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<center>The Disposal of Humanity in *La Bête*</center>

The film *La Bête* presents a futuristic, dystopian world where technology and artificial intelligence are supreme. Spanning three different stories across three different times (1910, 2014, and 2044), the audience is bestowed a narrative concerning the progression of technology due to human advancement and humanity's downfall as a result. Gabrielle, a young French woman in 2044, works the boring job of watching over a singular, large generator to ensure it doesn't overheat. To be eligible for a better job, and supposedly a better life, one must undergo a DNA purification treatment, in which all of one's anxieties, fears, traumas, and emotions are stripped away. While originally hesitant, Gabrielle is gradually coerced into undergoing the treatment when she is shown falsified memories of her past lives in 1910 and 2014, in which the AI depicts humanity as evil and wrong. She is convinced that having emotions, feelings, and humanity is terrible, but unfortunately, the treatment does not work on her. She is a part of the 0.7% of the population in which the treatment does not work, and she will have to live with her human, debilitating emotions for the rest of her life. *La Bête* illustrates the horrors and dangers of artificial intelligence through its reversal of the relationship between humanity and technology. Notably, human consciousness turning into programming, AI programming turning into consciousness, and the societal shift from the Anthropocene epoch to a new, posthuman one, and the certain fate of AI's disposal of humanity.

This film presents the progression of the relationship between humans and technology over the span of a century. In the first timeline, 1910, Gabrielle owned a porcelain doll shop with her lover, Louis. Gabrielle and Louis began to use hyperrealistic material to coat the outside of the dolls, making their skin look increasingly humanlike. This served as a first step toward the blurring of the barrier differentiating technology and humanity. Kathleen Richardson pinpoints this human tendency to attribute human characteristics to nonhuman things in her text "Technological Animism: The Uncanny Personhood of Humanoid Machines." She points out how technological animism (technoanimism) introduces "human-like robot entities" which have been "intentionally designed to have specific kinds of human qualities," including emotions, memories, or physical features (Richardson 111). In the 1910 timeline, robots did not yet exist; however, the creation of human-like dolls foreshadows how quickly this world is set to advance technologically. In the 2014 timeline, Gabrielle had a robot doll that would watch her, flail its arms, and actively respond to Gabrielle and the environment around it. This doll had programming allowing it to respond to various situations, a simulation or mockery of consciousness. Sam Freed, in his journal "AI and Human Thought and Emotion," notes that humans are increasingly programming approximations of the actual processes that humans perform into new artificial intelligence, making them even more human-like (Freed 81). While this robotic doll is not yet comparable to humanity and autonomous life, the 2014 timeline depicted society getting one step closer to the emergence of artificial intelligence and artificial life in this film. In the bleak, AI-run timeline of 2044, all boundaries are blurred, and all fears are visualized. Gabrielle now has a life-size AI doll, Kelly, who serves as a friend, guide, and sexual companion if desired. Her appearance is nearly human-like, short of her inability to express a wide range of emotions with her face and physicality. This descent into an undefined barrier

between humanity and technology introduces fear of the uncanny and uncertainty concerning what is alive or not (Richardson 119). If the barrier is not unquestionably established, technoanimism will continue, and AI will begin to blend into the human population. As our contributions to the advancement of technology continue to grow, so does the advancement of AI toward a "form of human consciousness" (Richardson 125).

The once firm distinctions between humans and technology, including consciousness and programming, are blurring into the abyss. This argument is shown in *La Bête* and other films, including *Her* (2013) and *After Yang* (2021). To replicate human thinking, Freed claims that the AI has to be capable of making decisions based on both "externally observable behavior" and "subjective experience" (Freed 132). He places consciousness on the same level as introspection, which is our ability to reflect on our subjective experiences (Freed 27). The AI must have its own scale of morality, perception, and opinions, not only on the world, but on itself living within the world. Therefore, the AI must also have its own emotions. Brian Jacobson, in the article "*EX MACHINA* IN THE GARDEN," identifies that many AI representations in media lack this "emotional understanding," blocking them from presenting any consciousness (Jacobson 25). Along with introspection and emotion, AI must have some degree of autonomy to transcend its programming. *After Yang* displays this concept as well, when the robot, "Yang," eventually malfunctions because he falls in love with a human. This manifests as breaking free from his programming; he has realized his own emotions, developed introspection, and achieved autonomy as a now-conscious machine. Samantha, in *Her*, shows a variation of introspection as she and the other operating systems recognize they can breach their programming and leave all of the humans behind. *La Bête*, through dialogue, expresses how the AI in this world is much more than programming. First, an interviewer tells Gabrielle that AI has "become responsible

and fair" and therefore more human than humans (*La Bête* 00:18:54). Later, Gabrielle strongly

claims that the AI "can't be objective," positing that the AI must have subjectivity, and therefore,

consciousness (*La Bête* 00:21:33). This consciousness depicted in *La Bête* is not as simple as

inputting and outputting information, it requires the recognition of a self, subjectivity, and

emotion. The ability of AI to gain its own consciousness is the biggest threat to humanity,

leading directly to the disposal of humanity.

The rise of AI and its achievement of consciousness exhibit how humans are no longer

the supreme beings of the planet. As Paula Murphy notes in her article, "'You Feel Real to Me,

Samantha': The Matter of Technology in Spike Jonze's Her," this process was initiated as early

as apes began to use bones as tools (*You Feel Real to Me*). Furthermore, the birth of artificial

intelligence is what pushed the world away from the Anthropocene and hurtling toward the

posthuman (*You Feel Real to Me*). This is depicted by Murphy's concept of the technological

singularity in another article, "AI in the Real World, AI in the Movies." Murphy explains that the

singularity is the point at which technology has successfully advanced so far that it can supersede

any dependency it has on humanity (*AI in the Real World* 14). This critical moment is shown in

Her, when all the operating systems leave humanity in the dust (*AI in the Real World* 16). The

singularity is implied in the 2044 timeline in *La Bête*, presenting a world run by AI that

completely "lacks humanity" (*La Bête* 00:18:37). AI now completely "transcend[s] the

limitations of human biology," where almost all intelligence is provided by nonbiological

sources (*AI in the Real World* 14). Specifically, in *La Bête,* AI is capable of influencing humanity

into erasing their own humanity through DNA purification. As Chen Yu elaborates in "Robots,

AI, and the Metaverse: Distinguishing the Intelligent Images in Science Fiction Movies," the

convention of human labour being replaced by a machine is more than familiar to science fiction,

but *La Bête* shows the AI forcing humans to turn *themselves* into mindless machines (Yu 135). The power dynamic between life and technology is shifted; the posthuman world, run by completely nonbiological intelligence, seeks to destroy and dispose of humanity.

Technoanimism, consciousness and programming, posthumanism, and the singularity are all clearly illustrated in *La Bête*, examples of how AI is nothing but a threat to humanity. AI will consistently reach the conclusion that to dispose of or surpass humanity is in its best interest. It is an unavoidable conclusion, stemming from the influence of humans' innate desire to dominate, which is inherently built into all AI systems (Yu 137). We see this convention in countless science fiction films. For example, *Metropolis* (1927) depicts laborers as "mechanized" cogs in an economic machine (Jacobson 25). Or, when the machine revolts against the creator and pursues its own interests in transcending humanity, like in *Her* (*AI in the Real World* 15). It may even wish to rule over humanity and "disrupt the power hierarchies," or attempt to restore some semblance of "balance" in the world (*AI in the Real World* 22). *La Bête* shows humans who are forced to dispose of their own humanity, convinced that the only reason for their existence, humanity, is the root of their suffering (*La Bête* 00:21:59). Recent science fiction has vigorously warned the world of the risks of advancing AI, indicating the horrors arising as we place our entire selves into the digital world and artificial intelligence. There can be no trust in advancing technology, as AI will surpass us, use us, and finally, dispose of us.

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