

DREAMING THE POSTHUMAN: NONHUMAN ENTANGLEMENTS AND AFFECTIVE SONIC IMMERSION —A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

At the juncture of the fourth industrial revolution, driven by techno-capitalism and marked by nature depletion and social upheavals (Mbembe, 2024; Suárez-Villa, 2009), posthumanism has accompanied the exploration of alternative narratives that decenter the human subject and embrace nonhuman alterities to create possible futures (Wolfe, 2010). This paper analyzes Ildikó Enyedi's film *On Body and Soul* (2017), arguing that its decentering strategies serve as a crucial text that challenges human exceptionalism. This paper contends that through sound affective immersivity and the representation of nonhuman entanglements in dream sequences, the film establishes logical contradictions that mediate the narrative through visceral and precognitive levels that bypass rational closure. Thus, the film materializes entanglement, contesting dualism and reconstituting the human subject through embodied and embedded experience.

Keywords: Posthumanism, Nonhuman Entanglements, Embodied Experience, Sonic Affect, Multispecies Storytelling, *On Body and Soul*

Introduction

A bright harmony of chimes and the resonance of cymbals are the first elements of exposition in Ildikó Enyedi's *On Body and Soul* (Testről és lélekről, 2017). Throughout the film, sound predominantly functions as a rhetorical pivot, mediating the contrast between two impressions of reality: the diegetic world of the slaughterhouse and the shared oneiric world. During these dream sequences, the anthropocentric perspective shifts towards non-human subjects. As the protagonist's embodiment experience of being is reconfigured to a stag and a deer, the audience is led to rethink the human/animal boundaries. The contrast of worlds and experiences raises several questions on how we see ourselves through others and how nonhuman representation is a catalyst to explore other mythical, ontological, and sociopolitical paradigms. The film introduces, by way of its title, a contrasting relationship between two states of existence on "body" and "sou"; the contrast implies a dialectical relationship that cuts open a gap for ambiguity and in-betweens. As the director Ildiko Enyedi expresses, "It's not so much that we have a soul and we have a body, it's that the thing that we call ourselves is a third thing, it's the interference of the two. I wanted to show that we are somehow the interference of body and soul" (on Benjamin, 2018).

To elaborate on the ambiguity, the film is committed to a realistic depiction of dreams, rather than a fantastic scenario with surrealistic features. This commitment is evident, as the filmmakers dispensed with CGI for the dream sequences' stags, choosing instead to film real, trained deer (Worthington, 2018). The film is equipped with haptic sound and imagery that appeal to a tactile, physical, and emotional response from the spectator. This strategic use of sound-affective immersivity contrasts sharply with the heightened sensory stimulation of contemporary blockbusters, achieving a profound effect through stillness, intimacy, and sonic touch, themes that are broadly discussed in the film and part of the afflictions of the main characters.

In their waking reality, protagonists Mária and Endre are in some way constrained by physical or psychological conditions. They work at the slaughterhouse, a paradigm of modern society's dehumanized global commodification and industrial space, where death is carried out with surgical precision and emotional detachment. Their dream sequences, however, place them in a pristine, snow-covered forest, roaming freely as a stag and doe. These nonhuman entanglements, the becoming-animal, function as a narrative device that unsettlingly aligns with the posthuman critique of contemporary society standards. The shared dream bridges materiality and relationality, departing from transhumanist perspectives that claim that the separation of body and mind is something to transcend (McHugh, 2022). Instead, consciousness and embodiment are connected and affect each other. The nonhuman embodiment in dreams alters the characters' waking reality, having a profound effect on their sensibility and vulnerability.

In that sense, critical posthumanism raises the fundamental question of what it means to be human and, in doing so, promotes new paradigms for understanding entanglement, interimplication, hybridity, and interdependence (Herbrechter et al., 2022). Posthumanism addresses the premise that the human is not an autonomous and unique entity, but rather is a being chemically and physically embedded in and dependent on the environment, with attributes that are part of a larger, developing ecosystem (Orzeata, 2020). Posthumanism aims to bring profound alterations to the discourse and thought itself, where the "posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 12).

Posthumanists have taken on the affirmative critique of the enlightenment values and human exceptionalism from various poststructuralists and antihumanists. Highly influential have been the contributions from Foucault (1970), who considered the deconstruction of the traditional and hegemonic

precepts of the human subject and took on a critical stance against epistemological and power structures. Similarly, Derrida (1972) suggested that the humanist philosophy had neutralized and obscured speculative concerns about the anthropos. By challenging these precepts, Derrida argues for a notion of “human” as rather mutable and in constant flux. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argued for new kinds of relations emerging from nonhierarchical alliances, symbiotic attachments, and the mingling of creative agents, which they termed “Becomings.” Several other disciplines and fields of studies have been substantial for posthumanism’s development, such as critical race theory, feminism and postcolonial studies, to name a few in the humanities. Key works such as Donna Haraway’s theory on entwined reciprocal systems with other species (2016), Katherine Hayles’ media studies through the lens of gender and embodiment (1999) and Rosi Braidotti’s neo/vital materialism (2013) are imperative for understanding the structures of relations and the necessity of human-nonhuman links, encompassing technological interfaces and both biological and non-biological matter.

Contrary to the posthumanist approaches, the Cartesian dualistic tradition positioned nature as a mere backdrop of the human, culminating in the industrial and capitalist expansion that violently depleted global resources. Through the deployment of power, human exceptionalism and symbolic faculties justified the appropriation of the inappropriable, including human lives (Mbembe, 2024). The resulting instrumental reason fractured the very grounds of the human, contributing to what can be understood as a project of disembodiment or desensitization.

It is in this context that techno-capitalism (Suárez-Villa, 2009) has emerged, devoting innovation and technology to the commodification of nature and the creation of manufacturable beings (Mbembe, 2024). Such conditions, that prefigure the fourth technological revolution and the acceleration of the sixth mass extinction (Kolbert, 2014), demand a critical

posthumanist reflection on the contested structures that have enabled them. We are currently living in a period where human beings, through corporate machinery, seek to abolish the human/nonhuman divide not by recognizing vulnerability and co-dependence but by replacing genuine connection with the cold, unflinching power of technology and digital systems (Mbembe, 2024). This shift constitutes a move toward a technic, complex, and abstract vitalism that is detached from planetary realities, representing a fundamental flight from the vulnerable, affective body.

This is precisely what philosopher Frédéric Lordon contends with in his theory of the “society of affections.” Lordon draws from Spinoza, arguing that desire moves us, and therefore, the foundation of social life lies in shared affects, the pre-conscious emotional states that drive our actions (Lordon, 2022). The contemporary disembodiment project produces a crisis of affection because it seeks to detach us from our foundational, biological, and natural relationality. Instead, it is driven by artificial affects created by social and digital regimes. This results in the servitude of our passions, where responsibilities for other species are relegated to econostalgia. Desires are manufactured by the machinery of techno-capitalism, leading to a failure to find commonality, to reflect on otherness, and to organize collectively to decide what we want to become.

On Body and Soul stands as a poignant critique of society’s disembodiment/deanimation project. The film uses dream sequences, conceived as a shared experience and a space of incarnation, to challenge human exceptionalism and detachment. This decentering gesture is present in the film operations and in the narrative text. By this analogue of convergence, the film provides logical contradictions that deliberately unsettle the spectator’s cognitive process, creating an affective sensorial pull that facilitates immersivity through sound and image. The film engages the audience through the haptic and non-representational operations of sound that fluctuate between modes of listening — casual, semantic and

reduced (Chion, 1993) — compelling spectators to resonate along with the film's experience. This strategy shifts perspectives and moves the spectator from the "actual world" of industrial alienation and into the "possible actual world" of the posthuman.

Thus, the film's sound design is not merely an aesthetic choice but an enunciative strategy that materializes the posthuman entanglement. The shared dream of the nonhuman subjects (the stag and doe) bridges the psychic and the physical, the animal and the human, acting as a profound site of re-embodiment. By emphasizing intimacy, silence, and the visceral sounds of the body and the natural world, the film compels the spectator towards a tactile, embodied imagination. This forces the audience to confront the viscosity of precognitive levels, the very site where Lordon's affections reside, challenging the dominant disembodied state of industrial logic.

In the following section, this paper aims to examine the enunciative strategies of immersivity, rooted in nonhuman entanglements and affective sound design, that is alternately mediated and amplified throughout the film and ultimately serves as a critique of the modern crisis of affection while articulating a pathway toward an embodied, relational, and truly posthuman existence.

Dreams beyond human

Dreams are a point of rupture between the consciousness and the unconsciousness, what is real and what is not. Often, cultures and humanity make meaning out of the symbolism of these ruptures of state, given that dreams challenge rationalism. For Jung (1997), dreams provide common threads that connect all individuals. Along with our personal consciousness, there exists a collective unconscious that is universal and inherited. Dreams directly challenge the concept of human derived from the enlightenment, a human who is

in command of nature and far beyond their own animality. Dreams challenge this by revealing the structural lack within the subject and their desires. Rather than fulfilling wishes, dreams appear to shine a light on the rupture of humans and their alienation from their own nature (Dimitriadis, 2014). Therefore, dreams provide crucial intersections for analyzing, through the lens of critical posthumanism, the contradictions of humanism and its legacy of crisis, exploitation, and detachment.

Dreams have been deeply intertwined with cultural and artistic expression precisely because they challenge logic and invite the spectator to participate actively by stepping outside of consciousness and rationality. To use Cary Wolfe's (2015) terms, the posthuman demands a challenge to current rationality, positioning that it is a necessity to think outside inherited norms and create an inclusive framework that integrates non-hegemonic voices. This is evident in how certain cultures have embraced the logic of dreams, such as Amazonian cultures that draw a cosmology where humans share subjectivity with nature but experience different realities (de Castro, 1998). In these knowledge systems, dreams and rituals are sources of wisdom, encountering the anima of other ontologies. In this sense, dreams are perceived as a portal to understanding nonhuman subjects, moving us away from universalism and instead embracing a perspectivism that recognizes our shared posthuman convergence (Braidotti, 2013).

Francisco Goya's 1799 aquatint, *The sleep of reason produces monsters*, depicts the dreamer stalked by owls and bats, with an inscription explaining that imagination, when unchecked by reason, can create horrors (Nehamas, 2001). This reflects a conscious effort to detach the rational self from the flesh and, by extension, from nature. Similar pieces from this period, such as Henry Fuseli's *The Nightmare* (1781) and William Blake's *The Ghost of a Flea* (1819–20), consistently associate nature and animality with nightmarish creatures, reflecting an epistemic

practice that nature must be tamed rather than integrated, part of the Western tradition that depicted the rupture of dreams as a threat to reason. However, the Industrial Revolution and the horror from disruptive events like World War I led to a rejection of these traditional aesthetic and philosophical values. Movements such as Surrealism and Expressionism, influenced by psychoanalysis, found in dreams spaces of metamorphosis and transformation that defied the established order (Forrer, K. 2021). Works such as Salvador Dalí's *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee Around a Pomegranate a Second Before Awakening* (1944) and Charles Burchfield's *The Moth and the Thunderclap* (1961), along with Frida Kahlo's *The Wounded Deer* (1946), exemplify the intrinsic relationship between the unconscious and the natural world, where humanity and the wild merge as a body of the same matter.

Consistently, dreams have been depicted in film since the early days of cinema. Oneiric representation has been a way to expand the limits of cinematic language through the instrumental transformation afforded by decoupage, montage, and projection (Baudry, 1975). These innovations, particularly foregrounded by the Surrealists, changed cinema's relationship with the spectator, challenging the passive audience stance and moving them toward an active role (Lowenstein, 2015). In this context, the dream sequence's ability to disrupt the narrative text helps to close the gap between subject and object by connecting the spectator with an allegorical or symbolic realm, fostering identification with the character's mental life. As Eberwin states, "To this screen we bring memories of how we experience the rapid jumps, incoherent connections, and ambiguities of our own dreams. These serve as constitutive psychic coordinates helping us to follow through the dreamer's experience" (1984, 54).

Eberwin (1984) developed a taxonomy of film dream sequences. Those relating to desire are particularly relevant, as they depict a character's inner motivations and drives, often generating sequences that explore themes of completeness,

transcendence, fulfillment, or conflict. This categorization proves useful when framed by Frédéric Lordon's *The Society of Affects* (2013). Lordon, adopting a Spinozist and materialist posture, contends that individuals are conditioned by affects, the shared passions and emotions resulting from the structures and institutions to which they belong. He argues for a return to these long-forgotten passions, not for the sake of subjectivity but to recognize that they are collective, not merely subjective, and are determined by historical conditions. Humans are moved by these passions and tend to replicate the structures that determine them, yet desire also holds to disruption and creates new structures. As dreams are not controlled by these structures, they are capable of dismantling the contingency of the exploitative and profit-minded pursuit of passions, and achieve this by switching on empathy, recognizing the otherness and recentering those dormant and tamed passions.

For example, in *On Body and Soul*, the slaughterhouse operates as the dominant social structure, and the affects of the main characters, Endre and Mária, are determined by their professional position within it. Ironically, they are confronted daily with death and the bodies of living beings but the passions they are determined to experience are highly contained. What are these determined affects? The desire for professional fulfillment, the sense of a job well done? Could there also be a fear of punishment or the lure of sociability at work? Within the film, several of these dynamics are present in the workplace, emphasizing its efficiency at taming the passions of its employees.

Both Endre and Mária exemplify the affects of this environment as a state of atrophied desires. Mária struggles with intimacy and basic socialization, while Endre displays a profound tedium and loss of interest that manifests in emotional and sexual disinterest. This set of atrophied desires, which enable the operation of a slaughterhouse without empathy, is precisely what is disrupted by a crisis of uncontained desire.

This disruption is triggered by an employee who steals cattle mating hormones, attempting to enhance his virility and appease his wife's fear of abandonment.

The film subtly details how the slaughterhouse mediates a chain of desensitization and repressed affects across its employees: the sexual dissatisfaction of the stealing employee, the aggressive flirtation of a newly hired worker towards Mária, as well as one of the office employee's flirtatious behavior. It is the widespread evidence of contained or misdirected desire that marks the emotional terrain of the institution. Crucially, the mating hormone incident leads to an investigation where the main characters are asked about their dreams by a psychologist who is hired to help solve the case of theft, ultimately connecting the protagonist's private worlds. The shared dream disrupts the boredom and weariness, an event that confronts manufactured and immanent passions. Respectively symbolized in the mating powder, there is a deeper and obscure desire that needs to be sought and processed, initiating the film's exploration of embodied connection.

Thus, dream cinema and the dream screen phenomena contribute to a dialectic and oscillating process of immersive personalization and engaged embodiment (Walsh, 2004), and explore new temporal and spatial orders at the enigmatic, ambiguous, and unpredictable intersection of impression and reality (Hahn & Werner, 2016). Contemporary examples further highlight this posthumanist shift: Ali Abbasi's *Border* (2018) uses surrealist encounters where the protagonist, Tina, displays an affinity with other species, like a fox, moose, and deer. For Tina, these are Harawayian "companion species" with whom she is "bonded in significant otherness," blurring the boundaries of species-status. Similarly, Apichatpong Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2011) incorporates local myths in a dreamlike narrative where the deceased son visits his dying father in the shape of an animal, thus merging the lines between human/

nonhuman, life/death and dream/reality. Following this lineage, Ildikó Enyedi's *On Body and Soul* (2017) highlights the severance of body and soul (and human and animal) through the contrast between the carnality of the cattle in the slaughterhouse (the "body") and the freedom of the deer in the pristine forest dreamscape (the "soul").

Embodiment and Sound Affective Immersivity

Posthumanism contends that the collapse of the nature-culture divide necessitates new figurations for understanding embodied and embedded subjectivity (Braidotti, 2013). This perspective, fed by contemporary materialist readings of Spinoza's Monism, such as those by Deleuze, Guattari, and Foucault, allows us to surpass the Cartesian dualism of body and soul, implying a notion of self-organizing matter that is transversal across beings. Haraway's work reinforces this, noting that the lines constituting mind/body, human/animal, and organism/machine are increasingly blurred, as scientific evidence points toward entanglement rather than purity and superiority. Cognition is shown to be deeply shaped by our physical experiences and affective interactions with the environment and nonhuman subjects (Haraway, 1991). In this sense, Braidotti's theory implies a materialist and vitalist perspective that recognizes a vital, self-organizing matter not exclusive to the human but belonging to a human-nature continuum and based in the immanence of relations.

To this extent, the analysis of sound and immersivity in film offers an ideal approach to tracing the configurations of post-human subjectivity in action. This approach moves beyond a mere interpretation of the narrative text to recognizing the film as an embodied and situated experience. Such subjectivities are deeply shaped by their body (embodied), through the contact with the film apparatus and its operations, and by the surroundings and conditions of their environment (embedded) through the layered system of events and text. The body is the vehicle through which the spectator encounters the

cinematic modes of representation to make matter meaningful and meaning matter (Sobchack, 2004). These sensory and cognitive relationships are not detached but overlap, entangle, and mediate one another. Abstract and concrete and figurative and literal senses reciprocate in an interplay of equally possible situations. This ambiguity, as Merleau-Ponty posits, is a basic situation of the human condition, constantly mediated by experience, sense, perception, and temporality (Carruthers, 2022). By surpassing dualism, the spectator's sensory and sensual economy is actively engaged, altered, and reconstructed by the film's operations, experienced as a whole. Hayles (1999) argues that while information is important, it is the material embodiment that provides meaning and context. In particular, sound affects the spectator materially: its physical vibrations and waves resonate with the body, compelling a system of reciprocal shaping and becoming-with.

Consequently, the manipulation of these qualities through post-production creates aural experiences that, in conjunction with other audiovisual operations, guide or alter the spectator's psychoacoustic perception to convey emotion, attention, and narrative engagement. Consequently, sound mediates the text within a realm of abstraction and imagination. On the horizon of representation, unlike the image, which often *speaks for itself*, aural experiences do not require a corresponding visual source to define their ontology. As Don Ihde expresses, "it is of the very essence of the imaginative noema to be easily changeable and variable... Its dissolubility, its rapidity of transformation, its vivid but 'evanescent' presences make it difficult to 'fix' what is imagined" (2007, p. 122). This inherent ambiguity, which comes from narrative indeterminacy, ensures that audiences actively fill in the gaps using memory, emotion, or narratively guided intuition.

To analyze this active role, we apply Michel Chion's three modes of listening, casual (structure/source identification), semantic (meaning interpretation), and reduced (focus

on sound matter/timbre). The movement and overlapping actions of these modes are both crucial to our argument, demonstrating the immersive experience as a dynamic process rooted in ambiguity and the comparison of equally possible situations. Thus, the spectator is actively filling in the gaps and negotiating meaning; it is among these spaces of plausibility that the film experience unfolds over time. Salome Voegeling, in her book "Sonic Possible Worlds" (2021), argues that sound worlds are not just real but actual. Standing in between, fictional sound worlds become not just a mental possibility of representation but a concrete actual possibility that "breaks open the slices of materiality, interpretation, and the perspectives that furnish an apparently actual world" (p. 44). Distancing from the disembodiment hype from our era, the analysis of sound represents a way of accounting for the embedded and embodied nature of the subject, contributing to the complexity of subjectivities in critical posthumanist research.

Decentering the Human

Key to posthumanist scholarship is the decentering of the human, not through abandonment but by imagining a physical context that integrates the perspectives of nonhuman subjects. This concept is mirrored in narrative theory through the framework of Possible Worlds.

According to Marie Laure Ryan (1991; 2019), in fictional narratives as well as dreams, the "actual world" is temporarily decentered, and the fictional text becomes the new "actual possible world" where new alternate possible worlds become available. Thus, the spectator's agency dynamically transitions, a process Ryan describes: "For the duration of our immersion in a work of fiction the realm of possibilities is thus recentered around the sphere that the narrative presents as the actual world. This recentering pushes the reader into a new system of actuality and possibility" (1991, p. 22).

On Body and Soul's particular premise of the dream as a shared experience intensifies the central power from which these alternate possible worlds orbit. When the dream becomes the "temporal actual world," the spectator is forced to decenter their own privileged human perspective, thereby engaging directly with the nonhuman subjects, the stag and the deer. This movement, bonded to the realistic depiction of dream sequences, exhibits the duality between sensorial pull and spectator agency, thus presenting several possibilities of pretended actual worlds and drawing attention to the ambiguity described by the paradigmatic discourse of dreams. Marco Caracciolo argues that "it is because logical contradictions elicit emotional responses— they may make us feel uneasy, confused, afraid, fearful, joyful, or pleased— that we build interpretations on the basis of the 'experiential feel' they evoke in us" (Caracciolo 2014, 55).

Connecting possible worlds with the theory of immersivity and listening, Salome Voegeling (2021) argues that immersivity is tied with recentering motion, subsequently centering and decentering itself among the possibility of worlds. These possible worlds are governed by the film's sensual and cognitive operations with concrete, semantic, and symbolic mediations of sound, image, and spectator. "It is only through a decentering and recentering from this present possible world into that present one, that what was previously only a possible world becomes an actual possible world for me: once I live in the midst of its things" (Voegeling, 2021, p. 63).

Dream worlds suit the context of alternate possible worlds in the filmic actual world. The uncanny and symbolical nature of the dream foregrounds the unconscious, which amplifies the contextual paradigms. This affective confusion, which forces the spectator to move beyond rational closure, is precisely where sound-affective immersivity intervenes using haptic and non-representational elements that promote the sensorial pull and guide the spectator precognitively towards vulnerability and entanglement with non-human subjects.

Resonating from Within

From the opening sequence of *On Body and Soul*, sound anticipates the visual operations. With the screen pitch black, a bright timbre resonance with a metallic texture is followed by chimes and bells. Without a visual cue, this tone can be referred to as what Chion (2019) defines as an acousmatic sound, a sound that is absent of sight. As a reflection of the film's materiality, the sound is separated from the image, eliciting the concreteness of the film and the non-representational dimension (Buckland, 2000). This initial isolation of sound preceding the image foregrounds the materiality of the film and emphasizes the vital matter as means of cognitive representation. As Braidotti argues, the posthuman subject must acknowledge the "dynamic and self-organizing capacity of all matter" (2013, p. 83).

The pristine winter woods that follow, which later will be revealed to be the dream sequence, find a stag and doe wandering the snow-covered land. The film has a total of eight dream sequences. Consistently, the soundscape is naturalistic and organic, accompanied by mostly soft wind and birds calling, whose pitch emphasizes the muteness of the environment, amplifying the visceral details of deer's respiration, galloping and touch. For instance, in the opening dream sequence, the stag tenderly reclines its head on top of the doe's loin. Even when the frame widens again, the presence of both deer is very much in the foreground. The sound heightens the closeness, denoting their movements, touch and breathing.

This minimalist approach and restraint in the use of other layers of sound elements brings into perception the corporeality of the deer. By silencing other sounds, it materializes the on screen representation. Through the physical attributes of sound, e.g., frequency register, it gives the stag and the doe a body that can be felt. The crafted silence makes us vulnerable and more perceptive to other sounds from the film and also to the sounds that we make. Chion (2016) defines this listening

act as “ergo audition.” This transensorial dimension of experience invites us to breathe along with the deer on the screen. Thus, we move closer to the actual world and become connected to a precognitive part of ourselves, and to our bodies as part of an entangled and reciprocal system. According to Chion (2019), there are certain phenomena, such as rhythm, texture, and material, that, although they reach us through audition and vision, are decoded in a motor function area in our brain. This effect, and the textures that sound and vision emanate, appeal to an embodied memory that activates a tactile sensory input (Marks, 1999). This resonates with Haraway’s notion of ‘becoming-with’ other species, where “co-constitution and situated knowledge are the only way to the real” (1991, p. 200).

These sensory links, according to Rocha (2016), invite us to experience from within ourselves the haptic contact that affection generates. This overall sound design choice will be replicated in all of the dream sequences, employing what Chion refers to “added value,” which is the sensory, informative, semantic, narrative, structural, or expressive value that a sound heard in a scene allows us to project onto the image, so as to create the impression that we are seeing in the image what we are in fact “audio-viewing” (2019, p.243).

The film’s diegetic world takes place in a slaughterhouse where the main characters work. Despite being a completely different setting, the empathy and the elemental feeling on which the spectator has been perceptually trained will remain intact regarding the situation. Expanding on the choice of deer and cattle for the film, Enyedi noted that “cows and bulls have very expressive faces. It could have been pigs ... or chickens. But there I think we would feel only horror” (Doo, 2018). Paraphrasing Orwell in *Animal Farm*, Haraway (2016) reflects that even in posthumanism, some animals are more equal than others. Deer and cattle are in some way a humanist abstraction. To illustrate this, stags are a fundamental part of Hungarian mythology. One of the oldest legends of the nation

features a stag leading the founders of the Magyar and Hun peoples to their land. As a mystical symbol, many other cultures include the deer in their mythology (Makkai 2000). The cattle belong to the bio-technological complex that has been stripped of every piece of relationality and concreteness. The film brings both abstractions together and forces the audience to confront this dichotomy and paradox.

One of the most grueling scenes in *On Body and Soul* documents the industrial slaughter of a cow in the first act. The scene follows the workers preparing the machines and placing the cow in the cabin. The frontal shot from the eye perspective of the cow compels the spectator to stare directly at the animal. The soundscape is considerably silent; minor noises from machines can be heard and, on top of that, the exhalation of the cow can be distinguished. The resonant acoustics and reverb of the machinery evoke a cold artificial space. After a pause, a blurred close-up shot shows the dead body falling from the cabin’s ramp and an explosion sound effect, presumably a cattle gun, is synchronized with the cut. This creates an interesting acousmatic effect that shocks and signifies unflinching death and detachment, altering perception and clarifying the ellipsis, although is an asynchronous sound event. This unsettling sequence lasts for three minutes, detailing the beheading, dismemberment, and industrial treatment of the cattle in a documentary fashion.

The sound and images are so crude, in their pure maternity, that attention shifts to the psychological and affective conditions (Shaviro, 1993). The intensity of the scene and the collapse of the representation create a state of shock that corrupts the sensorial memory and destabilizes the perceptual system of the spectator. Thinking from the guts, the pretend actual world remains a visceral possibility that, from unstructured knowledge, guides the motion and intersects with other possibilities according to the spectator’s agency, namely their listening act mode. This confrontation with raw mortality, as a universal mode of exposure, highlights our shared

vulnerability and the material commonality among species. Furthermore, it exposes them as subjects of the same machinery of commodification that “seize bodies and colonize desires and dreams, through the pleasures of consumption” (Mbembe, 2024, p. 114).

The carnal nature and documentary style of the scene communicate effectively by creating an ambiguous situation: the factual content is veridical but contradicts the dream's affective reality. This leaves the spectator vulnerable to their most elemental responses. Neuro-cinematic research reveals that mirror neurons make meaning below consciousness in the ‘embodied imagination’ (Richard, 2021, p. 22). Sobchack (2004) argues that our sensory modes reciprocate, making meaning through film causality. The affective pull thus trains and seduces the spectator to move between possibilities, transitioning to the mist of ambiguity—a threshold between the fictional and actual world.

On the same note, the final act, which features Maria's suicide attempt, confronts the spectator with death and silence once more, bringing together a raw somatization of emotion. Devoid of any hope, Maria cuts her veins open, regarding her existence as disposable. This scene illustrates that dysfunctional bodies are unable to conform with the discourse of bodily politics and its regulations, evidencing the societal constraints of expression, expectations, and exclusion (Karkani, 2021). The deliberate halting of the diegetic music mirrors the cold industrial silence that previously accompanied the animal slaughter. The climactic moment is suddenly interrupted by a phone call that binds the characters' flesh and passions finally together. The day after, none of the characters can recall their dreams from the past night, signifying a transition beyond the representation of the dream into an embodied reality. During the final sequence, the screen fades to an illuminating white (the opposite of the opening's dark introspection), suggesting an awareness achieved not through rationality but through visceral, embodied experience.

Nonhuman Entanglements

Embedded in time and governed by the temporal structure of the film, the spectator is engaged in an immersive temporal movement due to the illusion of continuity of the gestalt of the film (Carruthers, 2022). Unlike the visual montage, which is fragmented across different time segments, sound creates a dream of continuity binding the different worlds and domains through the illusion of the unity of speech, noises and music (Chion, 2019). This is a concept that Chion (2016) defines as “assimilation.” *On Body and Soul's* sound operations allow the spectator to transition itinerantly between the dreams of continuity and discontinuity, linking the worlds while at the same time emphasizing their heterogeneity. “Sound creates invisible structures between entities in a system. Sonicity is intended as a conceptual device for getting at the underlying conditions that make sound possible” (Valle, 2022, p.530).

For instance, the leitmotif of the film composed by Balázs Ádám's *El Camino de la Mente Oculta* (*The Path of the Hidden Mind*, 2017) creates “a temporal tonality, the way in which time unfolds within them, that conditions our sonic attention over the short, medium, and long term” (Chion, 2016, p. 40). We argue that the piece renders the dream as evoking a mood that guides the experience of the spectator, establishing narrative possibilities, enforcing the dream's doubling indeterminacy, cueing a bodily affective pull and “enabling stronger emotional attachment and more complex reasoning” (Richard, 2021, p.86). Revisiting the opening sequence, the whimsical bells and chimes that precede the image signals the first event of the film experience. The clear pitch value of the sound and bright timbre capture the perception and bring to the forefront of memory particular emotions based on symbolic associations with the tone (Chion, 2016). This sonic index functions much like the foretelling of a ceremony or the opening of mystic gates, and thus conveys a sense of introspection that is similar to the experience of closing our

eyes to darkness. Moreover, the bright timbre of the sound also contains a synesthetic quality of luminosity.

Except for the opening sequence, the leitmotif does not happen in the dream sequences but in the actual world. This placement grants the dream a sort of invisibility and omniscience presence. By operating from this threshold, it has the power to be an agent of narrative indeterminacy, becoming an acousmatic entity. According to Chion (2019), acousmètre is the sound, usually speech, that is not attributed to a body on the screen. From its immateriality comes its power. The leitmotif gives a voice to the unconscious and, as a dream, its reality pervades despite its physical absence and uncanniness, concealing both worlds and enabling mystical qualities in the possible actual world. Operating from the threshold, the soul and the dream is embodied in the mechanical vibrations and flux of the leitmotif. Thus, the sound waves resonate in the body, and the body becomes sound, and therefore the dream is flesh (Goodman, 2012).

The same effect is reinforced during the soundscapes' transitions between dream sequences and the fictional actual world. Dreams and reality are represented as axiomatically opposed, and the differences between them draw the audience's attention forward. The sound design done by Péter Benjámín Lukács contrasts nature-industrial and pastoral-city sounds. In doing so, other temporal and ephemeral framings of liminality are proposed, producing temporal environments in which "we inhabit and which we extend into their consequences by how we inhabit them" (Voegling, 2021, p. 22). Soundscapes are highly immersive while constituting a system of embodied relations, shown in the way that we record and interpret them mediated through a series of techno/bio-assemblages. Recording the vibration waves of the hoofs of a cow inside a metallic cattle module at the slaughterhouse, for example, goes through a transductive process that involves multiscale human/non human relations entangling the energies of other entities as they constitute a system (Valle, 2020).

Furthermore, it draws attention to the film's use of logical contradictions to elicit emotional responses from the spectator. These cues, intended to drive the spectator's engagement along with the film's experiential feel, seduces the spectator by conditioning their responses and interpretations. The leitmotif, as an embroidery of the dream, enables us to inhabit from within ourselves, to the point of cohabiting in the actual world of the film experience. The leitmotif suggests that the dream or the unconscious never stops to be or exist, regardless of the state of awareness. In the same way, sound design creates an illusion of bonding and continuity from the real world to the dreams (Idhe, 2007). The aural experiences render the world of possibilities, casting particular emotions, symbolizing the voice of the dream and creating sound fields of spatialization and the transitions between worlds. Creating the illusion of unity, sound bridges the worlds but conversely discontinues them, punctuating and signifying as events unfold and materialize in time. "Because sounds are neither experienced objectively nor named. But also owing to the narrative indeterminacy of sound, sounds 'attract' (with a magnetism stemming from all that vagueness and uncertainty)" (Chion, 2019, p. 142).

Conclusions

This paper explored how sound-affective immersivity is employed in *On Body and Soul* as a strategy to decenter the human perspective and challenge human exceptionalism. Consistent with critical posthumanists approaches, the film establishes a speculative scenario of nonhuman embodied and embedded experience, achieved through logical contradictions that disrupt the cognitive process and facilitate an effective pull at precognitive levels. Moreover, the sound operations are themselves gestures of materialization, that compel the audience into a trans-sensorial experience through modes of spectatorship. Immersivity is achieved through a motion of recentering, demanding active agency to reassess the subjectivity towards a posthuman, reconfigured self. This

subjectivity integrates the nonhuman entanglements present in the symbolic darkness of the unconscious, and in the violence and commodification of the slaughterhouse.

The film predominantly features a shared materiality that is expressed in dreams, industrial complexes and bodily politics, whose most profound convergence is through death, experienced through the lens of a matter-realist vitalism. Not all lives are susceptible to death to the same degree, as the bodies are not equally human (Braidotti, 2013). This realization demands questioning the precept of universality and assuming positions that recognize the power differentials and structures that govern those relations. Specifically, the depiction of dreams and sound operations allows one to assume a posthuman recentering in a mode of experience between irrational seduction and rational awakening (Lowenstein, 2015). This is where the body can be apprehended through the essential nature of its parts, embedded and connected, rather than through the singular and detached system of relations (Lordon, 2020).

The film's nuanced claim that the unconscious never ceases to exist, signaled as the "vital force" that is transversal with human and nonhuman subjects (Braidotti, 2013), is supported by the leitmotif and soundscapes that bridge and double the real and unreal world. This juxtaposition and narrative indeterminacy is what allows the spectator to inhabit a state of embodied imagination, where the highly improbable (shared dreams) becomes an actual possibility, apart from the tension and transgression of the logical contradictions. "This constant tension embodies the necessary posthumanist shift 'beyond liberal humanist conceptualizations that continually privilege the human and divide humans and animals based on capacities for reason and language'" (Ryan, K. M., & Staton, D., 2022, p. 69).

The questions raised by *On Body and Soul* are significant to the critique of posthuman preoccupations. The commodification

of life, death, and volatile identities in our era is constantly achieved by disregarding the recognition of the other, and this occurs at the expense of human/nonhuman subjects. This systemic exploitation demands narratives that reaffirm, dismantle and reconstruct these apparent inescapable systems of relations that transverse the perspective of human subjectivity. This necessity requires a complete shift in ontology, moving towards entangled and embedded subjectivities. As Barad argues, the primary units are not objects, but "phenomena—dynamic topological reconfigurings/ entanglements/ relationalities" (2007, p.141).

In this context, the imperative is to move beyond mere post-apocalyptic anxiety toward a situated critique of actual exploitative relations. This paper advocates new modes of storytelling, particularly those utilizing sound and other techniques that foster embodied experiences, offering a way to generate the necessary entangled perspectives. By embracing the reticular perspective (Mbembe, 2024), we can collectively strive to "become others, reborn, in another time, in another places, in a multitude of figures," (p.140) intertwined by nonhuman subjects.

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