses himself as the specimen. While anyone might have conducted this as a thought experiment at the level of imagination, Méliès literalizes it in the image through cinematic techniques and technology. When the contemporary audience sees him simply frowning and surprised to see his arms and legs floating in the air, they may ask questions to themselves, "What am I seeing and how am I seeing it?" as Pettersen explained. This type of experiment/surgery is differentiated from those with statues, creatures, and women because in those films he makes them vanish or transform into something else. Moreover, *Dislocation Extraordinary* distinguishes itself from the other films because the time that the body parts resist their owner or Méliès is comparatively longer than his other films about body parts vs. Méliès.[66]

For instance, in *The Four Troublesome Heads,* the protagonist only needs to fight with four identical heads, however, in *Dislocation Extraordinary* Pierrot needs to deal with his own arms, legs, and head. They are all different forms of bodies and require different types of care for survival. For example, arms can grab objects because of a hand; legs can walk because of muscles

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[66] It was André Deed who performed the role of Pierrot in *Dislocation Extraordinary,* not Méliès himself. However, it is possible to see him as a representative (or an automaton) of Méliès, performing the role according to his strict instructions.

and feet. A head can see, speak, smell, and hear since most of the sensory organs are placed in the face. In the film, the head even smokes a pipe as separated then comes back to the torso. The legs sway on their own in a separate chair, after leaving the torso. In other words, it is not easy for the main character to control or annihilate their separated bodies because of their diversity and different needs.

The transformation and adaptation of diverse beings are what transhumanists aim to pursue indeed. There have been attempts to understand transhumans and disabled beings as the intersections of bodily transformation. One way to regard Pierrot in *Dislocation Extraordinary* is as a person with disabilities. He experiences a process in which each of his arms, head, and legs escape his torso, and then come back to it as if nothing has ever happened. The most radical moment in this film is when his body part, this time including his torso, floats in the air and becomes confused because they almost forget how to go back to their original form. Then, can we say Pierrot's bodily adventure was an adaptation? My answer is yes, because of the very last moment in the film. After experiencing the separation of his body, he realizes that he can actually control it, by detaching and attaching it with his own will. With his hands, now he reaches for his head and removes it from the neck. After crouching on it, he puts it back to where it belongs, like putting a sticker on it. After this performance, he even leaves the stage with his head under her arm. This removal and transplantation of bodies back and forth is what later transhumanists imagine and dream about.

Méliès's experimentation does not stop cutting and grafting human bodies, it expands into two different directions. First, by enlarging and bursting his own head with chemical and air pressure in *L'Homme à la tête en caoutchouc/The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), he tests out his physical limit as well as maximizing its dramatic effect. If his previous films, such as *The Four*

Troublesome Heads and *The Vanishing Lady* leave room for the audience's reaction to bodily multiplication or annihilation, *The Man with the Rubber Head* also shows Méliès' own reaction, by kicking out the assistant who contributed to the explosion of the head. Secondly, by proceeding with a new experiment of turning an egg into human heads, he blurs the border between human and nonhuman. An egg can be a human, and a human can be an egg. Of course, in reality, we know this is not true. Nevertheless, by referring to an originally linguistic concept, *animacy*, I unfold how Méliès plays with mixing substances, hybridizes different species, and overlaps the borderlines between human and non-human, with his filming and editing technology.

2.2 *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902) and *Prolific Magic Egg* (1903)

This time, he uses experimental equipment and different chemicals to test the limits of human bodies. In *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), Méliès is more specifically presented as a person with proto-transhumanist ideals. With his technology and scientific knowledge, he tries to enlarge a human head as large as possible. At the beginning of the film, Méliès, who looks like a scientist or a chemist, mixes different solutions. Then, he brings in a table that resembles an operating table. On the table, he places an apparatus that can fix the separated head, with a hose that inserts air into it. From a box, he takes out the head and puts it on the apparatus. He takes off his wig, showing the audience that the head and himself are the same people. By maiming, he foreshadows to the audience that he is going to put some air into the head, using the pump. He inserts the pump into the hose, then starts air injection. Méliès keeps pumping, and the head grows. However, he is not satisfied with its size. He pumps more, and the head shows an impression that

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it feels like exploding. Then, he pulls air out of the head, and the head goes back to its original size. Satisfied, he brings in his assistant, trying to reenact his discovery. The assistant also tries pumping the head, however, because he inserts excessive air, the head explodes. Méliès is furious and he kicks out the assistant. He cries in despair: his new Frankenstein, the newly invented being, is destroyed.

I read *The Man with the Rubber Head* as a demonstration that shows how our bodies, including those of the characters and the audience, are innately transhuman. In this film, a ramp was used to make illusions happen, so the head stays on the table as the expansion continues. Schlemowitz explains that without the ramp, the head would have expanded equally, on both the top and bottom, and would have no longer appeared to be resting on the table.[67] Méliès continuously tried to entertain the audience with new tricks, so they would be surprised and pleased by his imagination. By exhibiting these bodies transform with the technology he devised, he enables cinema as a mode of transcendence. In a film like The Vanishing Lady, he used a female body to initiate this transcendence, however, in this film, he uses his own head as an experimental object. By identifying the character to the filmmaker, Méliès expands his cast of characters. It is not only actresses or actors who go through this transformation; it can be the director himself, or even the audience who aspire to a bodily modification.

Méliès's imagination of bodies was not just confined to humans. In *L'Œuf du sorcier ou l'Œuf magique prolifique/ Prolific Magic Egg* (1903), he continues his experiment with bodies, however, for this film, there is a need to apply a slightly different conceptual framework. In this

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[67] Joel Schlemowitz, *Experimental Filmmaking and the Motion Picture Camera: An Introductory Guide for Artists and Filmmakers* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 83.

film, it is not the human bodies that are duplicated, cut, or grafted, but a tiny egg is the subject of the experiment. In this section, I utilize Mel Y. Chen's concept of animacy to analyze *Prolific Magic Egg.* By referring to animacy, nonhuman subjects gain more agency in their transformation in their cinematic diegesis, and the metamorphosis is no longer preposterous nor purely fantastic. The film starts with Méliès taking out his handkerchief from his jacket. With it, he creates a small egg. Then, he places it on his fist and makes it disappear. He shows his palms to the audience, ensuring that the egg is not there. With magic, he makes the egg appear again. He throws the egg in the air, and when the egg falls into his hands, it turns into a giant egg. Now it looks like an ostrich egg. He places the big egg on the table, and with a pen, he draws a facial expression on it. Now, the big egg has a human face. With some gestures, he makes the egg grow – now it is the size of a big balloon. Then, the balloon turns into the face of a woman. The face slightly smiles at the magician. Soon, the face is divided into three heads. After being merged into one head again, the face turns into that of a clown. Finally, the clown's head turns into a big balloon-sized egg and shrinks into the size of an ostrich egg. Méliès throws it in the air, and when he grabs it, it becomes a tiny egg again. Suddenly, he eats the egg. He lies down on the table. In a moment, he turns into a skeleton. Another man comes in, and he drags it out.

Chen points out that pharmaceuticals are composed of nonhuman biological material, cloning and stem cell technologies deploy blends of human and nonhuman animal material.[68] In *Prolific Magic Egg,* the egg transforms itself into another being, a woman's or a clown's head. When Méliès directed this film, it exclusively belonged to an area of fantastic, however, recent

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[68] See Mel Y. Chen, "Animals, Sex, and Transsubstantiation," in *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 128.

technologies show that it is now an in-between of imagination and reality. An eggshell that changes into a human face can be a body too. *Prolific Magic Egg* is an appropriate example to understand *animacy* because it oscillates between an egg, a bigger egg, a woman's face, and a clown's face. There is an interchange of breeds, species, and gender in this film. Chen has also argued that the concept of animacy, animal, and animate are indeed racialized and humanized.[69] Instead of humanizing an animated object, the transformation in *Prolific Magic Egg* centers around the inhuman subject, which is the egg.

In a sense, Méliès's attempt to present his moving images centering around the egg is posthumanist and transhumanist at the same time. For example, posthumanists attempted to reorient our understanding of human agency by underscoring human subjectivity's interdependency and porosity with respect to a world that Enlightenment humanists often falsely claimed to control.[70] In other words, even though the representation of humans in his films may not be diverse, *Prolific Magic Egg* certainly depicts a nonhuman subject (not an object in this context) that demonstrates human bodies' porosity and fluidity when it comes to animating their bodies. Previous to the discussion of posthumanism, the discourse of humanism, based on a speciesist logic of domination, has contributed to building a hierarchical system that legitimizes the enslavement, torture and killing of nonhuman animals without legal liability.[71] This film, which was released before a lively academic discussion on posthumanism led by scholars such as

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[69] Ibid., 7.

[70] Iman Zakiyyah Jackson, "Animal: New Directions in the Theorization of Race and Posthumanism," *Feminist Studies* 39. Issue 3 (2013): 670-671.

[71] María Ferrández-Sanmiguel, "Toward an Ethics of Affinity: Posthumanism and the Question of the Animal in Two SF Narratives of Catastrophe," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 64. no.5 (2023): 751.

Cary Wolfe, Katherine Hayles, and Rosi Braidotti, can be understood as a posthumanist example that resists a hierarchy between human and nonhuman bodies, by visually mixing and even overlapping them.

Prolific Magic Egg uses a dissolve technique in order to realize these smooth transitions between different identities. When the egg changes into something else, its form slowly overlaps with another object, thereby presenting two objects at the same time. With this technique, he is emphasizing the liveness and fluidity of the egg. A dissolve is the superimposition of a fade-out onto a fade-on, achieved by reversing and then re-filming using film that has already been exposed once.[72] Elizabeth Ezra adds that from the beginning, the dissolve was usually not used for trick effect, but rather to create a smooth transition from one scene to the next. I argue that the dissolve effect does not just enable a smooth transition, but also provides a helpful visual explanation for the understanding of transhumanist bodies.

On the surface, the dissolve effect expresses a smooth transition between various species and genders, however, I see this dissolve effect as a key epistemological symbol that helps contemporary viewers understand the concept of animacy and transhumanism. For instance, in "Intra-inanimation", Rebecca Schneider explains how other scholars and herself interpreted the animacy of Neolithic rock art:

In this case animacy, like agency, might be considered to move among human and nonhuman in an intra-in-animate weave of call and response-ability… Similarly, animacy,

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[72] Elizabeth Ezra, "Méliès does tricks," in *Georges Méliès* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 30.

here, might be akin to mimesis—the action of becoming through repetition that is not representation but iteration.[73]

With the dissolve effect, the audience obtains the opportunity to observe this animacy akin to mimesis. The only common trait between an egg and a face is their physical shape. In *The Vanishing Lady*, Méliès cut and grafted two shots, so the lady could disappear immediately. However, in *Prolific Magic Egg,* when the transformation happens, we can see the egg slowly turning into the woman's head. Here, I contend that he is performing the magic of revealing the unseen, a tendency opposed to contemporary body genres. In *The Vanishing Lady,* the modern audience can see the seams of Frankenstein's body. By confronting the abrupt editing of early cinema, the audience can be affectively closer to fantastic filmmaking. In this film, similar to Neolithic rock art, the audience witnesses the movement among humans and nonhumans in an intra-in-animate weave of call and response-ability, as Schneider suggested.

2.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed five early films of Georges Méliès – *The Vanishing Lady* (1896), *The Four Troublesome Heads* (1898), *Dislocation Extraordinary* (1901), *The Man with the Rubber Head* (1902), and Prolific *Magic Egg* (1903). It is known that Méliès made over four hundred films from 1899 to 1912. Therefore, it might not be sufficient to study only five films to fully understand Méliès as a pioneer in fantastic filmmaking. However, I selected these films to present his potential

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[73] Rebecca Schneider, "Intra-inanimation," in *Animism in Art and Performance,* ed. Christopher Braddock (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 165.

as a versatile illusionist, with the assistance of transhumanism, posthumanism, and animacy. There already exists a vast amount of studies on Méliès, ranging from feminist studies to genre studies. Nevertheless, there has not been enough attempt to recognize him and his films as facilitators to understand human and nonhuman bodies, from the perspective of transhumanism and posthumanism. The body in *The Vanishing Lady* is completely docile: the lady vanishes as Méliès orders to, and he creates a skeleton that will turn into the lady. This film itself functioned as a trailer for his other films in the future: it seems like it is a mere reenactment of stage tricks, however, by converting its form from theater to cinema, Méliès proved cinema's different possibilities. Unlike theater performances that could never be reenacted in the exact same way, cinema's self-replication of time and image is closely intertwined with its immanent transhumanist characteristics. The lady can vanish millions of times, yet she can reincarnate herself by playing the film from the beginning. *Dislocation Extraordinary* implies transhumanism's close involvement with disability. By presenting a person who learns to detach and re-attach his own body, it describes disability as a precondition to transhumanism. Before a bodily modification, from the point of transhumanism, all bodies are disabled. It is meaningless to divide the bodies with adjectives abled/disabled because the emphasis lies in the transformation and adaptation, not situational understanding. In *The Man with the Rubber Head*, someone other than Méliès himself succeeds in destroying the overinflated head. The multiple gazes in this film interrupt the monopolized pleasure that Méliès was enjoying with his own and other bodies. Although Méliès preferred to use the fixed camera angle, there are many internal dynamics between the audience and the characters due to these gazes. Lastly, in *Prolific Magic Egg*, the reproduction and the cutting of bodies start from a non-human body. The egg reproduces different genders and the dissolve effect facilitates a transhumanist understanding of transformation in his films. Animacy

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is crucial when it comes to the interrelation between human and nonhuman bodies because it blurs the border between these two groups, pointing to the fluidity inherent in definitions of transhuman. Being transhuman does not just mean enhancing one's body with technology, but it also means expanding the realm of humanness. By showing nonhuman characters turning into humans and vice versa, one can comprehend the films of Méliès as preliminary instances of transhumanism exploration, even before the term's coinage.

3.0 René Laloux's Fantastic Adaptation of Nonhuman Bodies

A woman runs away from something with a baby in her arms. She trips over a stone but does not give up running. Eventually, she bumps into a giant, blue finger. The finger flicks her to the bottom of the hill, and she tumbles down. She climbs up the hill again, and the finger sends her back, with a slight flick. She tries running to the other side, but this time, the blue hand places obstacles in front of her. Finally, the hand picks her up and drops her on the ground. The woman is now dead, and it turns out that this was only the playtime of extraterrestrial children just like what some human children do with bugs and small animals. This opening sequence of *Fantastic Planet* (1973), René Laloux's animated film about human beings domesticated by nonhuman extraterrestrials, encapsulates the film's perspective on the relationships between humans and nonhumans. In his films, human bodies are the object of experimentation, amusement, or violation.

Laloux's particular type of animation draws in important ways on the work of Georges Méliès, the subject of my previous chapter. His pioneering usage of special effects inspired many filmmakers working in animation such as Émile Cohl, Lortac (Robert Collard), and O'Galop (Marius Rossillon). Richard Neupert writes that thanks in large part to Méliès, French cinema offered high-quality special effects films, many accomplished via in-camera manipulation but also with profilmic trickery, so that the pixilation of objects became a common strategy from the start.[74] French animation differs from that of Hollywood in that it often focuses on artistic stylization, producing images that were not necessarily realistic and are sometimes exaggerated. Many French

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[74] Richard Neupert, "Stop-Motion Animation Attractions," in *French Animation History*, (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), Kindle Location 468.

animated films concentrated on making each shot and image into an artistic work. For instance, Émile Cohl, called "The Father of the Animated Cartoon," was also well known as a caricaturist. As well as contributing to the development of early animation by creating works such as *Fantasmagorie* (1908) and *Le Peintre néo-impressionniste* (1910), he left various illustrations that were detailed and elaborate. For instance, in one of his illustrations from 1899, he drew a Dachshund dog that gained more accessibility after his owner attached a wheel to the side of its body. Although Cohl and Laloux did not live in the same era, Cohl's witty observation of animal bodies shares common ground with Laloux's penchant for animal and nonorganic characters, such as monkeys, snails, rabbits, artificial brains, and robots.

While Méliès was arguably important for all these French animators, I regard René Laloux as the most consequential descendent of the Méliès, a filmmaker who, as I showed in Chapter One, consistently experimented with the borders between humans and nonhumans. In this chapter, I analyze four films by René Laloux – *Les escargots*/*The Snails* (1966), *Les Dents du singe*/*Monkey's Teeth* (1960), *La Planète sauvage*/*Fantastic Planet* (1973), and *Gandahar* (1987). Laloux worked in a mental asylum during the 1950s and started creating animated films using paper cut-outs, colored backgrounds, and characters attached to them like paper dolls. Because Laloux's films are animations, not live action films, he chose a different strategy when it came to presenting distorted, severed bodies. While Méliès focused on realizing the impossible with real people and props through editing and tricking the eye, Laloux concentrated on making the impossible more unreachable. The disjunction between reality and his animated worlds created an almost surreal mood, permitting unrestricted and liberating expressions of bodies. His films parallel Méliès' artistic approach in that both interpellate the audience with a representation of a new creature, but Méliès had to make an extra effort to blur the border between reality and the

fantastic. In Laloux's films, we already know that the animated images are artificial, and Laloux leaned into disorientation as an aesthetic strategy in his images. Laloux's films let us wander around places and beings that we have never encountered. This fantastic viewing experience comes from artisanal handwork, not from sophisticated technology.

The first three films of Laloux – *The Snails*, *Monkey's Teeth*, and *Fantastic Planet*, employ cut-out animation, which is a stop-motion animation technique that uses paper-cut, flat characters and props to create movement. I argue that the flat, paper-like texture in these two films emphasizes the unfamiliarity of characters, amplifying their sense of otherness. Because of this technique, it is difficult for viewers to be emotionally attached to the characters. The latter act strangely and disappear suddenly – there is not enough time to be in their shoes. Drawing on interviews between Laloux and Fabrice Blin, I explore how Laloux's films were able to achieve this effect using cut-out animation.

The abrupt transitions between shots in these films make us imagine an interstice between them, one that aligns with contemporary notions of transhumanism. In my view, transhumanism is also about imagining the in-between, not just exploring the end result of transformation. On the one hand, according to many transhumanists, these transformations signify an enhancement, not a retrogression. There has been an ongoing argument over the concept of human enhancement in transhumanism. Transhumanists – such as Ray Kurzweil, Natasha Vita-More, and Nick Bostrom – typically argue in favor of radical forms of all three types of enhancement:

(1) *physical* enhancement, discussing modifications to improve performance of the human

body in one way or another, through doping, bionic implants, prosthetics, and so forth,

(2) *cognitive* enhancement, looking at enhancements to our ability to focus, think, or

otherwise take in and process information and emotive, (3) *emotive, moral*, and

motivational enhancement, probing the implications of modifying or improving social

aspects to our mental life and behaviour.[75]

Earlier in the Introduction, I argued for substituting the term "enhancement" with "adaptation", to

encourage non-linear, non-evaluative transformation. To examine transhumanism in the films of

Laloux, it is more valid to refer to "adaptation." *The Snails* and *Fantastic Planet* focus primarily

on *physical* adaptation, while *Gandahar* discusses transhumanism through the notion of

temporality, which means it shows deformed people with *cognitive* adaptation. *The Snails* shows

a process of the whole town being demolished due to the advent of giant snails. *Fantastic Planet*

describes a dystopian society (for human characters) where human bodies are domesticated as pets

for extraterrestrials. Finally, *Gandahar* explains how generic experiments can cause the birth of a

hostile creature against human beings and how can disabled bodies be a solution for human

survival. A farmer can grow gigantic crops with his tears in *The Snails*, and the Draags in *Fantastic

Planet* can reproduce without intercourse, due to their high level of technology.

 If the bodies in the films of Laloux are the objects of *physical*, *cognitive*, and *emotive*

adaptation, in what ways can those be understood? Another keyword that I suggest for this chapter

is disability. For example, the farmer's inability to grow bigger crops can be read as a disability.

Disability is a very comparative concept. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

defines disability as "any condition of the body or mind (impairment) that makes it more difficult

for the person with the condition to do certain activities (activity limitation) and interact with the

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[75] David M. Lyreskog and Alex McKeown, "On the (Non-) Rationality of Human Enhancement and Transhumanism," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 28, no. 6 (2022): 3.

world around them (participation restrictions)."[76] There is no absolute or unchanging definition of disabilities, and transhumanist thoughts can be one factor that consistently challenge their range.

A new cyborganic norm – the fusion between organic and artificial substances in human bodies – becomes the new normal for humanity, thereby putting "natural human beings" in the position of the disabled. Miriam Fernández-Santiago discusses the intersectionality between transhumanism and disability:

> The very prosthetic "nature" of transhuman individuals already indicates the presumed disability of merely human beings by pointing to the fact that the prosthetic addition that makes transhumans of human beings exists as a supplement for some loss or absence in the human self…On the other hand, from a transhumanist perspective, however, disability is displaced towards the "natural" human, who becomes actually traumatized by the loss of their humanist supremacy, and by its subsequent becoming a different underdeveloped species in the continuum of sapiens evolution because it fails to adjust to the new cyborganic norm.[77]

According to Fernández-Santiago, the prosthetic addition already presumes that human beings always lack something. From the perspective of transhumanists, the supplement through artificial organs or body parts completes human beings. At the same time, this reinforcement or re-formation of bodies through technology deconstructs the hierarchy formed by ableists.

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[76] "Disability and Health Overview," *The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,* accessed October 4, 2023, https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/disabilityandhealth/disability.html

[77] Miriam Fernández-Santiago, "A Dystopian Vision of Transhumanist Enhancement: Speciesist and Political Issues Intersecting in M. Night Shyamalan's *Split,*" In *Transhumanism and Posthumanism in Twenty-First Century Narrative,* ed. Sonia Baelo-Allué and Mónica Calvo-Pascual, (London: Taylor & Francis, 2021), 152.

In *Gandahar*, the bodies of the "deformed"[78] were transformed due to genetic experiments, such as heaving multiple heads or arms. As a result, they were gifted with a special ability to foresee the future. It is crucial to focus on the causal relationship here: because their bodies were severed or distorted, their cognitive ability was enhanced. This talent is not just a mere wonder; it allows the characters to recognize different temporalities at the same time and predict what normative people cannot see. *Gandahar* introduces a transhumanist change in which physical metamorphosis triggers cognitive adaptation. In the world of Laloux, there is no such thing as the "origin of the bodies," which are understood as the origins of each character. Mothers, fathers, ancestors – these biological ties of kinship do not mean anything in his films. All bodies are removable and modifiable at the same time, so, there is no need for hierarchies of bodies. These "detachable" bodies track with how transhumanism understands bodies. The audience encounters effortless, simple detachment and attachment of partial/entire body parts, just as transhumanists advocate for artificial organs and implants. For transhumanists, there is no need to cling to organic body parts. Body parts are easily replaceable and losing a body part simultaneously implies the possibility of obtaining another one, just like a butterfly goes through metamorphosis.

This substitutability of body parts in transhumanism also diversifies thinking about of reproductive means. Wendy C. Nielson, who specializes in feminist literary studies argues that transhumanism challenges feminists to consider the ways in which reproductive technology potentially informs personhood.[79] It does not have to be always women who give birth to children,

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[78] This word, "the deformed" may include offensive meanings; however, here I follow the expression used by the characters in *Gandahar*.

[79] Wendy C. Nielson, "Introduction: Fictionality and Artificial Life," in *Motherless Creations: Fictions or Artificial Life, 1650-1890*, (New York: Routledge, 2022), 5.

and procreation can occur through non-genital organs. This diversification of reproductive subjects is a central concern in *The Snails* and *Fantastic Planet*. In *The Snails*, a farmer succeeds in growing bigger lettuce with his tears. In *Fantastic Planet*, viewers encounter a moment of fertilization through spiritual union, not through intercourse. In the films of Laloux, female bodies no longer represent birth – any being can be pregnant and nurturing.

While Laloux is supportive of the procreation of all genders, his perspective on human beings is not so bright. Laloux's films usually begin with dystopian circumstances in which human beings contribute to a catastrophe to the world. Neupert claims that much of Laloux's work revolves around comical nightmare scenarios that implicate humanity as the ultimate cause for throwing the world out of balance.[80] In *Gandahar*, it is Gandaharians who throw the world out of balance. Due to their extreme genetic experiments, they create their own foe, named Metamorphis. Because it desired immortality, Metamorphis petrifies Gandaharians, using them as its energy source. It is also the deformed, who were also the result of genetic experiments, that save Gandaharians through their ability to see the past and the future at the same time. It is easy to believe that transhumanism focuses on the future; however, in *Gandahar*, the changeover between past, present, and future enables the deformed to overcome their disability and suggests a nonlinear temporality that suits their language and lifestyle. I contend that Laloux actively presents his animated bodies as instances of physical adaptation through association with animality and disability. In *The Snails*, after the snails are gone, it is the rabbits that dominate the whole city. Humans are never at the center of attention in Laloux's films, meaning that transhumanism does not always require the human as the central point of reference.

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[80] Ibid., 2352.

3.1 Border-Transcending, Paper-like Bodies in *The Snails* (1966)

The Snails (1966) was released after 1957, when Julien Huxley coined the term transhumanism in his famous essay, "Transhumanism."[81] It came out at the same time as people's increased interest in owning new objects, such as electronic appliances and furniture, thereby enhancing the quality of life physically and emotionally. The 1960s was a period when Europeans started to question the meaning of life, especially after several wars that they had experienced. People were able to purchase many things, as described in Georges Perec's novel *Things,*[82] however, consumerism and materialism could not be a perfect answer to define who they were and why they live. The film historian Sébastien Denis called the 1950s and 60s "a paradoxical period," when Sartre and Camus's neuralgic existentialism and surrealism coexisted.[83]

Laloux's short film *The Snails* (1966) reflects this confusing social and cultural atmosphere in which people started to agonize over their existence. Denis also adds that animation seemed to be able to synthesize the weight of the human condition and responsibility, and its overcoming in absurd situations at the same time, whether dramatic or comic.[84] In this era, some animated films, including *The Snails,* were not mere entertainment for children. They conveyed social messages or functioned as abstract or experimental artworks for all ages. When we think about snails, few

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[81] See Julien Huxley, "Transhumanism," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 8, no.1 (1968): 73-76.

[82] Here, I refer to *Things: A Story of the Sixties* [*Les Choses*], written by Georges Perec. The novel is about a couple who is obsessed with owning and buying things, such as new furniture and luxurious goods in the 60s.

[83] Sébastien Denis, "Reconnaissance, Contestation, Engagement," in *Le Cinéma d'Animation*, (Armand Colin : Paris, 2017), 216.

[84] Ibid., 216.

people would recognize them as detrimental or terrifying. Rather, they are closer to children's playmates or pets. When one thinks of the word "monster," people would usually imagine King Kong, Frankensteins, or Godzilla. Contrary to general expectations, René Laloux, the director, and Roland Topor, the illustrator used snails and rabbits as their monsters. They may seem docile and harmless, but they are horrendous and striking in *The Snails*, like the typical monsters of science fiction.

The film focuses on giant snails that eat humans and destroy a whole town. One day, a farmer finds a way to expand the size of his crops by sprinkling his tears onto them. The advent of gigantic crops causes the appearance of giant snails. After quickly destroying the farmer's field, the snails head to the city. Once there, they look for their something else to eat, using their tentacles-like eyes. The tentacles look through the window of an attractive woman, like a Peeping Tom. The giant snails then swallow the woman and a little girl and go on to destroy the whole city. They demolish thick walls and buildings as they keep chasing people ceaselessly and slowly. Because of their horrific size, people panic and lose their minds even though the snails move slowly. After a terrifying night in the ruined city, the snails start to create various structures with their own bodies. Later, even those structures become cobwebbed, and new buildings appear in the city. Meanwhile, the same farmer from the beginning plants carrots. After making the carrots grow bigger with his tears, giant rabbits show up, beginning another cycle of destruction.

In *The Snails*, one of the most transformative moments is when the woman undresses in her apartment. Laloux likes arranging creative creatures as background props and making fragile human bodies confront them. One could say that the scene was not smoothly animated, because it was put in motion with only two shots: the woman is wearing the dress, and in less than a second, she is only wearing her underwear. This unnatural movement due to the lack of in between frames

contributes to the flat imagery in Laloux's works and recalls the effects of Méliès' trick films. The characters suddenly disappear like paper stickers and they are abruptly transformed into something else. This unexpected transformation also blurs the borders between humans, animals, and monsters in his films. There is no clear distinction between them since every being can be created and deleted equally at the same time. After the giant snail grabs the woman with the tentacles and puts her into its shell, we see an image of an abyss in its shell. In Laloux's animated world, it is inhuman creatures that devour humans, and humans are the main reason for this chaos. The snail resembles Metamorphis in *Gandahar*, which continuously devours human bodies for its survival, and the woman's role in the film is similar to that of the Oms (pet humans) in *Fantastic Planet*. In this film, human beings only exist to provide pleasure and satisfaction to the non-human beings called the Draags.

Laloux's preference for certain drawing materials is a key component of how the human characters in his films are freely exploited and disposed of. His frequent use of watercolor and colored ink enabled the lighter, more transparent texture of the characters, making them easier to eradicate and appear in seconds. In an interview with Gilles Ciment, Laloux revealed that he never liked working with celluloid. He explained that the color, with gouache,[85] which is usually applied on celluloid, is dull and flat. According to Laloux, watercolor and colored ink suit him better: there is a need to preserve the light of the paper in themselves which he finds very pleasant.[86] Watercolor and colored ink embody rather transparent, light images of the characters. Although the celluloid

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[85] Gouache is a mixture of rubber and watercolor, in order to create opaque texture.

[86] Gilles Ciment, "Entretien avec René Laloux : Né en 13 juillet," *Positif*, vol. 412. (1995): 92. English translation my own.

sheets themselves are transparent, gouache creates opaque textures, and opaque images are hard to get rid of. The pellucid human bodies in *The Snails* are removed so easily, and there is no single trace of their removal.

The Snails uses pen-and-ink drawing, a watercolor wash, and jointed figures,[87] which makes for an awkward combination because Laloux does not try to make the images as smooth as possible. This "awkward" expression shares a similar quality with the edited images of Georges Méliès, as I explained in Chapter One. By constructively revealing the artificialness of the bodies, Méliès and Laloux maximize the characteristics of the fantastic in cinema. The more unnatural and weird the bodies seem, the more disorienting and fantastic the images become. After the woman undresses in The Snails, there is a close-up of her upper body. From this shot, we can feel the light of the paper that Laloux mentioned: her skin looks clear and rosy, and the depth of her body against the background seems shallow. We can only confirm that she is a being of spatial depth through feathery pen lines around her body. She looks more like a character from a graphic novel, or *bande dessinée*.[88] When she is tilting her head, the movement also seems very artificial: it looks like a marionette is moving, under the direction of Laloux. In fact, awkward movements work better with the thematic concerns of this film. The Snails is not about how smooth, and fluid human bodies are. Rather, the bodies are described as stiff and temporary.

Secondly, Laloux's techniques for his depiction of the snails do not create realistic and smoothly moving creatures, thereby requiring the audience's imagination to complete their

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[87] Ralph Stephenson, "French Animation from Cohl to Kamler," in *The Animated Film*, (London: The Tantivity Press, 1973), 104.

[88] Bandes dessinées are Franco-Belgian comics that are usually produced in French. They have a long history of comics, and it is distinguished from English comics.

brutality. Moreover, because there are not many shots of their movements, the film occasionally omits some of the violent moments, such as when the snails devour human bodies. This blank space reminds me of the early films of Georges Méliès – when the lady abruptly vanishes in *The Vanishing Lady*, we can only imagine the cut shots before/after the vanishing. I call these disconnecting moments transhumanist because by presenting sudden and unexpected transformations, these films exhibit continuous and innovative metamorphoses. These switches of sizes, genders, species, and physical abilities are possible due to the characteristics of Laloux's animation, which was designed to show dynamic movements in a limited period of time. Compared to photographic images, animation is more adequate to present these transitions between bodily phases. It is an important tool to explore the questions of transhumanism.

Because of animation's intrinsic function – the realization of movements, it is also not cheap to make them. One might assume that the reason why Laloux's images seem unnatural and rigid is because of financial constraints. In his interview with Fabrice Blin, Laloux admits that all his films were more or less unsuccessful, due to lack of money. He added that there are different degrees of failure, but he always had to make films with little money.[89] However, René Laloux and Roland Topor, a surrealist illustrator who collaborated with Laloux in *Dead Times* (1964), *The Snails* (1966) and *Fantastic Planet* (1973), resolved this financial difficulty with Topor's artistic abilities. On *The Snails*, Blin notes that Laloux and Topor were able to skillfully circumvent the difficulties due to a ridiculous budget by betting on the graphic richness of Topor's drawings rather

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[89] Fabrice Blin, *Les Mondes Fantastiques de René Laloux*, (Chaumont : Le Pythagore, 2004), 98. English translation my own.

than focusing on the fluidity of movement.[90] This sublimation of economic difficulty in filmmaking also aligns with the abrupt images of Méliès in Chapter one. Of course, when Méliès was making his films, he faced the limitations of early film technology. However, the most important moments for considering transhumanism paradoxical emerge from these unexpected moments of filmmaking. Laloux and Topor had to use rough, less detailed moving images to introduce their characters, just as Méliès's artificial, visibly edited moments make viewers see the clear seams between bodily edits, just like Frankenstein's body.

In fact, Laloux reveals the fact that Topor was not a huge fan of animation. While a single painting is considered artwork, animation requires twenty-four images for a second. According to Laloux, Roland's drawing is a priori fundamentally anti-animation: it is rich, very detailed, and requires a very long time to process.[91] This statement also proves why Topor and Laloux concentrated on paper-like, light expression of the removal of the props and characters. Because every frame was drawn by hand, it would have been more time-consuming and costly if they pursued smoother, more natural movements. Ironically, the lack of resources rather contributed to the eerie and peculiar mood of the film.

One of the reasons why this film makes a macabre impression is that the plot structure repeats a vicious circle for the future of human beings. As Neupert has argued, Laloux points out humans as the main culprit of ruining the world. It is then non-humans that save the world. For instance, in The Snails, after giant snails swallow people in the big city, the farmer creates giant rabbits because of his giant carrots. The films that I discuss in this chapter - *The Snails*, *Monkey's*

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[90] Ibid., 36.

[91] Ibid., 38. English translation my own.

Teeth, *Fantastic Planet*, and *Gandahar*, Laloux does not trust human beings. In *The Snails*, humans bring calamity upon themselves due to their avarice. Monkey's Teeth illustrates an evil human being who exploits other people's teeth for his profit. In *Fantastic Planet*, they are portrayed as inferior beings to Draags. Finally, In *Gandahar*, the excessive genetic experiment by Gandaharians creates Metamorphis, their new enemy. This mistrust in human goodwill at first glance seems anti-transhumanist since Laloux is usually suspicious of human capability, however, he shows their adaptation by disabling or restricting their bodies. Laloux pushes human bodies to the brink of a cliff and observes how they transform themselves to survive. It is a misanthropic, mad scientist-like experience, but it is a transhumanist approach to physical adaptation.

If being transhuman means being disabled in this film, we need to examine whether physical adaptation has actually happened in this film or not. To support the growth of crops, the farmer provides a stanchion, but his crops wither again. To stimulate the growth of crops, the farmer uses huge magnets, and this attempt also fails. In despair, he begins to cry, and his tears vitalize the crops. Here, we find the potential to empower non-genital secretion as a reproductive source. It was not the farmer's sperm, but tears that made his crops grow. Moreover, the physical growth in this scene was interspecial, like that between Alexia and Cadillac in *Titane* (2021).[92] When the farmer was watering the crops, he was only a nourisher. Now, he raises them with his tears, like a mother feeds a baby with her breastmilk. We do not know how he obtained this ability, but this change in relationships between his crops and himself suggests an interspecific link that reminds us of transhumanism.

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[92] Chapter Four will elaborate on this relationship in detail.

While human beings are busy annihilating themselves, the snails set up a very specific, straightforward goal: to devour as many human beings as possible in a short period. To accomplish their purpose, they maximize the use of their bodily organs to lure and swallow human bodies. A snail that uses its tentacles as an eye and an arm at the same time makes us think of a hand with an eye. These snails break prejudices against naturalistic snails: they are not slow or weak. People have to run away from them in mortal fright. However, not all creatures in Laloux's films are eager to swallow bodies. Another way to control human bodies is to domesticate them. In this chapter, I also analyze Laloux's most representative film, *Fantastic Planet* (1973). In this film, human bodies are colonized and tamed, as the object of pleasure and spectatorship. By reversing the relationship between humans and non-humans, this film enables us to rethink the hierarchy between mobility and immobility. If *The Snails* introduces non-cyberorganic bodies as the disabled, the next film questions the hierarchy between humans and nonhumans. Before moving on to this film made in the 1970s, there is a need to go back a few years ago in order to understand how transhumanism and disability studies come together in his work. *Les Dents du Singe/Monkey's Teeth* (1960) helps us understand how Laloux interpreted human bodies in bifurcated manner. While unharmed and normative bodies are usually treated as obstacles or petty beings, it is disabled or nonhuman bodies that become heroic.

3.2 *Monkey's Teeth* (1960): Teethless Humans and Monkey's Justice

The animation of *Monkey's Teeth* is simple and basic, but it foreshadows the animation style of the three films that came after it: *The Snails* (1966), *Fantastic Planet* (1973), and *Gandahar* (1987). *Monkey's Teeth* functions as a preview of Laloux's three decades of filmmaking. Earlier,

I mentioned that he had experience working at an asylum in the 1950s. The mental institution was called "The Castle of Laborde" and was located Coucherverny. There were no locked doors in this institution, and the patients could participate in an art workshop. During the workshops, Laloux made a film with them. Laloux narrates this experience in *Monkey's Teeth*, "It was like a game, an improvisation."[93] From the beginning of the film, he makes clear that this film was not his individual work, but the result of a collaboration with the patients at the institution. Since his early works were intimately connected to mentally disabled people, later we can see how the ideas in those films are developed in other films. For example, there is a scene when the protagonist imagines his family members are pulled out from the dining table, one by one, by giant pincers. This facile removal of human bodies is similar to the one I analyzed earlier in *The Snails*. Also, *Fantastic Planet* starts with a scene in which human bodies fall into a giant blue extraterrestrial's toys. Finally, in *Gandahar*, the bodies of Gandaharians are stored as a petrified energy source that serves the eternal life of a massive brain.

Monkey's Teeth links transhumanism and disability studies together because it demonstrates how disabled people can transcend their physical or mental limits through artistic expression. The film is about a monkey magician who seeks revenge for a human whose teeth have been entirely removed by an evil dentist. The dentist was making money by selling teeth to rich people. The film starts with Laloux's explanation of how he was able to work on this project. After showing the images of actual patients working on the plot and characters, the film presents animated buildings, mostly bleak and eerie. A man walks into a dental clinic. After being anesthetized, the man imagines his family being removed from his house, just like his teeth were

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[93] *Les Dents du singe/Monkey' Teeth,* directed by René Laloux, (Les Films Paul Grimault, 1960).

all being removed. Soon, his imagination dissolves into an image of a battlefield, spread with dead bodies on the bloody ground. After realizing that the dentist actually pulled out all his teeth to sell, he attempts to seek revenge; however, the doctor runs away. During their fight, police officers start chasing them, and they transform into various objects, such as animal heads and an anatomical mannequin. Nevertheless, the doctor succeeds in escaping, and the man returns home with a toothless mouth. Then, a monkey magician seeks revenge: he raids the dental clinic and pulls out the doctor's teeth. In the end, the man can fully smile again, with the doctor's teeth implanted in his mouth.

When Laloux describes the reasons for the film's narrative choices, he explains, "It is not our place to explain either the obvious or the hidden motivations of those choices."[94] He never attempts to explain the images used in *Monkey's Teeth*. Still, there are certain moments when disabilities stimulate the exploration of transhumanism in Laloux's films. First of all, it is important to pay attention to each transformational phase during the chase between the police, the protagonist, and the doctor. To run away from the protagonist, the doctor tries to enter a building that was "Bar-Bob Café" but then is turned into "Charcuterie (Deli)." He sees other people turning into an animal head or sausage. Then, he also goes in and becomes a pig head. Another moment is when the protagonist runs into a school where students are learning anatomy. He looks at a mannequin and decides to become one. In the next scene, viewers can see half of his body is organic, the other half plastic. After his identity is revealed, he slowly escapes the classroom because half of his body is still stuck in the mannequin. We can see and hear his legs creak: it looks like a statue is walking.

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[94] *Les Dents du singe/Monkey' Teeth,* directed by René Laloux, (Les Films Paul Grimault, 1960).

Certain images used in *Monkey's Teeth*, such as a statue, an animal body part, and separated human body parts are commonly represented throughout the films in my dissertation. Not only are these moments connected to Laloux's future films, such as *Fantastic Planet* and *Gandahar*, but also the films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. In the interview with Ciment, Laloux explained that the plot of the film was made through collective improvisation.[95] With the help of Félix Guattari, each patient could come up with a word, then those words became phrases. He also adds that the film has fantastic and surrealist traits at the same time.[96] I add one more adjective to Laloux's description: transhumanist. Even though the plot came from the free association of fifteen patients, these images can be linked to transhumanist ideas because of the monkey magician in the film.

The monkey magician is a character that represents mentally disabled patients. By not putting forward a human character as a savior, the film emphasizes the contrast between meaningless and temporary human bodies that only exist to destroy themselves and those nonhuman beings who can contribute to the physical and moral adaptation of humans. Unlike his other films, what human characters do in this film is closer to the opposite of adaptation. They pull

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[95] Gilles Ciment, "Entretien avec René Laloux : Né en 13 juillet", *Positif*, vol. 412. (1995): 90. English translation my own.

[96] In the interview, Laloux did not clarify his definitions of these two terms. However, right after this statement he mentioned that the film has a side of "cadavre exquis (exquisite corpse)." Cadavre exquis is a collective drawing method used by surrealist artists. The participants are asked to draw something on a sheet of paper, and for the next player, the previous image has to be hidden by folding the paper. Considering this method, it is possible to infer Laloux connoted how the plot of *Monkey's Teeth* unfolded – just like surrealists worked on cadavre exquis, the patients developed the story together, in an unpredictable and automatic manner.

out teeth and exploit human bodies, powerlessly accept reality and return home toothless, or redeem their body parts with the help of the monkey hero. Regarding the usage of adaptation in cinema, Kathrin Klohs argues that instead of contrasting humans with angels or gods, science fiction uses robots, cyborgs, or aliens for the same purpose.[97] Instead of using nonorganic bodies to contrast with human bodies, *Monkey's Teeth* relies on animal bodies to expand transhumanist subjects. The word "transhumanism" evidently specifies "humans" as a subject of transcendence; however, by including a monkey that acts like a human being in this discussion, the film redefines the human subject. Regardless of their identity at the moment, any being, including the disabled and nonhumans can be the agent of adaptation.

Before the advent of the monkey magician, the film shows the transformative struggles of humans. The trickery used in the film – when human bodies transform into animal meat at a butcher shop or combine themselves with a mannequin body for a disguise – has a slightly different implication from the tricks used in the films of Méliès. His focus is not on the marvelous nor the fantastic but on the mockery of metamorphosis. Regarding narratives of metamorphosis, Bruce Clarke, who has been working on cybernetics and posthumanism, explains that they place the human into improper locations, then try to renaturalize that impropriety. Whatever the outcome, these stories intimate that the essence of the human is to have no essence.[98] His point about the

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[97] Kathrin Klohs, "More Human than Human!: How Recent Hollywood Films Depict Enhancement Technologies – And Why," in *The Human Enhancement Debate and Disability : New Bodies for a Better Life,* ed. M. Eilers, , K. Grüber, and C. Rehmann-Sutter. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 190.

[98] Bruce Clarke, "Introduction," in *Posthuman Metamorphosis: Narrative and Systems,* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 2.

stories of metamorphoses resonates with the films of Laloux. Through various moments of temporary metamorphosis, his characters lose their reason for existence.

For instance, the doctor's job in the film is to continuously sell teeth to rich people. On the teeth boxes that are supposed to be sent to his customers, we can find words such as Paris, New York, and Princess. By enumerating fancy cities and names, Laloux emphasized the despair of the exploited. While innocent people's teeth are pulled out for profit, people from luxurious cities await innovative implant operations. On the one hand, the film explores the class relations and capitalist implications of transhumanist adaptation. On the other hand, by letting a monkey magician seek revenge against the doctor and implant his teeth into the protagonist's mouth, *Monkey's Teeth* emphasizes that the problems caused by transhumanism can also be solved with it. Because the animation technique used in this animation is rather simple, when he pulls out the teeth, it seems that his arm is also a part of the dental equipment. His arm moves like that of a robot, constantly proving the incompatibility of the monkey's movements with the tasks at hand. When he transforms his body into a pig head to avoid the chase, his transformation is not to enhance human bodies, but it is rather a fleeting moment between imagination and reality. The positioning of human characters as submissive objects in *Monkey's Teeth* foreshadows human bodies being completely dominated by nonhumans in Laloux's later film, *Fantastic Planet* (1973). Instead of sympathizing with human characters, controlled and colonized by nonhuman characters, Laloux presents the ruthless exploitation of human bodies, ironically providing the visual pleasure of imagined bodily perversion.

3.3 Humans Are Our Pets: *Fantastic Planet* (1973)

It is widely known that pets provide humans with mental stability. To emotionally support students, some universities even host therapy animal sessions. In many films, television shows, and commercials, it is not rare to see a bond between humans and animals. However, what if humans were the pets, not the other way around? Would we still feel happiness and comfort, as we find them from the dogs or the cats? *Fantastic Planet* (1973) forcibly puts us, the human audience in the position of "being petted," so they can have the experience of repositioning our bodies, as opposed to our traditional concept of human/animal. This film was not the first film to illustrate the subverted hierarchy between humans and nonhumans. Chris Justice writes that because it "draw[s] parallels to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and *Planet of the Apes* (the 1968 film and Pierre Boule's 1963 novel), the film resonates with radical political and historical allegories drenched in European aesthetic principles."[99] Nevertheless, by employing animation to tell the parable of subversion, *Fantastic Planet* succeeds in conveying a fantastic and eerie mood of a dystopian society where bodies do not belong to their subjects, but to other beings.

Based on the novel *Oms en série* (Oms in series) (1957), *Fantastic Planet*, written by Stefan Wul, describes a society in which human beings (Oms) are treated as pets or harmful insects by the gargantuan blue humanoids, Draags. In French, the word "homme" (human) is pronounced as "om," therefore, the film clearly identifies the Oms as humans. While domesticated Oms are considered pets, wild Oms are objects for removal. Tiwa, the daughter of Master Sinh, who is the

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[99] Chris Justice, "Fantastic Planet," *Senses of Cinema*, Apr 2005, https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2005/cteq/fantastic_planet/ (Accessed September 22, 2023)

leader of the Draags, finds an orphaned Om and decides to keep him. Tiwa names him "Terr" and takes care of him – such as putting a collar on his neck to control his movements and making him wear showy costumes. One day, Terr succeeds in escaping from Tiwa and learns about the "Wild Oms." The untamed oms were regularly being eradicated by Draags. After going through hardships, the wild Oms find out the weakness of Draags. By attacking the body-shaped statues that Draags use to dock their meditation spheres, the wild Oms are finally liberated. The Planet Ygam now has two satellites – the natural satellite, the wild planet is reserved for Draags, and the artificial satellite is for the Oms.

When viewers watch *Fantastic Planet*, they confront the fact that the human bodies in the film are already tailored and reconstituted according to the needs of non-humans. The original title of the film is *La planète sauvage* (Savage Planet). While the French title focused on describing humans in the film as "savage," the English version sees the planet as a fantastic entity. The strange plants, giant blue extraterrestrials, and humans belonging to them all compose the concept of the fantastic. The word "sauvage (savage)" also has colonialist overtones. From the original title, one can infer the Draags' point of view on Oms. To them, Oms and their territory are the objects of colonialization and domestication.

In this film, one of the biggest differences between the Draags and Oms is while Oms still have physical intercourse in order to reproduce, Draags use statues as a medium of their procreation. There has been an ongoing discussion on the usage of statues in cinema. Kenneth Gross, the author of *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, analyzes Peter Greenaway's 1982 film *The Draughtman's Contract*, arguing that the statue in this film is also clearly a surrogate for the director himself, a translation of his own ironic presence, his invisibility, knowledge, complicity,

aggression, and self-disgust.[100] It is interesting that Gross chose a word "surrogate." For Gross, a statue is never an independent being, but it is an object that can be replaced, reflects an identity, or be used as a medium. In the case of *Fantastic Planet*, the Draags, by using statues instead of their own bodies, the Draags can focus on meditation, their routinized and essential method of communication and education. They can also avoid excessive child labor, and with the statues, they gain more opportunities to outbreed with beings from other galaxies.

The technology shown in *Fantastic Planet* does not exist in the real world; however, it is not completely far-fetched. The Draags' reproductive method can be thought of as a combination of surrogacy and somatic cell cloning. In the film, the surrogate body does not go through pregnancy. Instead, it offers a space for somatic cell cloning. Somatic cell cloning (cloning or nuclear transfer) is a technique in which the nucleus (DNA) of a somatic cell is transferred into an enucleated metaphase-II oocyte for the generation of a new individual, genetically identical to the somatic cell donor.[101] The Draags' reproductive method in the film is unique because it resembles somatic cell cloning, but their offspring are not genetically identical to their parents. At the same time, fertilization happens on the bodies of statues that resemble men and women. The statues are headless, and round-shaped meditation spheres are attached in place of the heads, making them look like men and women with red and blue heads.

The Draags never clarify whether they employ surrogacy or somatic cell cloning for their reproduction; however, the explanation of their reproduction method makes us think of using

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[100] Kenneth Gross. "Crossings," in *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 123.

[101] X Cindy Tian, Chikara Kubota, Brian Enright, and Xiangzhong Yang, "Cloning animals by somatic cell nuclear transfer – biological factors," *Reproductive Biology and Endocrinology* 1, no. 98 (2003): 1.

statues as surrogate bodies. The film's narration explains that "The Draags used their meditation spheres to meet beings from other galaxies on the Wild Planet and hold strange nuptial rites. This union gave them the vital energy they needed while also guaranteeing the survival of their species." While these nuptial rites may seem beautiful to the Draags, it was a pure nightmare for the Oms. Afraid to be crushed by the giant feet of statues, the Oms hop on the rockets they invented.

By coincidence, soon the Oms find out that the feet of the statues are their only weak point. With their rockets, the Oms quickly annihilate the reproductive statues, and the persecution against the Oms is stopped immediately. Because the Oms attack their feet right away in the film, it is impossible to see how they give birth to a newborn after the nuptial rite. The difference between the statues and surrogate mothers, in reality, is that the statues are non-humans (although they resemble human bodies, they are still headless), and the surrogate mothers are humans. However, instead of defining the statues as a nonorganic entity that is similar to machines, what if we imagine the statues as cyborgs, that is to say, bodies consisting of organic and nonorganic substances.

Some transhumanist scholars have already predicted that cyborgs might liberate human bodies from numerous physical responsibilities. Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, the scientists who first coined the term cyborg, insisted that cyborgs could be a solution to free humans from strenuous spaceship management. They argued that the purpose of the Cyborg is to provide an organizational system in which such robot-like problems are taken care of automatically and unconsciously, leaving humans free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel.[102] The situation of Ygam, the planet where the Draags reside, is similar to the space travel situation that Clynes and Kline describe. They add that man in space, in addition to flying his vehicle, must continuously be

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[102] Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline, "Cyborg and Space," *Astronautics*, September (1960): 27.

checking on things and making adjustments merely in order to keep himself alive: he becomes a slave to the machine.[103] In the case of the Draags, by letting (cyborg) statues handle reproduction, they can concentrate on daily meditation and imagination, two important activities that occupy a large part of their life.

In my view, the Draags' daily meditation is closely related to transhumanist metamorphosis. By transhumanist metamorphosis, I mean metamorphosis that constantly changes one's identity, physical appearance, gender, or species. Also, this transformation is not only one-time. Its subject keeps transforming oneself continually, like a formless slime. When Terr, the human protagonist of the film finds four Draags sitting in a room, he witnesses a strange moment of transformation. There are black tentacles attached to the ceiling and walls, and as soon as the tentacles touch their bodies, colors, forms, and texture change. Even their bodily contour is blurred, and it seems like the four bodies are incorporated into one body. However, they find out that Terr has been watching them, so, they end their imagination session, saying that their imagination was so rich today. During their session, they switch into different forms – their organs are twisted together, making them look like a worm with a round face, sometimes we can see their lung-like organ that keeps growing, and there are even big holes in their bodies.

Regarding the transhuman future of humanity, Natasha Vita-More, the Executive Director of Humanity+, argues that the evolution of the transhuman as a substrate-diverse vehicle may arrive in stages. That is to say, the body will only become a vehicle to include various physical characteristics. Radically put, one will be able to change their appearance, gender, and race without much difficulty. A late-stage transhuman would be autonomous with the ability to exist within

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[103] Ibid., 27.

diverse substrates. A late-stage transhuman would be autonomous with the ability to exist within diverse substrates.[104] This means that one can choose their physical characteristics and easily go back to their previous status, just like a player might customize their video game avatars. Through the fictional Draags, and even though Laloux is not himself a declared transhumanist, his film nevertheless imagines what late-stage transhumans might look like. Due to their high level of technology, the Draags can change their substrates through just their own imagination. The Draags are beings who are freed from the reproductive responsibilities of intercourse and gestation, and they can transform their bodies via brainwaves. The critic James A. Tyner, writing about the concept of the monstrous-feminine, argues that within the Anthropocene, a neoliberal transhumanism attempts to further discipline and regulate the maternal body in an effort to more 'scientifically' and 'rationally' control – indeed, to engineer - human reproduction.[105] However, the advent of a reproductive vessel – a statue – in Fantastic Planet points to another social possibility since a highly advanced technology offloads reproductive labor by externalizing it.

While *Fantastic Planet* raises questions more about feminism and reproductive labor, *Gandahar* (1987) puts more emphasis on the hierarchy between the abled and disabled. Laloux's cinematic efforts to redefine the relationship between humans and nonhumans continued into the 1980s. Moreover, while *The Snails*, *Monkey's Teeth*, and *Fantastic Planet* present human bodies exploited by voracity, body extortion, and domestication, *Gandahar* (1987) attempts to show

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[104] Natasha Vita-More, "The Body Vehicle: An Argument for Transhuman Bodies," In *Modified Living as a Cyborg,* ed. Chris Hables Gray, Heidi J. Figueroa- Sarriera and Steven Mentor. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 62.

[105] James A. Tyner, "The monstrous-feminine, the colonial body, and Dr. Moreau: transhumanism, racial capitalism, and the speculative fiction of motherless birth," *Gender, Place & Culture* (2022): 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2022.2075328

multiple layers of humans' relations to nonhumans. First of all, it presents a conflict between humans and a gigantic brain that is the result of a genetic experiment. Secondly, instead of making a normative human character solve the problem, it is the disabled community that saves the whole planet in the film. To put it simply, *Gandahar* subverts the hierarchy between disabled and non-disabled bodies, and at the same time continues Laloux's tradition of favoring nonhumans in his films.

3.4 The Subversion between Normative and Disabled Bodies in *Gandahar* (1987)

This film is distinct from the other three films I discussed because it focuses on an internal conflict within the same species, after a series of generic experiments for physical transformation. Another crucial difference is the funding level. Laloux considers this film to be the first time when he was able to benefit from truly professional means to make an animated feature film.[106] To reduce the production costs, he worked with a North Korean studio. As a result, he could cut his costs: this film only cost thirteen million francs. Compared to the production cost of *Asterix and*

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[106] Blin, *Les Mondes Fantastiques de René Laloux*, 132.

Obelix vs. Caesar / Astérix & Obélix contre César (1999), which easily reached more than forty million francs,[107] this was a huge economic success.[108]

Gandahar (1987) is a film that empowers disabled characters with the capability to foresee the future and eventually save the whole planet. In *Gandahar*, being disabled means becoming transhuman. The characters obtain a special ability due to their disability, and they transcend the mental and physical limits of normative people. Due to the characteristics of a 2D animation, the flat and inattentive representation of disabled bodies in *Gandahar* enacts the diversification and acceptance of human and nonhuman bodies. In this film, the disabled become the most capable through their language that uses all three tenses – past, present, and future. The disabled in the film obtained their ability after participating in a genetic experiment led by Gandaharians. They are the victims of technology since their bodies were deformed after this experiment, however, it empowered them with an ability to surpass Gandaharians. By presenting disabled bodies as time-transcending heroes, *Gandahar* becomes a transhumanist parable.

Borrowing Alison Kafer's definition of *crip time*, I explain how the disabled bodies in this film were able to deviate from normative time and appreciate slowness to physically and mentally enhance themselves. *Crip time* is flex time not just expanded but exploded; it requires reimagining our notions of what can and should happen in time or recognizing how expectations of "how long

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[107] The original text does not reveal which Astérix series it was; however, according to my research, for example, the budget for *Astérix & Obélix contre César* (1999) was 41.8 million euros. Geoffrey Crété, "Astérix : Tous les chiffres d'une saga chaotique (budgets, box-office, salaires...)," *écranlarge*, Feb 14, 2023, https://www.ecranlarge.com/films/dossier/1466405-asterix-budgets-box-office-salaires-tous-les-chiffres-dune-saga-chaotique (Accessed September 26, 2023)

[108] Ibid., 132.

things take" are based on very particular minds and bodies.[109] By saying this, Kafer emphasized the flexibility of *crip time,* compared to normative time. For instance, for disabled people in reality, it might take some extra time to finish a task, compared to others. This does not necessarily mean that they have to be evaluated under the standards of non-disabled people. It is violent to coerce disabled people to fit themselves into non-*crip time* since their bodies need different notions of temporality in everyday life.

Gandahar starts with peaceful images of Gandahar, a planet where humans and nonhumans live in harmony. However, a strange ray turns the people of Gandahar into petrified statues. The female leaders of the planet order the protagonist, Sylvain, to investigate the incident. During his investigation, he encounters the Deformed, who have been living in a secluded cave due to disabilities caused by the Gandaharians' generic experiments. He also finds out that the petrification was planned by Metamorphis, a gigantic brain, which was also the result of the generic experiment. Metamorphis promises Sylvain that it will annihilate itself after a thousand years, so Sylvain freezes himself in a capsule to wait for a thousand years. However, even after a thousand years, Metamorphis refuses to be eliminated. With the help of the disabled beings, Sylvain manages to kill Metamorphis.

Disabled people in *Gandahar* are living in this *crip time*, and it becomes "normative time" in their world, which also stimulates an ability to foresee the future. The term *crip time* was originally suggested to differentiate it from the standardized time. Nevertheless, for the disabled people in the film, there is no need to call it *crip*. The temporality they recognize does not need

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[109] Alison Kafer, "Time for Disability Studies and a Future for Crips," in *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2013), 27.

any adjective. For instance, one of them tells Sylvain their prophecy, "In a thousand years, Gandahar was destroyed and all of its people killed. A thousand years ago, Gandahar will be saved, and what can't be avoided will be." He adds that they do not know what this prophecy means exactly, but it becomes an important clue for Sylvain to kill Metamorphis. This universality of *crip time* among the deformed in *Gandahar* is a helpful example to show how the deformed are using past-future as their transhumanist ability to transcend time and the limits of their bodies. One can say transhumanism is about expediting the evolutive process and enhancing the bodies; however, *Gandahar* suggests a non-linear way to perceive temporality and slowness that can be caused by certain kinds of disability.

For instance, instead of saying I am (Je suis), they say I was will be (J'étais serai). By letting disabled people use a differentiated tense in their language, Laloux highlights their linguistic prowess. The petrified Gandaharian statues cannot speak, but the deformed can speak, using several tenses at the same time, predicting the fate of Gandaharians. One thing to note is that the deformed omit the present tense when they are speaking. They recognize time by using the past and the future tense at the same time. It seems like the present does not mean anything to them, because their deformed bodies came from the genetic experiments from the past, and their descendants will deplore their ancestors in the future. Their impossibility to embrace their bodies *per se* and forgive Gandaharians is manifestly presented in their language. On the one hand, it can be read as their willingness to escape the present and go back to the time when their bodies were not transformed or to the future when their bodies will be possibly liberated from heredity. In this sense, their differentiated language use can also be interpreted as a time-transcending movement.

Time travel has been a fascinating topic in *crip time* since it enables derailment from the normative, linear concept of temporality. Ellen Samuels, another scholar in disability studies

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claims that *crip time* is time travel. Disability and illness have the power to extract us from linear, progressive time with its normative life stages and cast us into a wormhole of backward and forward acceleration, jerky stops and starts, tedious intervals and abrupt endings.[110] To go a little further with her idea, the transhumanist belief that the transcendence of human bodies will bring improvement and better future for us, empowers the disabled bodies in *Gandahar*. For example, the original name of the deformed in French is "Les transformés (the transformed). One of the disabled people is upset because the people of Gandahar call them "Les malformés (the badly formed," not "les transformés.") Their original French name already implies that they are the beings who transcended the border of humans, by compulsion. Due to this bodily transformation, the first generation was able to foresee the future.

In fact, science fiction has been closely related to disability studies, in terms of discussion of transformed bodies that suggest an alternative way of living. Katie Ellis, a specialist in disability and new media studies, explains the similarities between disability studies and science fiction.

> Disability studies reflect long-standing traditions of the science fiction genre as it explores the future possibilities of the human body in an environment constantly changed by humans. Both disability studies and science fiction are concerned with physical difference, body modification, environmental adaptation, medical research and notions of technological transcendence.[111]

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[110] Ellen Samuels, "Six Ways of Looking at Crip Time," *Disability Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (2017): https://dsq-sds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/5824/4684

[111] Katie Ellis, "Spaces of Cultural Meditation: The Science Fiction Cinema of the Third Stage of Disability," In *Disability and Popular Culture: Focusing Passion, Creating Community and Expressing Defiance*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2015), 64.

I agree with Ellis that both disability studies and science fiction focus on the physicality of human bodies. Her explanation of their common ground is also applicable to the description of transhumanism. However, *Gandahar* distinguishes itself from typical science fiction films about disabled bodies, by using *crip time* as a superpower that empowers disabled people. The disabled bodies in the film are not just bodies that are changed by humans; they are also the bodies that save the whole planet. It is not rare to see disabled bodies in science fiction; however, this film makes the non-disabled people the disabled, because they are petrified into statues by Men of Metal. The non-disabled people lose mobility for being normative. The disabled characters avoid the attack since they live in the cave.

This isolation of disabled bodies is not a rare situation in cinema. Martin F. Norden, a specialist in communication studies argues that most movies have tended to isolate disabled characters from their able-bodied peers as well as from each other.[112] Expanding from Norden's argument on disabled characters, this isolation in fact emphasizes their presence and competence in *Gandahar*. The disabled characters are isolated within the plot, but their presence is the most prominent to the audience. By positioning them in an isolated space that caused Sylvain, the non-disabled character to look for them, the disabled people in *Gandahar* are no longer simply the *isolated*, but the *sage in the cave*. Laloux challenges dominant representations of disability, by not hiding nor beautifying disabilities. He finds potential in them, and with his imagination, he portrays them as the most reliable and as having competitive abilities that can save the world.

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[112] Martin F. Norden. "Introduction: Politics, Movies and Physical Disability," in *The Cinema of Isolation: A History of Physical Disability in the Movies*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 1.

In *Gandahar,* a statue is a source of organic energy. To provide nourishment for Metamorphis, a gigantic brain that desires to have eternal life, the Men of Metal petrify Gandaharians into statues. These organic statues consistently energize Metamorphis, thereby making him invincible and ageless. Statues in this film are completely organic – they can even become Gandaharians again, which means the transition between organic and nonorganic forms is fluid. I argue that the statues anchor the film's exploration of transhumanist ideas. In his films, statues contain biopower which facilitates transhumanist progress. In *Fantastic Planet*, the Draags do not need to have physical intercourse in order to reproduce. In *Gandahar*, statues become a powerful tool to pause and preserve cinematic time, energy, movements, and organisms. The captured biopower in the statues realize *physical*, *cognitive,* and *emotive* adaptation that I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter.[113]

Statues in *Fantastic Planet*, are also used as a crucial medium to restore biopower. In Gandahar, the petrified human bodies store energy in them, so Metamorphis can absorb them for its immortality. In *Fantastic Planet*, they are essential elements for the Draags' reproduction. Although the Draags are highly advanced beings in *Fantastic Planet*, they still rely on "statues" as reproductive vessels. Statues might seem far removed from advanced technology, such as robots, artificial intelligence, or cyborgs. Instead, one might think of statues made in stone or bronze, closely associated with classics, since sculpture is regarded as the early form of art. Nevertheless, Laloux has been consistently describing statues as an intermediary that carries the most advanced technology in his films.

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[113] David M. Lyreskog and Alex McKeown, "On the (Non-) Rationality of Human Enhancement and Transhumanism," *Science and Engineering Ethics* 28, no. 6 (2022): 3.

Laloux's understanding and description of disability in his films were pioneering considering their era, because the links between transhumanism and disabilities are not well recognized in academic or public discourse. Melinda Hall, who specializes in bio-medical ethics and continental philosophy, explains that transhumanists have claimed persons with disabilities as part of their movement and have described themselves as allies in the fight for disability rights.[114] However, not all agree with this position. Transhumanist thinker Julian Savulescu argues that "eugenic" genetic selection is the best way to achieve human enhancement—for him, it is superior to genetic engineering.[115] Likewise, bioethicist Adrienne Asch critiques negative genetic selection by claiming that selecting against traits deemed characteristic of already-existing persons with disabilities is deeply stigmatizing and sends a hurtful message to those in the disability community.[116] Despite the risk of eugenics and genetic selection, transhumanists could find allies among disability advocates. Such a coalition would not only mean employing technology for physical enhancement but also using technology for *cognitive* and *emotive* enhancement. For example, Nick Bostrom, a philosopher with a background in computational neuroscience and artificial intelligence, emphasizes that a posthuman emotional capacity[117] would be one which is much more excellent than that which any current human could achieve unaided by new

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[114] Melinda Hall, "Choosing, for Choice's Sake: A Case Study," in *The Bioethics of Enhancement: Transhumanism, Disability, and Biopolitics* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017), 106.

[115] Ibid., 88.

[116] Ibid., 91.

[117] Here, Bostrom chooses the word 'posthuman'; however, in this context, it is not preposterous to interchangeably use transhuman and posthuman. See my Introduction regarding this use.

technology.[118] Animation can serve a medium to imagine such transformations for disabled characters because of the form's fluid relationship to reality.

Slava Greenberg, an interdisciplinary scholar working in animation and disability studies, believes that certain types of animation can stimulate the discussion of disability. He argues that Adam Elliot, the acclaimed Australian animator, uses clayographies for disorienting the past and cripping the future by criticizing the marginalization of people with disabilities.[119] With clay, the substance that enables smoother, softer lines, Elliot's works suggest a different understanding of time for marginalized people. According to Greenberg, the black-and-white, stop-motion claymation evokes our recognition of bodies as susceptible and disabled. Likewise, the flat and inattentive description of the bodies of the deformed in *Gandahar* engages with the diversification and acceptance of human and nonhuman bodies. Laloux does not look at the deformed bodies sympathetically. They loathed Gandaharians for abandoning them at first, but they just kept striving to survive. Unlike the claymation of Elliot, the visual texture of the characters in *Gandahar* does not call much attention to itself. The images are rather flat and dull, and the deformed bodies are inattentively described. The surplus heads are attached around the neck like accessories, and multiple arms hang limply over the torso.

Nevertheless, these sketchy illustrations in the film have a positive effect on representations of disability. Van Norris, a researcher specializing in British and American animation history and

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[118] Nick Bostrom, "Why I Want to be a Posthuman," in The *Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on the Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future,* ed. Max More and Natasha Vita-More (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 37.

[119] Slava Greenberg, "Disorienting the Past, Cripping the Future in Adam Elliot's Claymation," *Animation* 12, no. 2 (2017): 107.

theory, cites John Callahan's Media World production *Quads!* (2001) and Matt Parker and Trey Stone's Comedy Central program, *South Park* (1997–to date) as some examples. He argues that the removal from a naturalistic design sense cushions the viewer and creates a buffer between representation and offence.[120] By employing animation as a form to describe the disability in an uninterested manner, transformed bodies do not always mean weakness, specialty, or delay. Different bodies have existed in the world of *Gandahar* like indifferent backgrounds.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed how animation in René Laloux's films can be a key medium through which to explore questions of transhumanism. In terms of adaptation, Laloux involves disabled and nonhuman entities as its pioneers. In his films, the normative human characters are just followers or minor roles, accentuating the subversion between humans/nonhumans, and the disabled/non-disabled. He deploys and uses non-normative bodies – such as gigantic snails, extraterrestrials, and deformed to realize physical adaptation and substantiate transhumanist values through a format of animation. At the same time, his films demonstrate how fragile and helpless human bodies are in front of a different civilization or species. In *The Snails*, by offering the farmer the ability to grow bigger crops with his tears, this adaptation becomes a rightful expectation, making those without the ability disabled people. The advent of new technologies consistently

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[120] Van Norris, "Taking an Appropriate Line: Exploring Representations of Disability within British Mainstream Animation," in *The Animation Studies Reader,* ed. Nichola Dobson, Annabelle Honess Roe, Amy Ratelle, and Caroline Ruddell (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2018), 314.

challenges the definition of disability, driving the natural, untransformed bodies as the disabled. Human bodies, precarious and easily disposable like paper stickers, are peeled off from the shots, and this was possible because of the watercolor and pen-ink drawing that Laloux and Topor chose. In this sense, human bodies *per se* are understood as disabled bodies, because they cannot survive without help from nonhuman characters. Moreover, by letting mentally disabled patients make the artistic and narrative decisions of filmmaking, Laloux makes viewers redefine disability. Instead of presenting robots or the results of high-technology reproduction, this film chooses statues as bodies of surrogacy. Among his films, *Gandahar* is one of the most distinctive cases because it demonstrates how disabled bodies can be the most transhumanist version of humans, by linguistic excellence and a different perception of temporality. Another French filmmaker whom I consider a possible inheritor of Laloux's transhumanist view on humans is Jean-Pierre Jeunet. Through multiple genres – romance, horror, cult, animation, science fiction, and fantasy, Jeunet foregrounds how incompetent and fragile human bodies are in the age of transhumanism. In the next chapter, I discuss how animality studies and transhumanism can be used to interpret the films of Jeunet.

4.0 Confused Robots and Incompetent Humans in the Films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet

In a fictional 2045, human beings are finally liberated from house chores. Instead of humans, a household robot grates hard cheese with its sturdy robot arm. Her finger is attached to a whisk, and she can serve grilled crickets right away.[121] However, sometimes she will automatically advertise coffee products when you order some tea from her. A gigantic floating advertising screen visits each house, encouraging purchases based on personal needs.[122] If you do not pay for your robot eye subscription, the provider company might extract your eyeballs. Other than some possible deprivation of your privacy and freedom of body, this futuristic society offers endless convenience and unlimited accessibility of goods, provided you pay.

This brief summary describes the social background in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's film, *Bigbug* (2022). Jeunet presents *assemblages*[123] of media, machines, and animals[124] to suggest a new definition of human. In *Bigbug*, our bodies are already an *assemblage* of media, nonhuman substances, and even animal bodies. Therefore, in his diegesis, it is meaningless to strictly distinguish humans from other species, such as robots, artificial intelligence, and animals.

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[121] In fact, her features share some similarities with "Rosie the Robotic Handmaid" from the 1960s TV series, *The Jetsons.* The biggest difference between them is that instead of having a robotic face, Monique has a human face, played by Claude Perron.

[122] Indeed, this situation is not too different from Meta or Instagram inserting advertisements on each user's main page. In the film, the advertisements are more explicit and physical since they pop up in front of one's private space.

[123] See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, "Introduction," in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 3-25.

[124] Steen Christiansen, "Terminal Films," *Journal of the fantastic in the arts* 25, no. 91 (2014): 264.

Moreover, with a little bit of humor, he puts the human characters in the lowest position of the social hierarchy. They seem secondary to the advertisements and subscriptions that continuously play on outdoor screens via the bodies of home robots, computers, and televisions. In Jeunet's world, human beings no longer have self-determination. They have to accept technologies and substances into their bodies if artificial intelligence recommends them, and they must buy certain products even if they don't want to. For example, with a subscription service or a purchase, humans can easily enhance their physical capability, such as vision. Instead of worshipping these transhumanist achievements, Jeunet portrayed them as comical and sometimes even pathetic. In his films, these transhumans or nonhuman characters are not defined by otherness. They are just struggling, funny beings, who would do anything to survive and not die. This ridicule of transhumanist bodies matters, especially in the context of alleviating repulsion against them. Modified bodies are one natural outcome of basic human desire, wanting to adapt to an abrupt, rapidly changing climate of society, nature, and culture. Rather than portray them as uncanny or horrific creatures, Jeunet just describes them as funny and desperate people.

For instance, at the beginning of *Bigbug*, the characters talk about their neighbor who went blind due to an artificial eye subscription. Their neighbor, Igor, originally subscribed to a service called "HawkEyez." With this service, his visual field increased by forty degrees, as well as enhanced night vision and color identification. Nevertheless, six months later, his eye prostheses were taken back, along with his biological eyeballs, when he missed his installment payments. It is a tragic incident, however, almost every human character in this film lacks self-determination and freedom of their bodies, once they are determined as "bankrupt" by the group of humanoids, Yonyx. Instead of making these situations very serious and criticizing the nonhuman antagonists, the film rather chooses to jest about such tragedies. In *Bigbug*, human characters are stranded in

their own houses because they are not capable of controlling the house without relying on artificial intelligence.

Unlike the films of two directors I analyzed earlier, Georges Méliès and René Laloux, Jeunet's viewpoint on human bodies is different. While Laloux is not interested in celebrating his characters but rather shows that human bodies are doomed and ill-fated, Jeunet believes that humans can at least laugh off their difficulties and continue living. Humor is a part of Jeunet's optimism about the future of humanity, and it serves to make transhumanism more accessible to a majority of people. As I explained in Chapter One, previous scholarship perceived Méliès's films closer to *remediation*[125] or an extension of theater performance.[126] Rather than making fun of his mutilated, severed, and cloned objects, Méliès focused on reproducing a variety of magic tricks, describing transhumanist bodies as an in-between of fantastic and a technological achievement. Jeunet takes a different tack. He dilutes the adversity of human characters with humorous encounters and interactions with nonhuman characters. This dilution of hardship with humor reduces antagonism against nonhuman characters at the same time.

For instance, *Bigbug* starts with the android-made comedy shows that satirize the animality of human bodies, comparing them to companion dogs. The opening sequence might be a bit uncomfortable for certain viewers. By juxtaposing Yonyx, the androids with house robots who aspire to be human or love human characters sincerely, it enables viewers to laugh about the

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[125] André Gaudreault, "Animated pictures according to Georges Méliès: A sober and unpretentious remediation, or when Méliès took a stand against … the cinema!," in *New Perspectives on Early Cinema History: Concepts, Approaches, Audiences.* ed. Mario Slugan and Daniël Biltereyst. (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), 22.

[126] Mario Slugan, "Introduction," in *Fiction and Imagination in Early Cinema: A Philosophical Approach to Film History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 12.

nonhuman characters, or even sympathize with them. When Greg, the sports robot confesses his emotion toward Françoise, the human owner, thereby revealing their physical intimacy in front of everyone, one can realize that Jeunet is not trying to present nonhuman beings with a coherent perspective. Just like human beings, it is impossible to define all of the nonhuman characters with a few words. Some want to exploit human bodies, while others desire to be more like humans. In the world of Jeunet, nonhuman characters are not just simple machines, but their interests are even more complicated than those of humans.

Bigbug is the latest example of a long-running concern with nonhuman bodies in Jeunet's work. After his first feature film, *Delicatessen* (1991) was a huge success, Jeunet has been consistently directing films on the theme of violated, transcended, or transformed bodies that focus on transhumanism and nonhuman such as *The City of Lost Children* and *Alien Resurrection* (1997). The nonhuman creatures and their interaction with human characters have been his main theme since the 1990s. He centers his films on nonhuman beings who are also the result of bodily separation and adaptation. For instance, in *The City of Lost Children*, it is Irvin, the separated brain in a vat that has the most knowledge and wisdom. Unlike Metamorphis, which is also the separated brain in Laloux's *Gandahar* (1987), Irvin cooperates with other nonhuman characters and seeks a way to survive together. In this sense, Irvin is considered more of a posthumanist character than a transhumanist. Transhumanism focuses on more of an individualistic achievement and transformation. It interprets an individual as an entity with the possibility to transcend their limits. On the other side, posthumanism emphasizes ways to co-exist with beings of otherness. In order to do so, bodily modification and transplants are encouraged. These two movements seem similar in the way that they are interested in cyborgs, robots, artificial intelligence, and animal bodies, however, their motivations and intentions are distinct.

The presentation of various nonhuman characters also contributes to posthumanist understandings of the bodies: the co-habitation of different bodies in his films reinterprets definitions of diversity in contemporary society. When one thinks of the word "diversity," in general, it is considered within the range of different human beings. When it comes to "biodiversity," the word usually implies organisms, excluding robots, cyborgs, or artificial intelligence. The creatures made by Jeunet redefine this diversity in a posthumanist manner: organic and nonorganic beings coexist in a contemporary society, and it is important to find a way to blend in with one another.

One way to synthesize organic and nonorganic substances in one's body would be to have transplants or prostheses. The representations of prosthetic bodies throughout his films are also relevant to the separated bodies of Méliès, and also to the domesticated, petrified bodies of Laloux. Elizabeth Ezra also focuses on his technique of prosthesis: Jeunet's films depict the severing of ties with the past and its prosthetic restoration through the medium of film itself and through other media representations.[127] In his films, bodies never remain in the same state as when they were born. They are grafted, regrown, separated, and duplicated. However, this severing of bodies is conducted in a rather witty and delightful manner, as compared to the films of New French Extremity. Some of Jeunet's films are contemporaneous with NFE and include images of cannibalism, violence, (*Delicatessen*, 1991), fanaticism, and severed bodies (*The City of Lost Children*, 1995). Nevertheless, they only share similar concepts, and the tone is completely different. While the scenes of excessive violation and violence sometimes cause unpleasant feelings for certain viewers – the moments of peeling one's skin in *In My Skin* (2002) or continued,

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[127] Ibid., 10.

intolerable torture in *Martyrs* (2008) – the adaptation of bodies in Jeunet's films provide visual pleasure and laughter. For example, the bodies of animals in *Deux escargots s'en vont*/*Two Snails Set Off* (2017), a short animated film made in collaboration with Romain Segaud, are prosthetic bodies: they are combined with plant bodies, such as acorns and leaves. These creatures *look* adorable; it is difficult to link these plant bodies to those of horror and gore. However, their physical construction provides us room to discuss the continuous transformation of the nonhuman and human bodies that interchangeably oscillate in Jeunet's films.

In this chapter, I engage with four films by Jeunet: *Big Bug* (2022), *Two Snails Set Off* (2017), *Delicatessen* (1991), and *The City of Lost Children* (1995). I begin with his most recent film, *Bigbug* since it discusses transhumanism directly through contemporary topics such as artificial intelligence and robots. By mixing traits of plants, animals, and nonhumans (robots and artificial intelligence) in one character, he prioritizes non-normative bodies over human characters. By doing so, one can understand the term diversity in a more expanded manner. Being diverse does not only mean racial diversity, but it also means being diverse species-wise, transcending the categories of human/animal, and including nonhuman/nonorganic.

First, I begin with *Bigbug*, which visualizes a future space where humans and nonhumans live in symbiosis, thereby emphasizing human incompetence. Then, I move on to *Two Snails Set Off,* a short-animated film that can be interpreted from a new perspective – prosthetics between animal and plant bodies. Instead of comparing human bodies to those of nonhumans, this film creates a new being of adaptability, which contains characteristics of plants and animals. Unlike Laloux, where redefining the human via the nonhuman was so important, in this chapter, animality, adaptability, and humor are the key concepts. By adaptability, I mean an ability to willingly give up a part of one's body, and then accept foreign, artificial substances in order to redefine or change

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one's identity. In fact, Jeunet has been continuously working on the hybridized borders between humans, animals, and plants. *Two Snails Set Off* focuses on the interrelationship between animals, and plants, but in *Delicatessen* (1991), he explores a situation when humans become animal meat, and people are consumed by each other like Ouroboros.

Jeunet has been exploring the relationships between human and animal bodies by showing them being influenced by each other. Traditionally, bodies that have been hybridized, considered nonhuman, or declared as limited were usually understood as an object of transformation rather than its subject in media. Also, they have been described as beings who suffer from a complex, an obsession, or anger. David Cronenberg's *The Fly* (1986) is one of the most representative examples: a man combined with the body of a fly falls into despair and loses everything he had. I discuss later in Chapter Four how Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915) is another excellent example to show how a man's life turns into a surrealist nightmare after turning into a big bug.

Nevertheless, what Jeunet attempts to achieve through his films is slightly different from these works. Jeunet does not describe those adapted, animal bodies as detestable or repugnant. Instead of isolating and discriminating nonhuman bodies, for instance, *Bigbug*, shows nonhuman characters endeavoring to assimilate with humans. To do so, they practice certain jokes and try to mimic the facial expressions of humans. In other words, physical and emotive adaptation is not exclusive to human bodies; in his films, animals, extraterrestrials, cyborgs, robots, and artificial intelligence transcend their limits too. Using his imagination, he creates a world where mutated animals are just accepted as per se and is a boundary between humans and nonhumans is irrelevant. In the world of Jeunet, how one is human, or nonhuman does not matter much. Regardless of their identity, almost every character goes through a blending between various species and genders. By creating a series of characters that are the in-between of humans and nonhumans, Jeunet actively

deconstructs their boundaries of species with laughter. Beginning with Jeunet's most recent film, I demonstrate how Jeunet blurs the borders between nonhumans and humans, with his wild imagination about the future.

4.1 *Bigbug* (2022): Am I a Robot Dreaming of a Human? Or a Human Dreaming of a Robot?

The film starts with the television show "Homo Ridiculus," where two human beings are on a leash, and it is Yonyx, the A.I. android who is controlling them. The year is 2045, and artificial intelligence entirely takes care of households. A group of people are locked in a house, because their house management system, Nestor, judged that the outside was too dangerous for them. Alice, Max, Leo, and Jennifer try everything they can do, but they can never leave the house. Meanwhile, the domestic robots in the house – Monique, Einstein, and Tom – try to find a way to become human. While they struggle to learn human emotions such as humor, Jennifer, Leo's girlfriend contacts Yonyx, so they can escape from the house. Yonyx arrives, however, he destroys printed books in the house and collects the memory chips of the domestic robots for trying to be human. With the collaboration between the humans and the remaining robots, Yonyx is destroyed and the rest of the androids also self-destruct, due to a system error. Originally, they were planning to exterminate the human species with their anti-terrorism drones, however, because of a mistake, they designate themselves as hostile targets. The family regains peace, and Monique's body, combined with Einstein's head, kindly suggests having coffee and snacks.

At the end of the film, Yonyx is destructed with their own hands; nevertheless, Jeunet's film highlights human incompetence through a satire of a highly developed society. A case in point

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that demonstrates his intention is a story shared in *Bigbug*. Léo, Max's son, tells the story of Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi's dream to the robots. He uses the story to distract them, so the other characters can start a fire in the house, however, in a broader context, this story also resonates with the theme of this film. Through a consistent blur between humans and nonhumans, the film asks us a question about the definition of human. Are we robots dreaming of humans? Or are we humans dreaming of humans?[128]

> One night, a man named Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly. After happily fluttering over the flowers, he awoke prey to doubt. Am I a man who just dreamed he was a butterfly? Or a butterfly dreaming he's a man? … Therefore, you are humans dreaming that you are robots.

By referring to Zhuangzi's story, Jeunet reinforces an insinuation about the border between humans and animals. Whether butterflies can be humans and humans can be butterflies is not the appropriate question in this film. Rather, whether robots can be humans is more of a central topic: the home robots in *Bigbug* desire to be humans and try to become one by mimicking their behaviors, just as anthropologists observe peoples and cultures different from them. While the human characters' only goal is to escape the house, the robot characters fully use this opportunity to study and analyze human bodies, as an extension of their research.

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[128] These questions were continuously asked in the novels of Philip K. Dick, such as Paycheck (1953), *We Can Remember It For You Wholesale* (1966), and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Questions such as "Who am I?", "Is this true?", or "Am I really myself?" are frequently used in many SF films and TV shows these days, but Philip Dick was a pioneer in this genre. It will be a promising project to trace him and other science fiction writers' influence in contemporary French cinema.

Bigbug legitimizes the domestic robots as beings who have a right to explore their own bodies. Moreover, rather than simplifying them as "good robots," Jeunet puts up Yonyx, the A.I. androids as antagonists who ridicule human bodies. Yonyx's role is different from that of housekeeping robots such as Einstein and Monique. By making housekeeping robots go against Yonyx, the film shows them as loyal, reliable friends because they also want to be human. While Einstein has gained more mobility and accessibility, human bodies in the film are locked and controlled. In other words, the mobility of human bodies is decreased ironically due to the development of technology. Although Einstein is considered "a robot from the old times,"[129] he is the only character who was physically enhanced. Before the union, he could be carried easily because he only had a head and a partial shoulder. Also, he was able to attach his head anywhere, such as to Monique's body. The head and shoulder of Einstein, combined with Monique's body is the most advanced body in *Big Bug*. This at the same time resembles the physical adaptation, due to the development of technology, eventually dreamed of by transhumanists. The appearance of Monique+Einstein resonates with the theme of the film: in the world of *Bigbug*, humans might lose mobility and non-humans might gain it.

This dark joke regarding human bodies trapped in limited space shines when Einstein makes a joke about COVID. He says, "The new COVID-virus has dropped. COVID-50. Universal lockdown for at least three months has been decreed." Victor cries in despair, "You promised me in the name of human solidarity!" The mentioning of COVID in the film not only fosters empathy

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[129] When the characters first encounter him, one of them asks if he is from a yard sale, then Victor replies, "I work in smart prosthetics, but my hobby is old-school mecano". It is also fascinating that Victor works in prosthetics – he is an assembler of body parts in modern days.

of the audience but effectively raises a question on human mobility and adaptation in the era of high technology. Through COVID-19, we have witnessed a dismantling of the very boundaries between home and work by relegating many workers and teachers to their home offices, thus profoundly unsettling conventional boundaries.[130] As well as presenting the hybridized bodies, *Bigbug* adds complexity to this blurred boundary between different places of everyday life, through the presentations of robots for home use.

The blurred boundaries within confined space function as a crucial factor in this film, because Jeunet shows incompetent human bodies that cannot adjust themselves to extreme weather in the house. Due to the malfunctioning of the air conditioning system, the house goes through a severe winter and summer in a short period. This unfolding of the narrative reminds viewers of rapid climate change. *Big Bug* can also be a contemporary parable that postulates personal space as our world, and with a wrecked world climate system, human beings struggle. Again, the only beings who can survive this harsh, radical weather are the robots, and they help out human beings by distributing warm blankets or cooperating with their plans to attack the Yonyx.

The secluded setting in the films of Jeunet enables and reinforces an organic, linked relationship between human characters, making them seem like one collective that requires consistent communication. In his films, bodies live in confined spaces. For example, in *Bigbug*, it is the moving billboards that visit the houses, not the other way around. A similar setting of exhibiting confining bodies in limited space is also presented in his other films, such as *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children.* The characters either cannot leave the house during

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[130] Irene Gammel and Jason Wang, "Introduction," in *Creative Resilience and COVID-19,* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 5.

the whole film (*Delicatessen*),[131] or live in the middle of the ocean, refusing any contact from the outside world (*The City of Lost Children*).

People are living in a space where time is now organized according to imperceptible fragmentations of the technical time span.[132] Bodies do not have to travel because they are connected to each other by technologies. This description of "ubiquitous bodies" is a bit different from our bodies in reality, since in the film, rapid technological advances interfere with physical travel. In other words, *Bigbug* portrays a society where an individual has no choice but to be vested in the flow of inordinate information. By being confined in the limited space, the characters also end up sharing personal information about each other, and each individual's originality is thoroughly ignored by Yonyx. Ironically, the collective group is recognized as a whole human body to him. By making the human characters mimic animals or go through ideological verifications, Yonyx tries to solidify the hierarchy between themselves and humans. According to Yonyx, humans are inferior to themselves, and they make fun of the animality that humans contain. Because they always belong to their designated space, it becomes almost impossible to imagine the characters outside that space. For instance, at the beginning of *Bigbug,* there are several attempts made by the characters, to escape the house. Françoise, one of the trapped humans tries to use her dog to open the door, and Victor, Alice's ex-husband dashes his car into the house. The house in this film is not just a background; it functions as a critical plot device that interacts with the characters.

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[131] Even after the protagonists succeed in surviving in the end, instead of leaving the house where cannibalism is allowed, Louison and Julie play instruments on the roof.

[132] Paul Virilo, "The Overexposed City," in *The Blackwell City Reader*, ed. G. Bridge and S. Watson (Hoboken: Blackwell Publishing, 2022), 444.

Therefore, one can say that this house functions as a landscape, not a setting. A landscape is more than just a setting; it is a complex idea, expressing the link between human beings and their context, and has a cultural and subjective dimension. [133] Because the human characters are locked in this house, they are forced to interact with house robots more intimately than before. As they adjust their bodies to this newly established landscape, that is, where they cannot leave the house for a vacation to "Isola Paradiso,"[134] a clear border between the house and outside is created. However, it is a border that the characters cannot easily admit. Alice, the homeowner's house has a huge glass door, enabling the characters to clearly see outside. To them, it seems like they can easily break the glass or open the door, but they fail to do so until the very end of the film. This "transparent" border that defines *Bigbug*'s landscape is differentiated from other dystopian films, such as *High Rise* (2015) or *Snowpiercer* (2013), in which landscape is divided vertically or horizontally. *Bigbug*'s transparent but completely inaccessible border stimulates the characters to adapt to their new environment effectively because otherwise, they would have to die.

The impossibility and unnecessity of bodies traveling in space are also connected with the idea of *terminal films* that Christiansen suggested. The film shows a situation where human bodies have to modify themselves because of an abrupt technological error. That is to say, when the A.I. system, which normally takes care of humans' everyday needs is impaired, humans are at a loss

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[133] Elena dell'Agnese, "Dystopian Settings and Posthuman landscapes," in *Ecocritical Geopolitics: Popular Culture and Environmental Discourse,* (London: Routledge, 2021), 78.

[134] Isola Paradiso is described as an artificial island, constructed for vacation. According to the promotional video clip that Jennifer, Victor's new partner played, it is equipped with distilled water pools, hypoallergenic beaches, adjustable microclimate, and anti-UV sunshine. Compared to the house where they are locked in due to the severe control of Nestor, the smart home system, this place surely looks like a "paradise."

since they are not used to life without A.I. Because of this dependence, human bodies lose freedom of movement instead of expanding it. Some viewers may identify themselves with the confined characters because of Covid-19 that they had to experience a few years ago. The cinematic space in the film parallels the viewers' space in reality; there used to be a time when education had to happen almost one hundred percent virtually. Students could take their classes in their beds, and teachers could give a lecture in their own vehicle. The advent of virtual classrooms and workplaces provided increased accessibility for some people. Spatial confinement drives transhumanist modification because human beings in that space have to come up with alternative methods to reconnect with their lifestyles before confinement, within limited space and possibly limited resources.

There is a moment that demonstrates the absurdity of A.I. enhancement, which reduces the quality of human life. When the characters try to turn on the air conditioner, Yonyx, the android refuses their request, explaining that under the new eco-law, turning up the AC or heating requires ministerial approval. Under one single condition, Yonyx allows their usage of the AC: the human characters have to be on the show "Homo Ridiculus." For the show, Yonyx makes them mimic animals such as a bear, a snake, a seal, an elephant, and a dog. Through this show, Yonyx attempts to prove that human beings are inferior to them, and not too different from the animals. In another episode of "Homo Ridiculus," Yonyx eats foie gras made out of human flesh. In the diegesis of *Bigbug*, human bodies are being ridiculed and belittled for being imperfect and inefficient. Yonyx despises and bans the acquisition of a certain number of books. To them, the artifacts that were born before their birth are taboos and obstacles of their world.

After finding numerous books in her library, Yonyx decides to test Alice's level of inaptitude to the emerging society. He asks questions such as "What is the greatest human

invention?" and "Do you agree that humans are optional?" Alice manages to answer "Artificial Intelligence" to the first question, however, she argues that humans are original because they are deeply flawed. The twofold meaning of the title *Bigbug* derives from this dialogue. There was a "Big bug" in the house management system, so, the humans were locked in the house. Nevertheless, from Yonyx's point of view, humans are the "Big bug" since they are causing problems and errors in an impeccable society of robots. Yonyx also clarifies that even though humans created A.I., it was A.I. who gave birth to them, not the humans. If we can be a "Big Bug" to artificial intelligence, what about our relationship with plants and animals? Were they also "Big Bugs" in our society? Or is it the other way around? Of course, the situation that Alice had to go through does not seem funny. Rather, it is closer to our pessimistic imaginings of the dystopian future people might encounter after accepting artificial intelligence in their everyday lives. Nevertheless, *Bigbug* tries to discuss these "what if" situations in a comical tone. By showing house robots roaming and struggling at the same time in the house under the control of Yonyx, it tells the viewers that humans are not the only possible "Big bug" in contemporary society.

Instead of comparing animals to humans, the androids identify humans with animals, reducing humans to simply one type of animal rather than a separate category of existence. To Yonyx, humans are not too different from a species to be exterminated like vermin or weeds.[135] In order to survive, human beings in this film have to heavily rely on each other, like a herd of cattle.

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[135] Their perspective on humans is very similar to how Draags (gigantic blue humanoids) interpret Oms (humans) in *Fantastic Planet* (1973). One can say that the subverted hierarchy between humans and nonhumans is one of the common themes in science fiction. The difference between René Laloux and Jean-Pierre Jeunet would be their endings. In *Bigbug*, Yonyx is destroyed at the end, by their own mistake. In *Fantastic Planet,* Draags and Oms find a solution to co-exist.

In this extreme situation when they cannot control anything in their own house, such as temperature change or communicate with the exterior world, the characters have to be creative to cope with the problems. For example, to avoid Yonyx's thermal sensor, the human characters wear frozen clothes and attack them. This method was not based on high technology, but they were able to change their body temperature, which can also be understood as bodily modification.

The film broadly dealt with animality: humans and animals are not too different from each other, from the perspective of androids. By bluntly dividing two groups – organics and non-organics, Yonyx claims that they are "the future of humanity." In their propaganda broadcast, they narrate, "Unlike human workers, Yonyx needs neither food nor drink. Human soldiers are vulnerable to extreme temperatures. Yonyx is the future of humanity!" To them, they are the humans and the biological humans are nonhumans. I further investigate the interrelations between humans, animals, and even plants before going back to Yonyx's argument. In his three-minute animation, *Two Snails Set Off* (2017) which was a collaboration with Romain Segaud, Jeunet explores the hybrid bodies between animals and plants. After carefully studying those characters that can never be solely defined as animals or plants, then, I look at other examples where he has been consistently questioning the boundary of human bodies.

4.2 The Bodies of Animality and Vegetability in *Two Snails Set Off* (2017)

Based on the poem by Jacques Prévert, "Chanson des escargots qui vont à l'enterrement" (Song of the Snails on their Way to a Funeral), this film is about two snails going to the funeral of a dead leaf. Since the snails are too slow, it always becomes spring when they finally arrive at a funeral. This film was a collaboration between Jeunet and Romain Segaud, an animator previously

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participated in the production of films such as *Astérix - Le Domaine des Dieux/Asterix: The Mansions of the Gods* (2014) and *Micmacs* (2009). In *Two Snails Set Off*, there are multiple animal characters, narrating the poem line by line. Famous French actors, actresses, and directors such as Mathieu Kassovitz, Dominique Pinon, and Audrey Tautou participated in the voice acting, offering the pleasure of recognition to French cinema fans.

Instead of entirely comprising the bodies of these animals with feathers and flesh, Segaud and Jeunet mix leaves and branches with their body parts. This combination of animal bodies and plants contributes to a transhumanist discussion because this hybridization of bodies suggests a new perspective on synthetic implants. When we think of artificial body parts, we imagine bones in metal or skin made out of silicon, collagen, or gelatin. We would not believe that we can have artificial skin made with leaves, or bones from wood. Although wooden prostheses have been used until recently, these days, prostheses with advanced technology are available. There is a contemporary image of prostheses: it has to be sturdy, pliable, and powerful. However, the hybrid animal body parts in *Two Snails Set Off* seem fragile and light. Because of the images such as acorn-eyes and bark-skin, it looks like those bodies can be crushed with a foot. Their frail, flimsy bodies also arouse protective instincts in the audience. How lovely those hybrid animals are!

The flimsiness of plant bodies parallels the fragility of human bodies, frequently described in the films of Jeunet and Laloux. These two directors do not hesitate to illustrate human bodies as helpless, delicate, and frail. Laloux already presented humans as beings who cannot survive without nonhumans (*Monkey's Teeth*, *Fantastic Planet*, *Gandahar*), and Jeunet portrays human bodies confined in a limited space, in a great quandary (*Delicatessen*, *Bigbug*). In this film, instead of showing perplexed humans, he depicts a variety of animal-plant bodies, celebrating their diversity and pliability, instead of relying on other creatures. These beings are not necessarily the

object of horror for humans, however, it strangely contrasts with human bodies that sometimes consider fusion and adaptation alien and dreadful events. The human characters in Jeunet's other films are afraid to admit or reveal their weakness. Therefore, they will attach mechanical gadgets to their bodies (*The City of Lost Children*, *Bigbug*), while the animal-plants in *Two Snails Set Off* take pleasure in their adapted bodies per se, regardless of their physical capabilities.

There is also a need to take a look at the poem, "Song of the Snails on their Way to a Funeral," originally written by Jacques Prévert. In 1946, Prévert published his first anthology of poems, titled *Paroles*. "Song of the Snails" was not selected when the English-translated version of the anthology was published in 1958. The poem sings about the circulation of plant lives and the two snails' celebration of life. The poem begins as the following:

For a dead leaf's funeral

Two snails set off

They've blacked up their shells

Put black bands on their horns

They set off in the evening

A lovely autumn eve

Alas when they arrive

Spring has already come

The leaves, which were dead

Have all come back to life[136]

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[136] For the English translation, I referred to the subtitles attached to the film.

The leaves are resurrected in this poem, and this revival nullifies the efforts of two snails, trying to attend a funeral. We know that it is the provision of nature that the leaves wither and come back to life, however, from the viewpoint of the snails, it can be as scary as zombies brought back to life. In the original poem, the narrator says that the two snails are very downhearted. Then, the sun advises them to enjoy the moment – such as having a glass of beer, traveling to Paris, and taking back their colors of life. The poem ends with a scene when everyone raises their glass, and the snails come back home, heavily drunken.

Considering the content of a poem, one can read the poem from the perspective of anthropomorphism. "Anthropomorphism" is the word used to describe the belief that animals are essentially like humans, and it is usually applied as a term of approach, both intellectual and moral.[137] A key assumption in charges against anthropomorphism is that seeing animals as human in significant ways would lead to granting animals human value, which would compromise the value of the human.[138] Nevertheless, *Two Snails Set Off* is not a film that aims to understand their relationship with humans, nor identifying animals with humans. First of all, it is ambivalent to define the characters as plants or animals. Instead of stipulating their identity, the film focuses on

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[137] Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, "Introduction: The How and Why of Thinking with Animals," in *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism,* ed. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005): 2.

[138] Nina Varsava, "The Problem of Anthropomorphous Animals: Toward a Posthumanist Ethics," *Society & Animals* 22, (2014): 524.

their non-binary characteristics,[139] as well as celebrating *zoē* that Giorgio Agamben distinguished

from *bios*. *Zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals,

men, or gods),[140] does not distinguish animals from humans. By emphasizing their liveliness that

does not necessarily require confirmation of identity, the film refuses anthropomorphism, as well

as blurring the border between different species.

In fact, he has been playing with these in-between and non-binary bodies in the 90s, in *The

City of Lost Children* (1995) and *Delicatessen* (1991). In the former, he presented a series of

transformed characters, who were the result of scientific experiments or have chosen to modify

their bodies with technology. In the latter, human beings decided to consume their own flesh as

their food source. *Two Snails Off* lies in the extension of these presentations – it just escapes the

realm of human bodies. The next two sections retrospectively study Jeunet's exploration of diverse

human bodies, with a focus on *assemblage* and cannibalism.

4.3 The Assembled Bodies of Nightmare in *The City of Lost Children* (1995)

The City of Lost Children, directed by Jeunet and Marc Caro, visualizes a space full of

nightmares, where children are lost, and their dreams are exploited and stolen. In this film, people

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[139] By the term "non-binary," I mean no-fixed species or biological identity. By looking at the appearances of the characters, it is hard to tell whether they are plant or animal, however, it can also mean no-fixed gender or sexual identity, because of their in-betweenness.

[140] Giorgio Agamben, "Introduction," in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 15.

appear and disappear in the cityscape or through the sea or the fog, in an environment that is constantly dark and dank, and set, Caro says, in "a retro-future, a former future."[141] This film is distinguished from Jeunet's films after 2000, because it studies variations of human bodies that have adjusted to different temporalities, instead of focusing on relationships with nonhumans. For example, in this film, Krank is a character who was already born old, due to the failed cloning experiment. He feels a sense of loss for his lost childhood and desperately steals another child's dream to be compensated. On the one hand, the six childish clones, played by Dominique Pinon[142] search for "the original" who has been their forerunner.

The characters in *The City of Lost Children* always aspire to be connected or grafted with other bodies. The characters are a bewildering assemblage of clones and cyborgs and mythical characters.[143] The whole cloned family created by a mad scientist in the film consists of six clones who resemble himself, a wife with dwarfism, a gigantic brain[144] that needs to be in an aquarium, and a bald, smart scientist with progeria who keeps stealing children's dream. In this film, it is not crucial whether one is cloned or genetically modified. Everyone is an *assemblage* of nonhuman characteristics and artificial traits. There are no "pure humans" in the films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet.

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[141] Jen Webb and Tony Schirato, "*Disenchantment and The City of Lost Children*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 13, no.1 (2004): 58.

[142] Just like Julia Ducournau who has been working with Garance Marillier in her three films, Dominique Pinon has starred in many of Jeunet's films, including *Delicatessen* and *Two Snails Set Off* (voice acting).

[143] Ibid., 58.

[144] This gigantic brain certainly reminded me of the brain in *Gandahar* (1987). Also, this brain's voice resembles that of Einstein in *Big Bug* (2022). Although they do not look alike, the separated brain and the head of Einstein represent artificial intelligence, usually more intelligent than human beings in these films.

Instead of focusing on how strange they are, this film endlessly introduces atypical beings, like a parade. By escaping from a perspective that merely regards the characters as the objects of the fantastic, discussions on assemblage enable interpreting this film with posthumanism. Posthumanism encourages people to find ways to respect different beings, instead of prioritizing certain groups. What would you do if there is an extreme situation, such as a lack of food, medical service, or other resources that are indispensable in human lives? Are you going to choose to exploit other species, or decide to co-exist with them? *The City of Lost Children* shows what choices humans make, in order to survive.

In my view, the main focus of posthumanism is to find the interrelations between humans and nonhumans, not to enhance or transform human bodies without considering them. Here, I do not mean that posthumanism is not transformative, but it carefully contemplates the influence on a community, rather than prioritizing an individual's physical and mental need. One can say that transhumanists' logic is more selfish: the "I" comes first before the "we." Considering this different motivation of posthumanism and transhumanism, Jeunet's characters in *The City* can be read as posthuman since they are never independent on their own, but by conducting assemblage with other bodies, at last, they are completed. While many transhumanists' main focus is an individual physical enhancement that can also be understood as "achievement," posthumanists care about coexistence and harmony, which contains more of social or collective orientation. For example, Donna Haraway wrote "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and

Significant Otherness."[145] In the manifesto, she explained that her "Cyborg Manifesto" and "Companion Manifesto" are not too different from each other:

> Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and nonhuman, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways.[146]

To Haraway, the otherness of cyborgs and companion species functions as a nexus to consolidate solidarity between each group, as well as better comprehend each other. Janine Clark, another scholar of posthumanism believes that posthumanism challenges the framing of humans as bounded and autonomous individuals, emphasizing that all of us are entangled within wider relational assemblages that reflect the deep interconnections between human and more-than-human worlds.[147]

The most obvious example of this collectivity that Haraway mentioned in *The City of Lost Children* is the cohabitation of Krank, Irvin, Martha, and six clones. They live in an abandoned oil rig together, secluded from the city where One and Miette live. In a sense, they can be interpreted as the result of *abjection,*[148] and even their creator, the scientist, abhors them and tries to destroy

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[145] Donna Haraway and Cary Wolfe, "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness," in *Manifestly Haraway,* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 91-198.

[146] Ibid., 96.

[147] Janine Natalya Clark, "Harm, Relationality and More-than-Human Worlds: Developing the Field of Transitional Justice in New Posthumanist Directions," *The International Journal of Transitional Justice* 17, (2023): 15.

[148] See Julia Kristeva, "Approaching Abjection," in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-31.

them as a form of revenge, after being attacked by them. Another example in this film is the cyborg cult group, "Cyclops" who sacrifice their biological eyes and ears for the mechanical sensory device. Through this device, the cyborgs can tune in their hearing. Therefore, they can behave as one, gigantic entity.

The film starts with a child's nightmare. The child is in his room, waiting for the Santa Claus. Finally, Santa comes in, through the chimney. However, he is not the only one. His clones keep appearing, touching his toys, looking at him through the window, or even drinking. This nightmare is stolen by Krank, a mad genius who cannot dream, thereby kidnapping children to steal their dreams. While Krank and his cloned family - six clones of the original scientist, their mother, and a brain in an aquarium cooperate to continue kidnapping, One, a person working in a circus searches for his lost brother, Denree. One ends up accompanying Miette, a girl working for the conjoined twins, running a criminal gang. The scientist attempts to destroy his failed inventions. Krank realizes the only boy who can provide him with non-nightmares is Denree and tries to keep him. For One, Miette suggests sacrificing her for Denree, and in the dream, she manages to escape from it with her power of imagination. In the end, everyone succeeds in staying away from the explosion, and the scientist dies lonely.

Like the films of Méliès and Laloux, there are crucial moments of physical transformation and deformation in Jeunet's films. In *The City of Lost Children*, almost every character experienced bodily modification. Irvin, the separated brain without its own body, reminds me of Metamorphis in *Gandahar* (1987), the gigantic brain. The Cyclops, a group of cyborg cult who attached mechanical ears and eyes, choose artificial sensory organs over their natural body parts. Lastly, Krank, Martha, and six clones are the result of the scientist's experiment. It is also possible to compare them to the "transformed," who became disabled after the genetic experiment led by

Gandaharians in *Gandahar*. Moreover, these characters demonstrate how Jeunet is interested in "playing with bodies" like Méliès experimented in his early films. He is not into presenting normative bodies per se. The bodies are altered, deformed, and remodeled before being shown to the audience. In a sense, many of his characters function as participants of a giant circus that was presented in *The City*. In the film, only One (played by Ron Perman)'s job is a circus strongman, but other characters do provide a sense of wonder: none of them is average nor predictable when it comes to controlling and managing their bodies.[149]

Méliès' films are interested in moments of bodily transformation. Jeunet, by contrast, focuses on what happens "after" transformation, as well as the interactions between different characters. For instance, Krank and the six clones look for their "raison d'être" in the plot. Krank, who suffers from progeria, steals children's dreams to supplement his incompetence to dream, while the clones want to believe that one of them is the "original" form of the other clones. Instead of just showing diverse characters, Jeunet describes their anguish and struggles after the transformation, replication, and separation.

In order to better understand their bodies, many characters in the film dedicate themselves to physical and emotional *assemblage*. Dominique Raby, an anthropologist defines assemblage as dynamic collective (multiplicities) of human and nonhuman animals and bodies, bound by the

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[149] In 1932, Tod Browning directed a Hollywood Pre-Code drama titled *Freaks*. The film presents a variety of French circus artists, and most of them are considered disabled. It is not clear whether Jeunet was inspired by this movie, however, there are some overlapping elements in these two movies. In *Freaks* and *The City*, many characters have experience with the French circus, and they have their own autonomous district. For example, the octopus sister in *The City* has their own criminal gang of children, and the circus artists in *Freaks* punish Cleopatra, the femme fatale based on their ethics.

force of affects around central objects (non-agentive artifacts), and possessing collective forms of expression.[150] For instance, the Cyclops, a cult group center around their mechanical device that replaces and enhances their vision and hearing. With the same device, they are united as a group, and their leader addresses, "My brothers, you who have joined me in this struggle, understand that we must fight human beings from their own grounds." The Cyclops are connected through emotional assemblage, but they are also differentiating themselves from the humans in the film. This speech also reminded me of the speech conducted by Men of Metal in René Laloux's *Gandahar* (1987), when their leader insists "The "I" does not exist, I am you, you are us, us are him."

Other villains in this film who rely on *assemblage* are the conjoined twins, named "the octopus", who runs a criminal gang of children. The two women, attached to each other, act, eat, and sleep together. For example, when they cook, one cuts the vegetable, while the other sprinkles salt on it. When they talk to people, they complete a sentence together. When they ask Marcello, their old boss at the circus, to look for One and Miette, one woman says, "A little girl in the red dress", and the other woman finishes the sentence by saying "with a big moron (One)." From this dialogue, we can figure out that they do not just share bodies, but also their consciousness. In fact, the actresses Geneviève Brunet and Odile Mallet, who played the octopus, have separate arms, legs, and heads. They wear a two-piece which is connected by the skirt part. Also, a prosthetic third leg was added to their bodies, so they really looked like the conjoined twins.[151]

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[150] Dominique Raby, "Calling through the water jar: Domestic objects in Nahua emotional assemblages," HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 9, no.3 (2019): 529.

[151] IMDB, "La cité des enfants perdus – Trivia," Accessed September 15, 2023, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0112682/trivia/

At the end of the film, Irvin, the six clones, Martha, Denree, One and Miette leave the scientist behind, whose body is tied to the oil rig that is about to explode. He implores his creatures to help him, yelling "Come back! It's me! Your creator! I made you! I gave you life!" Ignoring his pleas, the rest of the characters keep rowing. Soon, the whole oil rig detonates, leaving nothing behind. The characters are in a union, except for their creator. The nonhuman characters in *The City of Lost Children* were finally liberated, after eliminating their creator. Considering the ending that everyone became happily ever after except for the human creator, one can conjecture Jeunet's perspective on humans. Four years before this film, he also directed *Delicatessen* (1991), which describes human bodies consuming each other, as a food source. In this film, most characters do not have the emotional capacity to care about other animals. They just have to become one for their own.

4.4 Edible, Resourceful, and Recyclable Bodies in *Delicatessen* (1991)

Previously, I discussed a society where individuals assemble their bodies in order to survive and become a part of topographic cinema space to transcend their physical limits. Jeunet originally had the idea for *The City of Lost Children,* however, due to financial difficulties, he had to direct *Delicatessen* (1991) first, a film that suggests an extreme solution when it comes to hunger and lack of resources. The film tries to solve the problems of food shortage by consuming human bodies, not reconstructing them. The characters in this film are not interested in living in a posthumanist world, where the boundaries between human/nonhuman and organic/technological

blur.[152] The only character who cares about nonhuman beings is Louison, the protagonist. He used to perform in a circus with his chimpanzee partner, Livingstone. Unfortunately, Livingstone was eaten by other humans, due to food shortages. In this film, there is a group of people, named "troglodists"[153] who live underground, refusing to consume human meat. They mostly rely on grains and have adapted their bodies to life without sunlight. I contend that Delicatessen explores the adaptation of human species to socio-cultural and structural changes, and it can be read from the perspective of transhumanism. There are two different groups of transhumanism in this film. The first group is "surfacers," who live on the ground and adjust to the life of cannibalism. The other group is "troglodists," who despise "surfacers" and choose to live a life of veganism. One might think of posthumanism since each group may seem to be unified under the same purpose and make decisions based on their collectivity. Nevertheless, the members do not necessarily consider coexistence and harmony as their priority. Moreover, in this film, they are not really interested in other species, such as other animals or plants. Surfacers already ate up most of the animals, including Livingstone, Louise's chimpanzee partner, and moved on to consuming humans. Troglodists are too busy conducting their own war against Surfacers. To sum up, most of the characters[154] in Delicatessen are closer to transhumanists, rather than posthumanists.

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[152] See Haraway, "The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness," 96.

[153] In French, "troglo" means "a hole," or "a cave." Jeunet was indicating people on the ground as the "surface" and those underground as the "cave."

[154] Here, I said "most of the characters" since not all the characters in his films are transhumanists. For example, the two protagonists, Louison and Julie are closer to posthumanists since they care more about sharing and co-existence, instead of competing against other people.

Set in a dystopian society where mankind suffers from incessant hunger, a man named Clapet owns a delicatessen that distributes mysterious meat. He was killing his tenants and using their bodies as a source of protein. One day, Louison, an ex-circus artist moves into the apartment and falls in love with Julie, Clapet's daughter. Clapet wants to kill Louison for meat; however, Julie attempts to save him through collaboration with troglodists, the outlaws who live underground. After a dynamic chase that almost destroys the whole building, Clapet ends up killing himself, accidentally using Louison's boomerang knife. In the end, Julie and Louison face their happy ending, Julie playing cello and Louison playing his musical saw on top of the apartment.

In his films, Jeunet chooses certain senses to emphasize how humans renounce or prioritize to adapt their bodies to rapidly changing environments. In *Delicatessen*, it is taste and vision they give up for their survival. In *The City of Lost Children*, the Cyclops abandon their natural vision and hearing for a mechanical device. I argue that these choices can be understood as transhumanist since the characters modify their bodies to transcend their limits to continue living and adapt themselves to different environments. Above all, the choice of the troglodists is extreme, because they disregard taste[155] and vision by choosing to live underground. Ironically, it is Julie and Louison who survive the battle between surfacers and troglodists.

Since the taste is the most luxurious sense in *Delicatessen,* characters sacrifice other senses to feel it. After inviting Louison to a tea party with cookies, Julie takes off her glasses, so she can look attractive to Louison. Without her thick glasses, Julie is almost blind, and because of this, she

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[155] They live on grains and Julie tells them that there is so much corn in his father's basement. This also implies that people on the ground cannibalize to feel the taste of meat.

overpours the tea and bumps into Louison. In this dystopian world where everyone struggles to be fed and not eaten, everyone has a different way of surviving, as well as different priorities of senses. Even if one has great vision, because the air is polluted and blurry, people can never enjoy a clear view. The restriction of eyesight is also a serious problem for troglodists; since they live underground, they always have a flashlight attached to their forehead. Since they lack resources and are vegans, they have to rely on grains, such as corn and beans.

For instance, it is taboo to consume human flesh instead of animal meat; however, in this film, there is no alternative meat that they can consume. The act of cannibalism is not even a one-time incident, but it has become a custom in their society. Not being able to utilize other alternative protein sources, humans have decided to make use of other human bodies. The troglos are the only people who have declared not to consume human bodies, and they lost their living space because of this choice. To be transhuman does not mean being extremely strong and agile, but it is about being supple and fluid to sudden changes. In this manner, we can say that Louison and Julie have been transhuman in *Delicatessen*. There was no scene where they were enhancing their bodies with high-end technology, however, the characters had to adapt to environmental changes. This adaptation which is not directly related to technology parallels the adaptation that the characters went through in *Bigbug*. In *Bigbug*, the characters had to adjust themselves in a situation without the A.I. system, since the system locked them down in the house. In *Delicatessen*, the characters

are already confined in a single apartment without any specific reason,[156] and they have to fight against their own human enemies.

Regarding the interpretation of the film, many scholars agree that *Delicatessen* is widely interpreted as an allegory for the German Occupation of France during World War II, with eating, in particular cannibalism and mutilation, as a controlling metaphor in the film.[157] However, the relationship between "surfacers," and "troglodists"[158] can be read in a more literalist and less allegorical manner through the lens of transhumanism. By doing so, one can regard human bodies as resilient and flexible forms that can adjust themselves to abrupt environmental changes, such as climate change, food environment change, a global pandemic, and migration. For example, the characters in this film stay in their house for most of the time, and it seems like the external environment is not ideal for human beings. The air looks dusty and opaque, and the film does not explain how these people ended up living in the same house, including Louison, who suddenly turned up for a maintenance job. The name of the paper where he found the job opening was "Hard Times." German Occupation during World War II was certainly hard times for France, however, analyzing this film through the lens of transhumanism extends the scope of "Hard Times" to include current times.

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[156] Louison moves into the apartment at the beginning of the film, and he is always in the apartment after that scene. The film does not specify why the characters are mostly at home, but it is possible to speculate that the outside environment is not very livable.

[157] Holly Lynn Baumgartner, "Delicatessen," in *Dystopian States of America: Apocalyptic Visions and Warnings in Literature and Film,* ed. Matthew B. Hill (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2022), 121.

Francesca Ferrando, a philosopher of posthumanism, discusses in an interview with *EuropeNow*, how posthumanism can help individuals and societies face the Covid-19 crisis at different scales, from the personal realm to the level of the species and the planet.[159] Covid-19 was a calamity for many individuals, but it was also a threat to humankind, as well as the entire planet. Likewise, the situation in *Delicatessen* is not too dissimilar from a situation like Covid. This also parallels the situation of *Bigbug*: the characters in these two films cannot leave their house. Naturally, humans confined in the same space have to cooperate. By putting them in an extreme situation, Jeunet observes the transformation and adaptation of human bodies. Ferrando also points out that whereas the goal of transhumanism is human enhancement, in contrast, posthumanism takes different angles, focusing on the deconstruction of the human.[160] I agree with Ferrando that posthumanism is about the deconstruction of the human. In order to understand something, one needs to disassemble it and see how it works. *Delicatessen* presents a group of people, including "troglodists," who went underground to refuse cannibalism, and "surfacers" who deconstruct, amputate, and cook human bodies for their survival. To surfacers, it is impossible to regard cannibalism as unethical or illegal.

To present dismal phenomena, such as man-eating, air quality deterioration, and shortage of food without overwhelming the viewers, Jeunet again uses humor to dilute their connection to

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[159] Rohan Hassan, "An Interview about Posthumanism in a Time of Crisis," *EuropeNow*, Nov 9, 2021, https://www.europenowjournal.org/2021/11/07/an-interview-about-posthumanism-in-a-time-of-crisis/ (Accessed January 24, 2024)

[160] Ibid.

reality. Ezra points out that related to the collage aesthetic[161] is Jeunet's penchant for elaborate, Rube Goldberg–like chain reactions, suggesting an interconnectedness among the vast array of human endeavor.[162] As an example, she describes a scene when the sounds of cello practice, cleaning the carpet, painting the wall, and making toys pair with that of twanged bedspring while having sex. The characters' ensemble in rhythm and sound is inherently incongruous, since they never share the same goal, even though they are living in the same building. First of all, the butcher, Clapet's goal is to stably provide human meat for his family and residents. Sometimes he would have sex with Mademoiselle Plusse, instead of being paid with money. Tapioca, a man who has to be responsible for his family, fixes his bicycle for sustentation. The situation is the same with Tapioca's wife; she has to dust the carpet, so she can take care of her son and mother. Each character has a different motif and conflict of interest eventually leads to an abrupt ending, with Clapet screaming out of orgasm.

The only characters who share the same goal are indeed Louison and Julie. They are the only characters who seek amusement other than making a living. In the sequence of discord, Julie plays the cello and Louison paints the ceiling. Louison was originally hired as a handyman by Clapet; however, as the story unfolds, the audience finds out that Louison used to be a circus artist. He had to quit his job because other people ate his chimpanzee partner, Livingstone. While taking care of the apartment, Louison still practices his trick, such as making Julie believe that his head is severed from his torso. When Julie invited him over to teatime, they fell into each other. In this

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[161] By collage aesthetic, Ezra means Jeunet's montage where he uses a variety of senses, such as mixing different sounds, colors, and shots across different spaces. In this exemplary scene, different sounds are combined rhythmically so it sounds like they are doing a musical performance together.

[162] Ezra, *Jean-Pierre Jeunet*, 8.

dystopian space, having cookies is one of the most luxurious activities to do, since cookies are too fancy to satisfy one's hunger. Pleasing one's taste is one of the most futile activities to pursue in this city. The feeling of taste does not last very long, but hunger lasts way longer than a sweet, savory taste. Rather than finding desserts that have superb tastes, the tenants in this building have to find human meat since it is the only sustainable food source. In the end, Louison and Julie, the only people who trusted each other, end up surviving. In the world of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, first, one needs to survive. Their collective behavior connects back to my definition of posthumanism: without a collaborative effort to adapt and transform their bodies, one will not be able to continue living. Nevertheless, Jeunet rarely describes their survival in a cruel manner. With a touch of humor, Jeunet jovially tells the audience that everyone needs to be and is already post/transhuman.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed four films of Jeunet – *Big Bug, Two Snails Set Off, The City of Lost Children,* and *Delicatessen.* Jeunet has always been exploring the dynamics between humans and nonhumans in his films. In *Big Bug*, by confining human and nonhuman bodies in the same space, he presents a sketch that describes humans as subassemblies of society. Unlike robots, androids, and artificial intelligence, humans are vulnerable to sudden changes in weather and are also depicted as overly sentimental beings. The robots in this film are transhuman characters since they desire to transcend their limitations to become human. They mimic human traits – such as humor and sex drive – to be admitted as humans, not robots. Through *Two Snails Set Off,* Jeunet adds another nonhuman axis to the discussion, that is, vegetality. The concept of vegetality should not be overlooked because it indirectly illustrates the relationship between human and animal

through that of animal and plant. Just as humans utilize animal bodies to complement their physical fragility, Jeunet displays a wide range of animal bodies combined with plant bodies. In *The City of Lost Children,* his experiment continues with mutilated bodies and clones – it shows a dystopian society where humans have to be assembled or grafted with each other in order to survive. Finally, in *Delicatessen*, humans are living in an extreme situation where this former assemblage does not work at all, so, they have to consume each other like Ouroboros. In four of his films directed from the 90s to the 2020s, Jeunet shows how fragile humans are, thereby they have to transcend their bodily limits with or without their own will. If Jeunet focused on illustrating various human characters that had to be transhuman in order to survive, the last chapter of this dissertation is rather on the transformation of a single female character in response to individual and social pressures. The films of Julia Ducournau are centered around female characters: a teenager, a veterinary student who cannot control her desire to consume raw meat, and a woman who becomes pregnant with a car-human hybrid baby. In reality, female bodies are not completely liberated from the reproductive duties. Some societies even require unconditional devotion from mothers. What if female bodies are not coerced into certain roles, such as childbirth, femininity, and obedience, due to the development of technology? In the next chapter, I continue to investigate the ongoing discussion on human and nonhuman bodies in contemporary French cinema, especially regarding women's bodies.

5.0 Bodies of Metamorphosis, Cannibalism and Hybridization in the Films of Julia Ducournau

Before the advent of the term "New French Extremity", it was not easy to explain a popular trend in contemporary French cinema, when there were so many films about extreme violence and sexuality, such as *Trouble Every Day* (2001), *In My Skin* (2002), and *Irreversible* (2002). In these films, the characters transgressed their physical borders and norms, chewing their own skin, committing cannibalism, or being subjected to rape on screen for nine whole minutes. After James Quandt coined the term "New French Extremity,"[163] there have been many attempts to analyze the current trend and tendency in contemporary French cinema. Quandt enumerates the characteristics of New French Extremity: "images and subjects once the provenance of splatter films, exploitation flicks, and porn – gang rapes, bashings and slashings and blindings, hard-ons and vulvas, cannibalism, sadomasochism and incest, fucking and fisting, sluices of cum and gore."[164] In other words, NFE focuses on presenting extreme violence and sexuality, and this presentation of excessiveness is one of its most important goals. Bodies are ruthlessly cut, slashed, consumed, and raped, so the audience can indirectly experience these acts in the most vivid and vicarious manner. According to Quandt, this cinematic phenomenon is new, since the previous provocations in French cinema have been historically political, formal, and philosophical, such as the works of

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[163] James Quant, "Flesh and Blood: Sex and Violence in Recent French Cinema," in *The New Extremism in Cinema: From France to Europe*, ed. Tanya Horeck and Tina Kendall (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 18-26.

[164] Ibid., 18.

Godard, Cluzot, Debord, and Buñuel. [165] Thus, New French Extremity helped redefine contemporary French cinema through the active usage of physical distortions and an excessive utilization of bodily fluids, such as blood, urine, and sperm.

Queer studies scholars have also been interested in representations of bodies on screen, exploring ways to liberate the distinctions between gendered bodies through the representation of sexual organs. For instance, Paul Preciado, a writer and philosopher of gender studies and pornography argues that artificial sexual organs can contribute to gender equality. Like the cyborg, the dildo is located at the very edge of the racist, male-dominant capitalist tradition. If the penis (phallus) is the organic embodiment of this hegemonic tradition, the dildo is its cyborg other. [166] To support his argument, he coins the term *countersexuality*: "soon we will be able to print our sexual organs with the aid of a 3D bioprinter. *Countersexuality* affirms that it is possible to design and print any sexual organ."[167]

I argue that Preciado's notion of *countersexuality* corresponds with the presentation of bodies in the films of Julia Ducournau. In her films, Ducournau empowers the characters to construct and reproduce bodies by transcending their gender and sexuality, which is not the first example of transhumanist thought in French cinema. Moreover, the flexible interchange of sexual organs that Preciado has been imagining also applies to the bodies of animals and machines in her films. Ducournau's work expands the applicable range of *countersexuality* to that of non-humans.

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[165] One can argue that Buñuel's works are radical, however, Quandt is calling him formal, since the surrealist intention is different from New French Extremity. NFE focuses on the bodily sensation of the characters and the audience, while surrealism also concentrates on reading images through psychoanalysis and dreams.

[166] Paul Preciado, "Introduction," in *Countersexual Manifesto*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 9.

[167] Ibid., 11.

Non-binary sexual organs in non-human bodies contributes to the development of transhumanism because after all, bodily adaptation should not be monopolized by a certain group of race, gender, or species.

In this chapter, I explain how Ducournau built on and reworked the tradition of New French Extremity in her own unique way, that is, through transhumanism and the tradition of the French fantastic which is less present in the NFE. I suggest transhumanism as a key term to understand her films: in my view, transhumanism discusses non-binary and non-linear metamorphosis which may or may not have been led by technology. Also, transhumanist bodies do not symbolize anything but present the body as a surface that contains various identities. Ducournau's films are suitable examples to demonstrate how should we read kaleidoscopic characters that do not stop transforming, from one gender/species to another. Moreover, I focus on how Ducournau suggests countersexual bodies to secure transhumanist freedom for human and non-human beings.

After graduating from La Fémis, Ducournau made her impressive feature film *Raw* (2016) and later won the Palme d'Or at Cannes with *Titane* (2021). It is possible to classify her three films – *Junior* (2011), *Raw*, and *Titane* as French extreme cinema; however, this chapter takes a different approach. Instead of claiming these films as extreme and excessive, I lean on and on transhumanism to discuss the fluid transgression of borders within these films I do not focus on the act of transgression, but rather on the result of this transgression: the birth of a new form of humanity after violation and fusion. In Ducournau's films, the audience pays more attention to the hybrid babies or awakened human beings after consuming human flesh, rather than the act of sex, murder, or cannibalism. The characters in her films transcend themselves, which is the essence of transhumanism.

To show how this is so, I focus on the process of metamorphosis rather than violence and gore. Metamorphosis plays an important role in the films of Ducournau, psychologically and physically. I engage with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-animal to theorize how metamorphosis works in Ducournau's films. Becoming is an intriguing concept because it implies transformation and maintenance at the same time. There are many ways to realize becoming-animal, but I discuss specifically the cannibalistic behavior in *Raw*. Finally, I end the chapter with Titane, analyzing its presentation of hybridization between car and human flesh. I discuss the concept of cyborgs and Organorgs, leaning on the theories of Thierry Hoquet. There are two meanings to Houquet's term *presque-humain* (almost-human): "the term human can be from which we come or where we try to reach, terminus a quo ou terminus ad quem."[168] Using metamorphosis to understand this *presque-humain* important because it makes transformation an ordinary process. Metamorphosis is not a fantastic, nor instantaneous phenomenon that happens to selected beings: it can happen to everyone. For example, *Junior* postulates that going through puberty can also be accepted as a metamorphosis. In this regard, are humans the result of metamorphosis, or in the status before the metamorphosis? No human beings stay the same ever since birth: does this mean that every human is transhuman? I begin by reading Ducournau's first film *Junior*, relying on Deleuze and Guattari.

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[168] Thierry Hoquet. "L'humain point de départ," in *Les Presque-Humains: Mutants, Cyborgs, Robots, Zombies*. (Paris: Seuil, 2021), 50.

5.1 Metamorphosis is the Opposite of Metaphor

The prefix "meta" means "after" or "beyond," and it is generally used to mean something "more comprehensive." It has a slightly different nuance than "trans," since that term signifies "across" or "through." Also, in chemistry, trans refers to atoms or groups that are on the opposite side of a molecule. While the prefix "cis" means "this side of," trans means "the other side of." While meta focuses more on the entire process, trans implies the result of crossings. Even though metamorphosis and metaphor share the same prefix, "meta," Deleuze and Guattari certainly wanted to distinguish the two. They note that Kafka despised metaphors: "metaphors are one of the things that makes me despair of literature" (*Diaries*, 1921).[169]To Kafka, a human turning into a giant insect is not a metaphor, but it is the presentation of transformation. Deleuze and Guattari also introduce their own interpretation of metamorphosis:

> Metamorphosis is the contrary of metaphor. There is no longer any proper sense or figurative sense, but only a distribution of states that is part of the range of the word… There is no longer man or animal, since each deterritorializes the other, in a conjunction of flux, in a continuum of reversible intensities. Instead, it is now a question of a becoming that includes the maximum of difference as a difference of intensity, the crossing of a barrier, a rising or a falling, a bending or an erecting, an accent on the word.[170]

While a metaphor attempts to represent an idea or a belief, metamorphosis concentrates on

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[169] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 22.

[170] Ibid., 22.

visuality itself. This is also why cinema is an appropriate medium to realize this metamorphosis. A metaphor in literature does not have to be an image, but metamorphosis makes the viewers imagine the whole process, visually. With this visuality, cinema can achieve extricating the viewers from monotonous reality. Using technologies that refer more directly to reality than literature, cinematography and editing materialize imaginations and dreams into beings that could plausibly exist.

This chapter is not about Kafka the writer nor his *Metamorphosis,* but it is about the metamorphosis in Ducournau's *Junior* (2011), *Grave* (2016), and *Titane* (2021). It is about Justine in *Junior*, played by Garance Marillier, who goes through puberty, but most viscerally and peculiarly. Also, it is about Justine, played again by Marillier, who transforms herself into a cannibal in *Grave*. Finally, it is about Alexia, played by Agathe Rousselle, who brutally murders Justine, and gives birth to a baby with a titanium spine in *Titane*. Here, I mentioned the actress's name, especially Garance Marillier because Marillier appears in all three films I discuss in this chapter – *Junior* (2011), *Raw* (2016), and *Titane* (2021), all under the same name: Justine. Interestingly, Ducournau also uses other names – Alexia and Adrien – repetitively in her films. Alexia is Justine's sister who also enjoys cannibalism in *Raw* (2016), and she consumes Adrien, who is Justine's gay roommate. In *Titane*, Alexia is a serial killer who borrows the identity of Adrien, a fireman's lost child who died in a fire.

I argue that Ducournau duplicates and re-uses three names and identities – Justine, Adrien, and Alexia – to erase distinctive characteristics of each character and put them as subjects of discourse on transhuman metamorphosis, corporeality, and hybridization across her films without the usage of metaphors. In other words, the peeling of slimy skins, consuming human meat, and copulation between humans and machines is not a specific moment of horror in NFE, but they are

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rather universal phenomena required for metamorphosis. From a transhumanist viewpoint, they are not so special because human beings need to go through a certain rite of passage in order to transcend themselves. You would not call a larva becoming a butterfly horrific or extreme. A larva has to come out of a pupa in order to exuviate.

The same logic is applied to the artificial sexual organs in Preciado's work. Writing about Preciado, Jack Halberstam insisted that a process of becoming woman or animal that is not about actual women or animals, so he called upon a transversal experience of homosexuality without actually needing to engage in homosexual behavior.[171] The process of metamorphosis does not mean that one's identity completely changes. Rather, it empowers the compatibility of different identities. If one is transplanted with an artificial organ, this does not mean that being's previous identity is completely denied: they co-exist. In Ducournau's films, Justine exuviates from different identities – she was once a teenager who peels off her skin, then she experiences another metamorphosis to transform herself from a veterinary, vegetarian student into a cannibal. Finally, she even changes her name to Alexia and fuses herself with a car. I suggest naming these three films a transhumanist trilogy. Each film is connected by three names – Justine, Adrien, and Alexia and they embody transhumanism in three different ways – puberty, cannibalism, and in hybridization.

Junior is a film about a girl who experiences metamorphosis through skin peeling. One day, Justine, whose nickname is Junior, feels sick. She says this to her mom, but her mom does not believe her. She goes to school with her best friend Karim, and she is usually dressed up in

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[171] Jack Halberstam, "Foreword: We Are the Revolution! Or, the Power of the Prosthesis," in *Countersexual Manifesto*, xi.

boyish clothes. At night, Justine's mom hears weird noises, and it is Junior, suffering from her illness. She takes her to the doctor, and the doctor says it is stomach flu. While she takes a bath, Junior finds out that her skin peels. She tries to touch her back, and there is a long crack – she puts her finger in that crack, and she can touch slimy secretion from it. One day, she goes to the dentist with her mom, and we can see her largely open mouth that makes weird noises like that of a monster. It seems like she wants to bite something. Then she wakes up – it is not clear whether she was dreaming about the dentist or not. She finds out that her slimy skin is peeling again. Junior looks at herself in the mirror. All she sees is a blurry image of a figure. The next morning, she goes to school and she has become a completely different person. She does not look like a boy anymore – she has become a lady. Karim feels confused after her change and kisses her. Justine lets Karim touch her skin: it is still phlegmatic.

One can say that her metamorphosis is a metaphor for going through puberty, however, in this chapter, I seek to analyze her bodily transformation per se. Ducournau is not the first director who discussed metamorphosis in French cinema and literature. In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin discusses how Rabelais plays with bodies and grotesque realism in his works:

> The unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements. It is an incarnation of this world at the absolute lower stratum, as the swallowing up and generating principle, as the bodily grave and bosom, as a field which has been sown and in

which new shoots are preparing to sprout.[172]

Bakhtin argues that the unfinished and open body represents the entire material world. To Bakhtin, the grotesque plays the role of subverting a social system, and it is not just a daydream nor fantasy. The material bodily lower stratum and the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presents an essential relation to time and to social and historical transformation.[173] This is also why he uses the term "grotesque realism", not just "grotesque." This "grotesque realism" aligns with the bodies in Ducournau's films. What is happening in her films is rather closer to realism, but it is realism embellished with seemingly unbelievable images. The images of transformation and distortion explain what is happening in our lives, not in our dreams and hallucinations.

For instance, there is a scene when Justine wakes up in the middle of the night, finding out that her entire bed is wet. She steps on the ground, and even the floor is damp and mushy. When she tries to figure out what is happening, sticky liquid tries to reach her. She looks at herself in the mirror: it is not clear whether her vision is blurry, but her image in the mirror is dim and fragmented. The following day, when she looks for clothes to wear, the camera shows her legs peeling off some scales. On the chair, there are piles of slimy skins, dripping strange liquid. This scene can be read as an expression of going through puberty since the next scene shows Justine looking more attractive and mature. However, there is no indication that everything she went through was imagined. The film ends with Justine letting her friend touch her slimy belly, which is a sign that the exuviation was not only in her mind. Also, her classmates experience similar

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[172] Mikhail Bakhtin, "Introduction," in *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Hélène Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 26-27.

[173] Ibid., 81.

symptoms. By making multiple characters witness and feel metamorphosis, *Junior* is embodying Bakhtin's grotesque realism.

Justine's peeling skin can also be read with Laura U. Marks' definition of an image. An image is connective tissue; it is a fold in a universal strudel. Each time we perceive something, we acknowledge the continuity between its many layers.[174] This approach can be read in two ways in *Junior*: first, it can be about the different perceptions of senses between Karim, Justine, and us, the viewers. Justine needs to touch the surfaces to identify the objects and herself. For instance, when she takes a bath, she realizes that something is wrong with her back. She tries to touch her back, but it is not so easy. Instead of letting her fully see or touch her crack in the back, the camera shows us the horrifying fissure; we can see what Justine cannot see, and Justine can touch what we cannot touch. On the other side, Karim did not view Justine as an attractive partner, until she went through her metamorphosis. At the beginning of the film, on their way to school they play pranks, friendly kicking, touching, and bumping into each other. After she turns pretty, he kisses her. Then, Justine lets him touch her belly. To Karim, visuality is the most instinctive sense that he can rely on. This does not necessarily mean that tactility is a better indicator of metamorphosis in Ducournau's cinema, but this scene suggests that everyone has different priorities of senses when recognizing a transhuman moment of metamorphosis: one will try to carefully observe it, while the other will touch it without any hesitation. Regardless of their preferences, it implies that a bodily transformation is a remarkable event, that makes us rub our eyes, or pinch our flesh to find out whether it is real and not a dream.

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174 Laura U. Marks, "Introduction," *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media*. (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 5.

Also, their differentiation of priorities in senses supports Marks' argument on the images and connective tissues in media. Because Justine prioritized the touch in *Junior*, (although we cannot touch the slimy skin, it almost makes us feel like we are touching it, due to the sound and visual effects) we have the impression that touch is vision, and vision is sound. This is what I add to Marks's take on the correlation between image and touch; in *Junior*, because of the effective use of image, sound, and presentation of touch, all the layers of representation are incorporated under the experience of metamorphosis and transhuman experience. I just said that the amalgamation of senses in the film enables transhumanist experience since *Junior* is claiming that metamorphosis is not an imaginary nor extraordinary event, but a matter of daily life. Of course, this belief assumes that Justine was transcending her bodily limit through ecdysis. Is she a nonhuman? A monster? Or a human with some abnormal symptoms? Ducournau does not offer a clear answer, but it would be more useful to track Justine's metamorphosis in Ducournau's next film – in *Raw*. There, instead of experiencing exuviation, she tries consuming skin and flesh.

5.2 Becoming-Animal: Flesh, Blood, and Bones in *Raw* (2016)

In everyday conversation, sometimes people say, "You are what you eat." It is an understandable turn of phrase: what we eat does not vanish, but it becomes our blood, flesh, organs, and bones. Writing about Deleuze and Guattari's concept "becoming-animal," Gerald L. Burns notes that it is among the most recondite of their concepts, but also arguably one of the most interesting because of the unusual way it addresses one of the important questions of recent

European philosophical thought: "Who comes after the subject?"[175] I agree with Burns because right after this statement he cites Deleuze and Guattari's definition of becoming: "to participate in movement, to stake out a path of escape in all its positivity, to cross a threshold, to reach a continuum of intensities that are valuable only in themselves."[176] To Deleuze and Guattari, becoming is a fluid concept, and it does not mean progress. A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity.[177]

Becoming-animal can be read as a transhumanist concept if we extend it to include absorption, violation, and amalgamation. One example that can help our understanding of becoming-animal is the character No-Face in *Spirited Away* (2001). In this Japanese animated film directed by Hayao Miyazaki, No-Face keeps eating everything that exists around him – food, humans, and non-humans. Its bodily structure changes due to gluttony, and it is not a human, nor an animal. It is just a being that absorbs and releases what is in front of it. Interestingly, Deleuze mentioned this "no-faceness" in his chapter "Body, Meat and Spirit, Becoming-Animal."[178]

> For the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent upon the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination. It is not that the head lacks spirit; but it is a spirit in bodily form, a corporal and vital breath, an animal

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[175] Gerald L. Burns, "Becoming-Animal (Some Simple Ways)," *New Literary History* 38, no. 4 (2007): 703.

[176] Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka,* 13.

[177] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 239.

[178] No-Face does not really have a face in *Spirited Away*. It is wearing a mask that looks like a face, over its fluid, black and half-transparent body.

spirit. It is the animal spirit of man: a pig-spirit, a buffalo-spirit, a dog spirit, a bat spirit…

The deformations which the body undergoes are also the *animal traits* of the head.[179]

For Deleuze, a face is a mask that hides the head. Like No-Face endlessly incorporates the other beings into its body by swallowing them, the transformation of its body allows it to have *animal traits,* even though it was not an animal at the beginning. Likewise, the bodily deformation and amalgamation in *Raw* lets Justine, the protagonist, go through a process of becoming-animal, which lets her become a transhuman, that is, the presentation of the change in her body. Also, like No-Face, she does not hold back from trying new flesh and expands her realm of experience. First, she steals a burger patty from a school cafeteria. Then, she tries chicken shawarma at a gas station. Her carnivorous attempts become bolder – she tastes her sister's finger, and raw meat from the refrigerator. Her transformation from a vegetarian to a cannibal is not static, but continuous, and this fluidity corresponds with my definition of transhumanism.

Raw tells a story about a vegetarian veterinary student, Justine, being transformed into a cannibal. Justine enters a veterinary school, just like her sister. At the school, the seniors make the freshmen undergo harsh hazing. They have to eat raw rabbit kidneys and wear diapers if they do not follow their dress code. After a ceremony of eating raw meat, Justine develops an obsession with it. She steals a burger from a cafeteria or devours raw chicken from the refrigerator. Her desire turns into lust, and she has her first sexual experience with her gay roommate, Adrien. One night, Justine is unconsciously drunk at a party and her sister Alexia films her, making her crawl and bite like a dog. After finding out about the video clip, Justine loses her temper and bites her sister like

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[179] Gilles Deleuze, "Body, Meat and Spirit, Becoming-Animal," in *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, trans. Daniel W. Smith (London, New York: Continuum, 2003), 20-21.

an animal. They reconcile; however, Alexia eats Adrien's leg while he is asleep, and Justine washes her bloody body. In the end, Alexia goes to prison and Justine finds out that her mom was also a cannibal and has been eating her father slowly for many years.

Martine Beugnet and Emmanuelle Delanoë already used Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming in their analysis of *Raw*. For them, *Raw* presents viewers with two irreconcilable yet complementary concepts of the body – through the scientific pursuit of disciplining already in evidence in the proto-cinematic project of decomposing movement, and the Deleuzean notion of becoming, based on exchange and multiplicity.[180] They were analyzed various behaviors of the characters and the mise-en-scène of the film using this concept. For instance, they call Alexia, Justine, and Adrien as margins of the pack that Deleuze and Guattari described in *Mille Plateaux*.[181] Also, they connect Ducournau's film to George Romero style of zombie:

> In the sequence of the zombified students who emerge from the enclosure of the school into the open space, it is the complex interaction, characteristic of the zombie narrative, between expansive mass, infolded pack and enduring traces of individuality that produces a sense of becoming (Couté 2015). Here again, the dynamics of the singular versus the normalising come into play, both reiterating and questioning the disciplining strictures of the systemic, and the surfacing of more diffuse forms of control.[182]

Beugnet and Delanoë compare the scene in *Raw* with the films of Romero: the zombies become-animal together by organizing themselves as a pack. The zombies' identities are confirmed as an

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[180] Martine Beugnet and Emmanuelle Delanoë, "Raw becomings: Bodies, Discipline and Control in Julia Ducournau's *Grave*," *French Screen Studies* 21, no. 3 (2021): 206.

[181] Ibid., 215.

[182] Ibid., 216.

expansive mass, and their formidability is only confirmed through that collectivity. I agree with their argument because it is possible to read the entire film and the characters through the concept of becoming. After all, becoming is a fluid concept and the characters in *Raw* consistently change in many ways: the freshmen have to dance, crawl, eat and caress each other to survive in hazing rituals. Alexia uses her body to cause a car accident – her body becomes moving bait in the hunt for human prey. When Adrien plays soccer, half-naked, Justine gazes at him like a predator is observing its prey.

However, contrary to Beugnet and Delanoë's approach, I limit the usage of becoming in this chapter to analyzing the act of cannibalism in the film. Beugnet and Delanoë mentioned *Raw*'s possible connection to films such as *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001), *High Life* (Claire Denis, 2018), and *In My Skin* (Marina De Van, 2002). However, they do not focus enough on cannibalism in Raw. I read this film as a story that demonstrates Deleuze and Guattari's becoming-animal through Justine's manifestation of cannibalism. Writing about cannibalism as a literary topos, Martin Lefebvre explains that cannibalism entered the European imagination as a rhetorical tool, one connected in good measure both with fear of the other and the will to dominate him, and with the economics of New World colonialism and the beginnings of capitalism.[183] In literature, the act of eating up the other's flesh is interpreted as an act of domination, control, and colonization in some cases. Also, it is not difficult to imagine a giant corporation devouring other companies from a capitalistic viewpoint. Instead, I look in this section at the act of cannibalism as an attempt at becoming-animal, a blur of species and constant oscillation between species. In other words, in

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[183] Martin Lefebvre, "Conspicuous Consumption The Figure of the Serial Killer as Cannibal in the Age of Capitalism," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 22, no. 3 (2005): 46.

Raw, Justine consumes raw flesh not to present her domination and capitalistic desire to the others, but to become other. She is an animal, a human, and a nonhuman intermittently.

Regarding Justine's cannibalism, an important part of the story is that her cannibalism runs in the family: her sister, Alexia, and their mom also enjoy consuming raw flesh. This implies that her cannibalism is not merely an impulse but rather an instinct that is inherited in the family as a pack, a population, and a multiplicity. About the principles of becoming-animal, Deleuze and Guattari discuss two different possibilities:

> Our first principle was: pack and contagion, the contagion of the pack, such is the path becoming-animal takes. But a second principle seemed to tell us the opposite: wherever there is multiplicity, you will also find an exceptional individual, and it is with that individual that an alliance must be made in order to become-animal. There may be no such thing as a lone wolf, but there is a leader of the pack, a master of the pack, or else the old deposed head of the pack now living alone, there is the Loner, and there is the Demon.[184]

In *Raw*, Justine experiences both sides of becoming-animal that Deleuze and Guattari explained: at the beginning of the film, Justine shows a strong repulsion towards the meat. At the cafeteria, she finds meat in her mashed potatoes, and Justine's mom complains about this incident to the employees of the cafeteria. In Justine's pack/family, she has to obey the regulations of vegetarianism. Later, she becomes an exceptional individual by choosing to eat human meat. Her singularity as an individual is especially noticeable when she finds out that Alexia filmed her crawling on all fours like a dog and trying to bite the corpse.

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[184] Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus,* 243.

Also, *Raw* is a film that presents Justine's becoming-animal in two other ways – 1) by showing her adaptation process within the veterinary school – she has to become an animal to survive, and 2), by presenting her realization of the inherent cannibalism that runs in the family. For instance, when the seniors assemble the freshmen for the first time, the freshmen are not allowed to walk but have to crawl on the floor. Regarding this imitation of a dog or an animal with four legs, Deleuze and Guattari said that mimicking a dog is not a becoming, but you become animal only molecularly.[185] If the seniors only made them imitate an animal, of course, that is not a becoming, but a mere imitation. At the beginning of their rush week, Adrien says to Justine, "Hey, it's just a game. What do you think could happen?" Here, Adrien strongly believes that this rite is only a simulation, and there is no need to become-animal. This nonchalance foreshadows their becoming – later, they were forced to eat the raw rabbit kidney as a part of the ritual, and this corresponds to the molecular becoming-animal that Deleuze and Guattari explained. The seniors shove the molecules of the dead rabbit into the mouths of the freshmen.

Secondly, Justine's realization of her cannibalistic instincts can be linked with the tactile hallucination she experiences in the film. Sean McQueen explains that the significance of becoming-animal is that this animal is a schizophrenic, in Deleuze and Guattari's sense of materialist schizoanalysis as opposed to representational psychoanalysis.[186] For example, in *Raw,* there are several scenes when Justine scratches her body continuously, especially during the night in her bed. One of the representative symptoms of schizophrenia is hallucination, and some

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[185] Ibid., 274-275.

[186] Sean McQueen, "Biocapitalism and Schizophrenia: Rethinking the Frankenstein Barrier," *Science Fiction Studies*, 41, no. 1 (2014): 127.

patients experience imaginative itching and pain. These repetitive moments of itching also resonate with *Junior* – Justine in Junior kept peeling off her skin, while Justine in *Raw* experienced rashes and an obsession with scratching her skin. Of course, her rash started after her consumption of raw rabbit kidney, but after the rash, carnal desire is awakened in her and she ends up stealing a burger from a school cafeteria.

This realization of immanent cannibalism is differentiated from female cannibals in classic literature. Regarding women's cannibalism, Silvia E. Storti points out that the monstrous wicked women of fairy tales have been endlessly set apart from the protagonists because their attempts at devouring their rivals mark them as distinctly Other.[187] Justine's conduct resembles the monstrous wicked women that Storti described, however, *Raw* emphasizes her abnormal behaviors such as tasting her sister's finger and biting her own flesh. This enumeration of her eccentric behavior empowers her position as a protagonist and lends probability to her becoming-animal as cannibalism, rather than marking her as "other". Justine is also a unique character because unlike some characters in French extreme cinema, such as *Trouble Every Day* and *In My Skin*, she tries to control her desire. While it is almost a tradition for characters in French extreme cinema to gratify their desire without any limit – such as murder, sex, and physical mutilation – the extremeness in *Raw* lies in Justine's inner struggle not to cross the border. Lisa Coulthard and Chelsea Birks argue that Coré's cannibalism enhances her sexual desirability[188] in *Trouble Every Day*. About Esther in *In My Skin*, Adrienne Angelo contends that Esther is conscious of her marked

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[187] Silvia E. Storti, "The Better to Eat You With: The Anthropophagy Plots of Fairy Tales," in *Interdisciplinary Essays on Cannibalism: Bites Here and There,* ed. Giulia Champion. (New York: Routledge, 2021), 180.

[188] Lisa Coulthard and Chelsea Birks, "Desublimating monstrous desire: the horror of gender in new extremist cinema," *Journal of Gender Studies*, 25, no. 4 (2016): 471.

difference from those around her; but, despite this difference, and perhaps precisely because of her marginal status, she persists in bloodletting ceremonies.[189] Both female protagonists do not hesitate to reveal their desires and lusts for flesh and skin. Unlike them, Justine is almost shy and passive-aggressive when she finds out about her cannibalistic instincts. Ironically, her passivity highlights the uncontrollable cannibalistic tradition that runs in her family. Her desire to consume human meat is so intense that, in the end, she has to accept her becoming-animal as a cannibal.

If Justine went through the rite of becoming-animal as I argued previously, can we say that she is nonhuman? In the interview with *52 Insights*, Ducournau says "At the end of the movie, she's not inhuman, and yet she has eaten human flesh, and usually people tend to refer to cannibals as inhuman when actually they are just like us."[190] Cannibals are not monsters, just humans who consume human flesh. This also means that Ducournau does not see Justine as nonhuman, but as a human-cannibal. One of the reasons why some viewers are disturbed by the image of Justine biting her own flesh or of Adrien's thigh devoured by Alexia is because they do not want to be in the same category as those human-cannibals. What terrifies the viewers is not her inhumanness, but the possibility that they and Justine could be put in the same category.

Another possible reason why some viewers were terrified of her cannibalism is that she was not a human-cannibal from the beginning: she used to be a strict vegetarian, but the entrance to the veterinary school awakened her inherent desire to consume flesh. Some scholars interpret her behavior from a capitalistic or psychoanalytic viewpoint. For example, Eve Watson claims that

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[189] Adrienne Angelo, "Wounded Women: Marinade Van's Subjective Cinema," *International Journal of Francophone Studies,* 15, no. 2 (2012): 226.

[190] *52 Insights*, "Julia Ducournau: Cannibalism, Feminism & Growing Up (2017)," last modified September 3, 2022, https://www.52-insights.com/julia-ducournau-cannibalism-feminism-growing-art-movie-interview-french-cult/

Justine's ''unlawful'' representation of a woman's hunger satisfies a phantasy of woman as castrating and without limit in the absence of traditional masculine or paternal law.[191] It is one possible way to read *Raw*, since the protagonist is a woman, and many news articles called it a "French Feminist film". Justine finds joy and satisfaction in consuming human flesh, but she also bites her own flesh. This was partly to prevent herself from eating Adrien, but we cannot simply read this as self-hate nor self-destruction. As soon as Justine finds her sister's finger "delicious," she immediately transgresses her identity as a non-cannibal and vegetarian. This is not a perpetual transgression, but rather a flexible switch, because she stills feels a sense of guilt for devouring her sister's finger. One can say that she is a transhuman, because she is a former-vegetarian, cannibal, and becoming-animal[192] at the same time. She continuously reveals her new identities as she adapts herself to the veterinary school.

On the subject of cannibalism, some scholars criticize the fact that Adrien, Justine's Arab, queer roommate is consumed by Justine and Alexia, her sister. Rosalind Galt and Annette-Carina van der Zaag, scholars working in gender studies and contemporary European cinema, claim that we have the cannibal as a heroine and yet the cannibal also as white European predator of racialized bodies.[193] However, the argument based on the representation of gender and ethnicity can be

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[191] Eve Watson, "A Psychoanalytic Exploration of the Film *Raw* (2016), with Special Emphasis on the Capitalist Discourse,",*Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (2020): 442.

[192] Her characteristic as a dog-human stands out when Alexia makes her crawl and bark like a dog over a corpse. Also, the seniors make the freshmen crawl when they start the hazing ritual. The first-years are not human, nor animal, but they have to be becoming-animal in order to survive.

[193] Rosalind Galt and Annette-Carina van der Zaag, "'C'est grave': Raw, cannibalism and the racializing logic of white feminism," *Journal of Visual Culture* 21, no. 2 (2022): 285.

controversial, because in this case, if Adrien consumed Justine, another feminist writer may contend that the female bodies had been sacrificed in a misogynist context. Instead, it is more meaningful to focus on the advent of the cannibal-human, because Justine should be understood as a being who can oscillate different identities. Earlier, I argued how Preciado's *countersexuality* can be useful when analyzing Ducournau's films. According to him, (Hetero)sexuality, far from spontaneously springing forth from every newborn body, must reregister and reestablish itself through constant repetitive operations and through the iteration of the (masculine and feminine) codes socially vested as natural.[194] In other words, Justine's body was registered and established as a female, vegetarian body since her childhood, due to her mother's influence. At the beginning of the film, we can see that her mother is extremely upset after a server accidentally puts meat on Justine's plate. Justine tries to comfort her, saying that she is okay with it, but she complains strongly to the restaurant. This rigorous practice of vegetarianism is gradually violated after she enters veterinary school. she learns to reregister and reestablish herself as a cannibal-human who consumes meat, regardless of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, and species.

Her principle of vegetarianism is first violated when her school enforces her to consume raw rabbit kidneys. For a part of the hazing ritual, her seniors march toward her and her peers, chanting a song: "Vets, they march around. Their dicks up proud in the air cuz a vet will fuck you anywhere. They are men – yes sir! With giant balls, for her. They like a laugh, they like a drink, they like to screw, and we do too!" Then, they pour a massive amount of red liquid onto the freshmen. Now Justine and her peers are all in blood. Next, the leader of the seniors claims that the elders will make them family. He adds that first, they have to learn to be a team, to obey, and

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[194] Preciado, *Countersexual Manifesto,* 25.

to be good rookies. According to him, rush week will be over when there are three honks, and the freshmen will no longer be rookies. The elders make them line up and hand over the small pieces of rabbit kidney. When it is Justine's turn, she refuses to eat it, saying that she is a vegetarian. The leader calls her sister, Alexia, and she insists that Justine should eat it. Justine hesitates, and Alexia even demonstrates eating the kidney. Then, she shoves the kidney into Justine's mouth, and Justine throws up.

This is the first and last moment when she refuses the meat and the process of becoming-animal. Subconsciously, she was emotionally identifying herself with the animals. After the rite of eating raw rabbit liver, Adrien, Justine, and her peers have a conversation about a monkey's rights:[195]

> ADRIEN: Legally, I'm not sure "monkey rape" exists.
>
> JUSTINE: Sure, it does. Animals have rights.
>
> ADRIEN: The monkey won't turn anorexic and see a therapist. It's not the same.
>
> JUSTINE: Monkeys are self-aware. They see themselves in a mirror, right? I bet a raped monkey suffers like a woman.
>
> STUDENT B: So, a raped woman, raped monkey. Same thing?
>
> JUSTINE: Yeah.

Here, Justine is the only one who actively supports a monkey's rights. Other students are disagreeing with her, saying "Monkeys cannot be raped" or "A raped woman and a raped monkey are not the same." Also, Justine is subconsciously identifying a monkey as a woman. Her self-

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[195] Ducournau did not name the other characters, except for Adrien, Justine and Alexia. So here I am calling them as Student A and B.

identification here becomes an important key to understanding her because later, she shows an equal penchant towards all kinds of meat – she wants a burger patty in the cafeteria, a shawarma sandwich, raw chicken in the refrigerator, and finally, her sister's cut finger. Erika Murphy argues that by recognizing that the "human" is also at every moment a consumable animal, we make room for the radical relationality that is necessary for transformation.[196] Justine's bias-free love towards the flesh of animals and humans is altered into becoming-animal, and her primary method to do so is to consume various types of meat, from cooked ones to raw ones.

While *Junior* was a film about self-metamorphosis, *Raw* is a film in which Justine transforms herself with the help of other substances – the flesh and blood of other animals. Ducournau's third film, *Titane,* looks at bodies from a hybrid perspective: the film encourages intermingling between different species, and the result is not becoming but the birth of a completely disparate being. It was Bakhtin who insisted that the grotesque body is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.[197] The coexistence of the inexplicable and the explicable is what differentiates Ducournau's films from other films of New French Extremity. Her films do not try to mesmerize or shock the audience. Instead, they pose a question about whether it will be possible to realize her unbelievable images in reality.

In that respect, Ducournau's films resonate with the films of Méliès in that fantastic images imply bodily adaptation. That is to say, hybridization between machine and human flesh may mean

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[196] Erika Murphy, "Devouring Human: Digestion of a Corporeal Soteriology," in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology,* ed. Stephen D. Moore and Laurel Kearns. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 52.

[197] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 317.

an improvement in human nature. For instance, Ray Kurzweil's notion of singularity is a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed.[198] In *Raw*, there is of course no specific mention of singularity, however, Justine's metamorphisis implies an irreversible transformation inherited through generations due to genetics. The ending of the film suggests that Justine's mother also craved human flesh and it was passed onto Justine. In the next section, I elaborate on how Ducournau's *Titane* explores images of deep and irreversible human transformation, such as a woman impregnated by a car.

5.3 The Transhumanist Bodies in *Titane* (2021)

Can a human be impregnated by a car? If viewers encounter such a seemingly fantastic image in a recent film like *Titane* (2021), what are they to make of it? *Titane* shows the birth of new humanity, that is, a human being physically combined with a vehicle. In this film, the body is not the agency, but only a platform that carries human consciousness. *Titane* presents the birth of a "naturally artificial" human, who was born with a titanium spine from their birth. I argue that this titanium spine is not a metaphor nor a symbol of highly advanced technology, but a form of life that should be acknowledged as hybrid *per se*. These images are a key feature in my understanding of transhumanism because they do not signify permanently transformed bodies, but a cross section of continuous metamorphosis that transhumanism pursues. The hybrid baby at the

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[198] Ibid., 22.

end is not only a result of machine-human copulation but also a clear articulation of transhumanism in French cinema.

The film shows the bodily transformation of Alexia, who used to be a serial killer and a dancer at motor shows. When she was little, she had a serious car accident, and one part of her skull was replaced with titanium. After this incident, she becomes obsessed with murder and is in danger of being arrested. To avoid the police, she disguises herself as Adrien Legrand, the lost son of fireman Vincent Legrand. Vincent believes Alexia is his son without any doubt and they start living together. Alexia's belly grows bigger and Vincent's ex-wife finds out Alexia's true identity. However, she lets her stay with Vincent. Vincent realizes Alexia is pregnant, but he decides to keep her as her son. Alexia gives birth to a hybrid baby and Vincent helps her out. When he holds the baby, viewers can see its spine is in titanium.

To understand this new type of body, I utilize two notions of Thierry Hoquet, "presque-humain (almost-human)" and "Organorg." At the beginning of the film, Alexia kills people mechanically: she pierces earholes and lips with her hairpin and a fire poker, as a mechanic examines a machine. To survive she modifies her appearance through a disguise. She becomes Adrien and learns to behave like a robot, which is programmed to become someone else. Alexia's body consistently performs metamorphosis, like a snake that slips out of its skin. Her body is considered "presque-humain," which stays in the space of liminality. To change a form and an identity, one has to keep moving, without any hesitation. Through this exhibition of different identities, *Titane* demonstrates what is to be presque-humain.

Secondly, the concept of "Organorg" helps us understand the identities of the hybrid baby, Alexia, and the Cadillac. Hoquet defines Organorg as "the machine-organism assemblage that is thought as a tool that is exterior and interior at the same time, without butchery nor amputation, a

tooled organism, endowed with new organs."[199] The baby was already born with a spine in titanium, whereas Alexia was only equipped with a cyborgian body after receiving surgery. Hoquet writes that an Organorg looks sometimes successful, full of grace, before being crushed – the car that rolls to music at the beginning of Kieslowski's *Bleu*.[200] The car in that film reminds me of the Cadillac in *Titane* that visits Alexia to have sex. In the case of Ducournau's film, the hybrid baby can also be regarded as an Organorg, a being endowed with a new organ, without butchery not amputation.

At the same time, I contend that this film is also transhumanist at several distinctive moments. *Titane* consists of individual stories – Alexia kills people, she transforms her body and her identity to become Adrien, and finally, gives birth to a new form of humanity. Each section looks like a short film, that could be grafted together in any order. *Titane* is the film that shows us the birth of a new form of humanity in a binary manner: first, by giving birth to a new type of human, this film redefines a human being. Secondly, by presenting the grafting/separating/fusing of the body parts with film technology such as editing and CGI, *Titane* itself becomes a transhumanist film at the level of representation and style.

Also, it shows viewers that the grafting of identities can easily be separated and combined, like paper stickers. For instance, there is a scene where Alexia tries to copy physiognomy of Adrien. She cuts her dyed blond hair and becomes brown-haired, she bumps her nose against the bathroom sink to change its shape and she compresses her belly and breasts with bandage. One could claim that this is rather a gender or genre change, from a female to a male, or from thriller

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[199] Thierry Hoquet, *Cyborg Philosophie*. (Paris: Seuil, 2011), 56. English translation my own.

[200] Ibid., 56. English translation my own.

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to horror, but I perceive this scene as a switch between different species. She used to be a killing machine, and now she is the docile cyborg, who performs the role of a lost son. In order to change her species, she deforms, presses, and cuts her body to transcend herself. These actions conform to my definition of transhumanism.

There are many transhumanist moments in this film, but I focus on three parts where we can find the transhumanist bodies: the relation between Alexia and the Cadillac, her physical transformation to become Adrien, and finally, the hybrid baby. Without much doubt, the most shocking scene in the film would be when Alexia has intercourse with the Cadillac, which is her dance partner at the motor show. This motor show sequence begins when Alexia enters the venue and then the camera follows her. After showing other girls, cars, and mostly men's gazes at women, the camera again shows Alexia, fabulously dressed. She dances seductively with her body attached to the shiny surface of the Cadillac. This dance and her movements already imply their sexual relationship. Indeed, at the beginning of the film, we can already find her "auto-philia." Young Alexia imitates the sound of a motor with humming. In her father's car, she competes with the country music that her father plays. After the serious car accident, the doctor implants an artificial skull made out of titanium in her head. Then Alexia embraces the car, the medium of the accident with her arms and even kisses it. To her, the car is not a dangerous vehicle that can cause a life-threatening accident, but it is just an adorable creature: maybe even more adorable than humans.

Regarding the reproduction of the machines, Hoquet contends that technology signifies a production of life, not hostility:

Technology is not hostile to life: on the contrary, it is about producing lives that contribute to their evolutionary success. Thus, the machines are organs, just as the organs are the tools,

giving birth to what Canguilhem calls a "general organology." The machines are not only

produced by living beings: they have their own evolutionary dynamics.[201]

According to Hoquet, machines can also participate in reproduction. His argument resonates with

that of Donna Haraway: she has proposed the dissociation of women from every privileged

designation to the pole of "naturalness," describing in what ways they are, equally and in the same

way as men, integral parts of technical systems.[202] In other words, Hoquet and Haraway do not

understand reproduction as an equivalent of naturalness. Rachelle Chadwick, a feminist theorist,

also contends that there is no "natural birth." There is no birthing body that materializes separately

and independently from sociomaterial contexts, historical relations and sociosymbolic discursive

frames and ontologies.[203] Hoquet, Haraway, and Chadwick's conception of birth imply that just as

people believe that the reproduction of machines is an artificial notion, human reproduction is not

always "natural." Not just recognizing the possibility of mechanical reproduction, Ducournau

suggests a bold way of being reproductive with machines: we have intercourse with them. As we

use organs to survive and reproduce, machines also want to prosper.

When Alexia has sex with the Cadillac, we might suppose that she is playing a role of a

female, because the camera's angle makes us imagine that she is having intercourse through

vaginal penetration. However, the film does not show penetration, so we can only guess that the

Cadillac is using some kind of organ, which is perhaps not a human penis, to impregnate her. Here,

the car perhaps transforms an asexual organ/tool to give birth to a hybrid baby. No indication

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[201] Thierry Hoquet. "L'évolution darwinienne," in *Les Presque-Humains : Mutants, Cyborgs, Robots, Zombies*. (Paris: Seuil, 2021), 138. English translation my own.

[202] Ibid., 17. English translation my own.

[203] Rachelle Chadwick. *Bodies that Birth: Vitalizing Birth Politics.* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 200.

suggests the sex of the car, except for the fact that it impregnated Alexia. It is not a human, so it does not have to be a male in order to impregnate a female. Hoquet talked about mechanical reproduction, but he did not distinguish the sexes of machines. The sex scene in Titane effaces the idea of vaginal penetration.

At the same time, it subjectifies Alexia instead of objectifying her, since her partner is non-human. However, this intercourse has a different implication from zooerastia. For most of human history, sex between human and nonhuman animals has been approached as a moral and legal problem.[204] Can we say that Alexia is morally wrong because she had sex with a car? First of all, at least in the film, the Cadillac visited her and suggested intercourse. Although there is not an accepted term for a sexual relationship between a human and a machine, in the future, the name will be given to it, just like we have lately invented the concepts of zoophilia, zooerastia, zoosex and bestiality.[205]

Although I use the concept of transhumanism to understand Ducournau's films, there have been criticism about it, too. Rosi Braidotti argues that by questioning the global practices and narratives of the transhumanist transformations of humans, posthuman feminism voices the perspectives of the margins and the global peripheries of the contemporary world.[206] She tries to separate transhumanism from posthuman feminism, calling the former a "delusion"[207] and

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[204] Chloë Taylor, "Zoosexuality and Interspecies Sexual Assault," in *Foucault, Feminism, and Sex Crimes: An Anti-Carceral Analysis* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 175.

[205] Ibid., 175.

[206] Rosi Braidotti, "The Critical Edge of Posthuman Feminism," in *Posthuman Feminism*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), 65.

[207] Ibid., 61.

posthuman feminism as "an intergenerational and transversal exercise." [208] However, transhumanism can also be understood as an intergenerational and transversal exercise. The prefix "trans" of "transversal" shares more similar implications with transhumanism. The prefix "post" contains "after" and "posterity," and it designates a one-way direction of studies after the advent of humanism. Posthumanism cannot discuss a series of thoughts that came before humanism, because its focus is on finding an alternative way to discuss the human. Transhumanism does not necessarily enforce the same-way direction of thoughts. The prefix "trans" suggests rethinking the evolving direction of human bodies in non-linear ways. Moreover, the realm of posthumanism is too vast, so, Braidotti had to add another word, feminism to specify her arguments. For transhumanism, there is no need to add any other thoughts since the word itself intrinsically includes transgression and innovation. Of course, this progress inherently implies the liberation of female and non-binary bodies with technological help. In short, posthumanism and transhumanism have different directions for the improvement of human life, but one cannot argue that one another is more absurd.

One moment that exemplifies the liberation of non-binary bodies due to technology happens at the airport in *Titane*. When Alexia arrives, in the lobby, there is a machine that continuously creates portraits. In French, it is called "portraits-robots." Portraits-robots transform the faces of lost children in several seconds, turning them into grown-ups. The images of the children at their adult age are not those of reality, but they are based on the extrapolation of portraits-robots through artificial intelligence. Adrien's face floats on screen and Alexia decides to imitate this image, just like when she was imitating the motor sound when she was little to avoid

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[208] Ibid., 9.

the police. With the help of artificial intelligence, we can see the faces going back in and transcending time in a few seconds. Vincent's son, Adrien died in a horrendous fire many years ago. However, portraits-robots reenacted his face in the past, present, and future in a few seconds. After observing this continuously transforming the face, Alexia was able to transform her face with the help of this image.

On the back side of the portrait machine, ironically, there is a portrait of Alexia. This shot can also be read as a warning to Alexia about the machine. Of course, it is not easy to believe that the portrait machine and Alexia are on the same side because she looks like a human being. Despina Kakoudaki, an interdisciplinary scholar in literature and film, contends "we do not grasp the full impact of the discourse of the artificial person we use so fluidly in contemporary culture, partly because we take this literary and cinematic tradition for granted."[209] In fact, in reality, the artificial beings are already everywhere. For instance, according to the article written for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, nearly half (49 percent) of college students are using generative AI tools for their writing.[210] Reliance on artificial beings has become a lifestyle for many people, setting aside an extensive reference to nonhuman characters in contemporary film and media. Kakoudaki also adds, that even Haraway changed her definition of cyborg in 1985, to "a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." This change implies that Haraway also recognized the cyborgs that were already among humans.

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[209] Despina Kakoudaki. *Anatomy of a Robot: Literature, Cinema, and the Cultural Work of Artificial People*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press 2014), 8.

[210] Flower Darby. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Why You Should Rethink Your Resistance to ChatGPT," last modified November 13, 2023, https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-you-should-rethink-your-resistance-to-chatgpt

After having intercourse with the car, Alexia does not stop transforming herself. I contend that her transformation resonates with French philosopher Catherine Malabou's notion of plasticity. Plasticity has a double meaning of "receiving a form" (the clay is plastic) and "giving a form" (plastic arts and plastic surgery).[211] At the airport, Alexia becomes Adrien, a lost child. This also means that she needs to overcome the gap between Adrien the child and Adrien the grown-up. As she shapes clay into a work of art, she creates a new nose and flattens her chest. She was given a new form to her humanity by modifying the contours of her own body.

Malabou elaborates on the relationship between cerebrality and plasticity: there is a postlesional plasticity that is not the plasticity of reconstruction but the default formation of a new identity with loss as its premise.[212] She explains that the new identities of neurological patients are characterized by disaffection or callousness. This description corresponds to Alexia's behavior. After receiving a grafting operation on her head, she is reborn with a new identity. For her, being plastic in Malabou's sense is a mode of survival, and at the same time, she is a fantastic being that makes viewers uncertain about her identity and question it on our own. Because of her consistent metamorphosis – the skull transplanted with titanium, the joining of her body with the Cadillac, and her becoming Adrien –spectators are curious: exactly who is Alexia? These changes are not just fantastic images, but they are also the transhumanist impetus that vivifies her.

Another driving force that sustains her life is the mechanism of cyborgs. It is important to note that her cyborgization began with her head surgery. Notably, Cybernetics can be a concept

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[211] Catherine Malabou. *Changer de différence : Le féminin et la question philosophique* (Paris : Galilée, 2009), 75. French translation on my own.

[212] Catherine Malabou. *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage,* trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 48.

for understanding the systems of Alexia's body. Cybernetics is a term that suggests the control systems involved in combining artificial intelligence and machine-biological interfaces. [213] According to E. Paul Zehr, a neuroscientist, cybernetics and cyborgs are connected. Part of Alexia's skull is biological, while the other part is protected under titanium. She is half-cyborg and half-human. Zehr continues, "From cybernetics it is a very short jump to the term cyborg All of these jumps, of course, take us further and further away from the 'human' range of ability."[214] After the surgery, Alexia's behavior drifts away from "being human" by acts of parricide and serial killing. Not many people will agree with the idea that these behaviors are extremely human. However, we cannot interpret Alexia as a being completely isolated from society.

Ironically, after setting fire to her parents' house, Alexia decides to become the son of a fireman, whose name is Vincent. We can infer through the film that Vincent's real son also perished in a fire, just like Alexia's parents. A cyborg is a liminal being between a machine and an organism. When we think of the word, even though there are already people with artificial limbs or pacemakers in reality, we first imagine a fictional or imaginary character. Haraway suggests that the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-Oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity."[215] According to her, distinguishing a cyborg's gender is not important. In other words, a cyborg is a being free from sexual limitations. We can see a similar freedom in Durcournau's representation of Alexia, especially her

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[213] E. Paul, Zehr. "The Potential Transformation of Our Species by Neural Enhancement," *Journal of Motor Behavior* 47, no.1(2015): 76.

[214] Ibid., 76.

[215] Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs," 9.

physiognomy after becoming Adrien. Even if she deformed her nose and cut her hair, she could not look very masculine. This lack of masculinity is confirmed when she meets Rayane, her colleague, for the first time. Rayane observes her curiously: he recognizes her real identity right away. After realizing that she is not Adrien, he tells her to return to where she is from, saying "You don't feel the energy? You don't know what is going on between us?" For him, Alexia is a woman. For Vincent, she has to be a man. For Alexia herself, she is not a man nor a woman. She is simply a being that exists. Her transformation tracks with Haraway's account of the cyborg.

Alexia is an independent cyborg, but at the same time, she docilely follows Vincent's instruction: she lets him shave his face, even though she does not need to shave. Also, she helps with his injection of steroids. Here, she becomes an obedient cyborg who assists human beings, serving for their emotional and physical needs. However, she never abandons the hybrid baby and gives birth to it. When Vincent calls her "Adrien" during childbirth, she corrects him, saying "My name is Alexia." In other words, she protects her own identity, recognizing Vincent as her father at the same time. This means that there exist two different identities during her delivery. She is Alexia and Adrien. With heavy bleeding of motor oil blood, she gives birth to an interspecific baby.

What distinguishes this hybrid baby from other artificial beings is that the baby was not born as an adult. Writing about artificial births in general in cinema, Kakoudaki explains that:

> Artificial bodies are also compartmentalized, either because they are made of stitched-together body parts (as with Victor Frankenstein's creature), or because they have no body fluids (as is the case with robots in later stories), or because their construction involves

radically different interior and exterior materials, as with the metal skeleton and artificial skin of the cybernetic beings in *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984).[216]

The birth of the baby in *Titane* is different from this type of birth in several ways. First of all, the titanium spine is completely combined with its back: it is an immanent organ in the body. Secondly, when Alexia feels pain during childbirth, she bleeds motor oil, not red blood. One can say that this baby was born in the liminal space, because its corporeal construction includes human and non-human characteristics at the same time. Especially, it has an intriguing combination of titanium bone and human skin. It is not a monstrous body nor a body of horror, but it is a body of transhumanist capability, plasticity, and fluidity.

5.4 Conclusion

In Ducournau's films, bodies are violated and transformed. A little girl, going through puberty, consistently peels off her skin to become something else. A veterinary student eats raw flesh and opens herself to the world of cannibalism. A serial killer gives birth to a machine-human hybrid baby, bleeding motor oil. In this chapter, I discussed three films – *Junior*, *Raw*, and *Titane* – that present metamorphosis, cannibalism, and hybridity in a transhumanist manner. I call these films transhumanist, because they do not stop from presenting temporary metamorphosis, but they suggest to the audience that human beings consistently exuviate, experiment, and hybridize themselves. While transhumanism's emphasis on metamorphosis is often divorced from everyday life, Ducournau's films reveal how metamorphosis is a widely shared experience if only viewers

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[216] Kakoudaki. *Anatomy of a Robot,* 31.

could recognize it as such. Being transhuman does not mean being exceptional. Instead, it means that transformation is an ordinary, everyday event.

By using the same names multiple times in her films – Justine, Adrien, and Alexia – Ducournau highlights the centrality of transformation across her different films. In *Raw*, Alexia consumes Adrien's flesh and becomes Adrien in *Titane*. In Junior, Justine shows her transformation, while in *Titane*, she is one of Alexia's murder victims. To understand this oscillation between different identities, I engaged with Deleuze and Guattari's discourse on becoming-animal. *Titane*, Ducournau's most recent film, however, deviates slightly from this discussion of animality: the film makes us think about the relationship between humans and machines which suggests a new form of humanity. Earlier in this chapter, I began the chapter with a discussion of New French Extremity. It seems that Ducournau's films correspond to this category, however, at the same time they are different in respect of the goal of violated images. If the films of NFE wanted to transgress physical borders, Ducournau's films focus on the fluid process of transformation itself. Therefore, it is possible to regard her films as transhumanist, because in her films, constant metamorphosis matters more than a pure shock effect. By continuing and differentiating her films from NFE, Ducournau makes us want to see more metamorphoses in French cinema.

6.0 Afterword

As of today (May 1st, 2024), the first three films or TV shows that appear on screen after typing "French film" on Netflix are *Outreau: Un cauchemar français*/*The Outreau Case: A French Nightmare* (2024), *Lupin* (2021-2023), and *Dix pour cent*/*Call My Agent!* (2015-2018). *Outreau* is a crime documentary series based on true incidents, and *Lupin* is one of the most successful French TV series, starring Omar Sy, who became an international star after *Intouchables*/*The Intouchables* (2011). Lastly, *Call My Agent*! is a comedy series, which is also the most popular film genre in France.[217] Netflix has been presenting sci-fi films such as *Oxygen* (2021), and *Bigbug* (2022), and animated films like *I Lost My Body* (2019) and *The Summit of the Gods* (2021), but there are many lighthearted, comical, and romantic pieces when it comes to French TV shows and films.

The films I analyzed in this dissertation belong to comparatively less popular categories in France. Except for the films of Georges Méliès, the pioneer of early cinema whose films are usually studied in film courses all over the world, they are animation (four percent of admissions by genre according to Unifrance[218]), or SF, (categorized as fantasy, science-fiction, and horror), which takes up only two percent. Studying comparatively minor genres in film studies helps people better understand certain countries or cultures, because it diversifies the perspectives on particular topics,

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[217] "The Top Selling French Film Genres in Foreign Markets," *Unifrance*, accessed August 31, 2023, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://medias.unifrance.org/medias/126/97/156030/piece_jointe/the-top-selling-french-film-genres-in-foreign-markets.pdf

[218] Ibid., 5.

such as corporality, climate, technology, and hierarchy. For example, the way that characters treat a serial killing is very different in the Quebecois comedy, *Le Sense de l'Humour/A Sense of Humor* (2011) and *Titane*, a French film that is closer to horror/sci-fi. Comedies make us laugh, melodramas make us feel romantic, but fantasy, science-fiction, and horror sometimes cause us to feel dread. The unknown creatures that we encounter for the first time, the transformations and metamorphoses of human beings, and the blurry borders between humans and nonhumans can make us feel uncomfortable, and some viewers even have nightmares after seeing those images.

Nonhuman beings that can interact with human characters in cinema represent otherness. In everyday life, many people imagine talking to animals, robots, cyborgs, or being attacked by monsters and extraterrestrials. There always have been films about unknown, hybrid, and fantastic bodies that amaze and challenge us at the same time: what do human bodies mean? The films I chose for this dissertation interpreted "being human" in their own ways, through the formats and genres of early short films, animation, films with CGI, and finally, arthouse films. Studying French cinema alongside transhumanism allowed me to highlight the mutual relations between animality studies, disability studies, gender studies, and critical race theory at the same time.

For example, the protagonist, Naoufel in *I Lost My Body* (2019) was born in Morocco, but he had to live with his distant relatives in France after his parents were killed in a car accident. From this context, we realize that his separated hand, which gains an opportunity to travel the city on its own, is technically French-Arabic. One can analyze this film from a socio-political perspective since the film briefly shows his situation, having to live in France with his distant family after the death of his parents. When he was little in Morocco, Naoufel dreamed of becoming an astronaut and a pianist. Without his parents, in France, he has to deliver pizza and be scolded by his boss all the time. Nevertheless, from the separated hand's perspective, its tactile journey is

more important than his Maghrebi identity. I suggest transhumanism as an alternative framework for understanding the relational dynamics between different groups of identities. By including nonhuman, or in-between beings such as the severed hand in the discussion, one can realize that the focus of discourse does not always have to be humans.

Why does it matter to study transhumanism and French cinema together? By analyzing transformations of human and nonhuman bodies, one can examine how societies and individuals perceive bodies, as well as the connection between what is happening in reality and what can happen in the future. Contemporary French cinema has a particular focus on embodiment, and scholars such as Martine Beugnet and Tim Palmer have studied this aspect across a range of films. Beugnet argued that there is something particularly engaging in French cinema's emphasis on the corporeality.[219] Tim Palmer coined the term *Cinéma du corps* (Cinema of Bodies), analyzing French films that deal frankly and graphically with the body and corporeal transgressions.[220] Many scholars noticed the active expression of bodies in contemporary French cinema, however, the discussion had not yet been connected to transhumanism. As I argued in Chapter Four, the hybridization of human bodies is no longer only the province of fantasies and pure imagination. Prosthetic bodies and lab-grown organs are becoming more and more a reality, and cinema can help viewers process changes in how they recognize bodies. Some French filmmakers have always focused on these questions, such as in the films of Méliès and Laloux. This dissertation attended to the presence of severed, multiplied, and transformative bodies that sometimes escaped from

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[219] Martine Beugnet, "Beginnings," in *Cinema and Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression,* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 15.

[220] Tim Palmer, "The *Cinéma du Corps*," in *Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2011).

human bodies. One can say that they are nonhuman, or mere instances of the fantastic. Nevertheless, these "uncommon" bodies have existed since the beginning of French cinema, and they are still an important part of contemporary French production, as seen on global streaming platforms.

Even though the films I chose for this dissertation are mostly French, these films are consumed and discussed globally and universally. For instance, Méliès' films inspired many filmmakers all around the world, such as *The Invention of Hugo Cabaret* (2007), written by Brian Selznick, its film adaptation *Hugo* (2011), directed by Martin Scorsese, and *Fury of the Demon* (2016), a mockumentary film by Fabian Delage. For René Laloux's films, they are often compared to the works of Miyazaki Hayao. Laloux himself wrote an article on Hayao's films,[221] and some critics claim that there is a parallel in the animated world of Hayao and Laloux.[222] Jean-Pierre Jeunet was able to globally distribute his newest film, *Bigbug* through Netflix. Finally, Julia Ducournau is currently working with A24, an American independent film and television company, on her own TV series.[223]

The two most important keywords in my dissertation – transhumanism and posthumanism - ask questions about how to transform and adapt human bodies in relation to robots, cyborgs, artificial intelligence, climate change, animal bodies, and disability. Their raison d'être is slightly

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[221] René Laloux, "Mon Voisin Hayao (My Neighbor Hayao)," *Positif*, Iss. 412. (1995): 78-79.

[222] Philippe Moins, "René Laloux, The Man Who Made '*La Planète Sauvage*' ('*The Fantastic Planet*')," May 10, 2004, *Animation World Network*, https://www.awn.com/animationworld/ren-laloux-man-who-made-la-plan-te-sauvage-fantastic-planet

[223] Jordan Ruimy, "'*Titane*' Director Julia Ducournau Working With A24 on Her Next Project," May 4, 2023, *World of Reel*, https://www.worldofreel.com/blog/2023/5/gsfo7fya78oojo3ueanrt6hhiaw2my

different – while transhumanism focuses on individual transformation and adaptation, posthumanism focuses on cohabitation and reconciliation between different species and groups. Nonetheless, both transhumanism and posthumanism encourage people to escape from boundaries that define one's identity with a single word. In this sense, being non-binary means being transhuman and posthuman at the same time.

While this dissertation focused on a corpus of films made in France, transhumanism and posthumanism are global concerns and they are reflected in media from other production contexts. For instance, *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), directed by Shinya Tsukamoto, is about a man who was hybridized with metal parts in his body. *I'm a Cyborg, But That's Ok* (2006), directed by Park Chan Wook, is the film that I referred to in the Introduction. The film tells the story of a young woman who firmly believes that she is a cyborg, so she refuses to eat. There have been many interesting films that I have been watching over decades, and they would serve as great examples to better understand transhumanism and posthumanism.

Contemporary films that engage with transhumanism have a comparatively short history of nonhuman bodies compared to French cinema and literature. It was through the French animated film, *I Lost My Body,* and François Rabelais' sixteenth-century novels, *Gargantua et Pantagruel* (1532-1534) that I realized that there is a consistent use of humor in the French literary tradition that provides surprisingly acute insights about human bodies. I especially discussed the sense of humor in Chapter Three, on the films of Jean-Pierre Jeunet, but humor is at times very central to the discourse of French cinema in general. The films I curated for this dissertation do not regard transforming and adapting humans from a solemn, stern perspective. Those creatures might have started as expressions of the fantastic, however, what caught my eye was how expansive and fluid the play with bodies can be in French literature and cinema. For example, in François Rabelais'

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Renaissance novel *Pantagruel* (1532), characters joke about building a fortress made out of vaginas and penises. One could say that such vulgar jokes about sexuality can be recognized as an insult, but there always have been works in French literature and cinema that walk a fine line between mockery and the art of humor, laughing about the lowliness and mutability of human bodies. I believe that this lighthearted and flexible tendency on human bodies breaks prejudice against nonhuman bodies. Whether one is human or nonhuman, there is no need to thoroughly distinguish one another. Human bodies are fragile anyway, and they can be processed, recreated, and reimagined in versatile ways. They can be hybridized with machines and animals, finding their unique way to survive. It is not a coincidence that these bodies in the films of Méliès, Laloux, Jeunet, and Ducournau are depicted as easily separable, controllable, or transformable. Transhumanism and posthumanism are invitations to become other, so we can better understand the identities that we have not become yet.

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