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A Nonhuman Too Human: Posthuman Embodiment in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013)

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*In cinematic characterisation, the human body has traditionally been conceived as a biological constant – the primary locus of identity and the key distinction between human and nonhuman entities – reflecting a long-standing anthropocentric belief. However, under the growing influence of posthumanism challenging anthropocentrism, contemporary cinema has begun to articulate forms of posthuman embodiment that destabilise historically constructed boundaries between human and nonhuman by depicting hybrid modes of being. Nevertheless, the persistence of anthropocentric paradigms, alongside the fundamentally human-driven nature of filmmaking, imposes structural limitations on such posthumanist inquiries in cinema, rendering them inescapably “too human”. Accordingly, this article uses Jonathan Glazer’s *Under the Skin* (2013) as a case study to examine its effective depiction of posthuman embodiment within a posthumanist framework. In particular, it focuses on the film’s deployment of the metaphor of “skin” and “unskin” to visualise a nonhuman entity inhabiting and leaving a human body, thereby challenging conventional anthropocentric models of embodiment. This article also offers a critical view of the film’s limitations, arguing that its cinematic articulation of posthuman embodiment remains constrained by an over-reliance on existing humanistic frameworks. Both its visual emphasis on sexualised femininity and its conceptual reinforcement of gender binaries reveal a persistent tendency to remain “too human”.*

In films featuring both human and nonhuman characters, the human body has conventionally been viewed as a biological constant, functioning as the primary source of identity and the pivotal marker distinguishing human beings from nonhuman entities. This reflects an established anthropocentric assumption in cinematic characterisation, often manifested through stereotypical visual designs of nonhuman characters that deliberately emphasise their difference from the human body. For example, Denis Villeneuve’s *Arrival* (2016) features intelligent extraterrestrial beings known as “heptapods”. However, the film constructs these aliens through a set of oppositional visual cues, such as seven asymmetrical limbs as well as dark, indistinct and nonorganic skin textures that contrast sharply with

familiar human morphology (fig. 1). This design strategy reinforces a conventional anthropocentric framework, within which nonhuman entities are rendered intelligible primarily through their deviation from normative human embodiment. In this context, films frequently construct nonhuman forms in deliberate opposition to human physiognomy, thereby positioning the human as the principal referent of intelligibility. Such representations reflect an anthropocentric worldview in which humans are the central entity in the universe,¹ which systematically correlates with other species being accorded lesser significance (Boslaugh).



Fig. 1, A heptapod confronts a human, 2016.

Nevertheless, with the growing influence of posthumanism in the twenty-first century, traditional anthropocentric frameworks in narrative are increasingly being challenged. According to Michaela Fenske and Martha Norkunas, narratives in the twenty-first century progressively position humans not as dominant agents, but as participants within an entangled and interconnected world; in this posthuman paradigm, humans develop the

¹ This is the definition of “Anthropocentrism” from *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Boslaugh).

capacity to coexist with both other humans and nonhuman entities. Consequently, established conceptual boundaries like nature and culture, civilisation and wilderness, as well as humans and nonhumans, are being reconfigured (107). This shift is reflected in an increasing number of films depicting a posthuman embodiment that questions conventional anthropocentric models of human embodiment and blurs the boundary between human and nonhuman. Among such films, Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013) provides a compelling example of how posthuman embodiment within a posthumanist framework can be visualised through cinematic language, particularly by foregrounding the human body as a symbolic site of meaning. Specifically, the film mobilises the metaphor of "skin" and "unskin" to depict a nonhuman entity inhabiting and leaving a human body, thereby challenging conventional anthropocentric models of embodiment. As Missy Molloy et al. suggest, *Under the Skin* compellingly engages with posthumanism by provocatively destabilising the boundaries between human and nonhuman materiality (110). But although this film offers an effective depiction of posthuman embodiment, its cinematic articulation of this condition remains constrained by an over-reliance on existing humanistic frameworks. While the film initially introduces a hybrid figure across the human-nonhuman boundary, it ultimately shifts to a humanistic narrative where the nonhuman attempts to become human. As a result, the film's exploration of posthumanism is inconsistent, with two key factors that limit its cinematic representation of posthuman embodiment. At a visual level, the excessive focus on Scarlett Johansson's femininity and her stardom as a sex symbol undermines the film's posthuman vision. At a conceptual depth, the film's reiteration of gender stereotypes and the male-female binary reveals an inherent limitation of posthumanism itself: its tendency to remain "too human". As Rosi Braidotti notes, posthumanism seeks to critique humanism, but its critique is still grounded in humanistic frameworks ("Posthuman, All Too Human" 197–208).² Recognising both potentials and limitations of the posthumanist approach raises a further question about what posthuman embodiment might entail: is there an evolutionary or progressivist trajectory toward such

² For Braidotti, posthumanism does not seek to reject the humanist tradition outright. For instance, in her examination of Haraway's notion of the cyborg, Braidotti argues that "this philosophical post-humanism does not, therefore, result in anti-foundationalism. It rather stresses the need for process ontology" (199). Braidotti also highlights that posthumanist discourses should not be understood as abstract ideas detached from human experience. Instead, they possess tangible political implications. As she points out that "the function of figurations such as the cyborg or the companion species is not abstract but, rather, political" (200).

forms of existence, and would they remain intrinsically human? This question will be explored through the following posthumanist analysis of the film *Under the Skin*.

Posthumanism: Beyond the Human, Yet Still Too Human

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the film, a brief examination of the relevant posthumanist theories is required. Posthumanism is a relatively recent theoretical paradigm, but it has already attracted significant attention within contemporary scholarship. According to Francesca Ferrando, posthumanism emerges in response to twenty-first-century developments in cybernetics and biotechnology that fundamentally challenge traditional conceptions of the human body and identity.³ As technologies transform the human body and reshape understandings of what it means to be “human” as a biological species, they prompt a posthuman reconsideration of the ontological and epistemological foundations of humanity (Ferrando and Braidotti 21). In this sense, posthumanism seeks to think beyond the human by transcending the traditional binary divisions that have structured humanist thought. In cinematic representations, this tendency is often manifested in the visualisation of hybrid posthuman figures that dissolve the boundaries between humans and nonhumans, notably through the imagery of the cyborg.⁴ One iconic conceptualisation of this form of boundary transgression is Donna Jeanne Haraway’s notion of the cyborg in her 1985 essay “A Cyborg Manifesto”, in which she argues that “Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (67). For Haraway, the cyborg destabilises rigid oppositions between body and machine, human and nonhuman, as well as identity and category, demonstrating that these boundaries are neither fixed nor impermeable (67–68).

³ Ferrando presents the following examples of the developments concerning the advancements associated with the redefinition of the human body: “On the one side, electronic pacemakers, high-tech prostheses, and plastic surgery have become accepted practices of body reconfiguration. On the other, in a pioneer experimentation toward technological enhancement, a growing number of people have implanted RFIDs under their skin” (21).

⁴ Cyborg, a term combining “cybernetic” and “organism”, was first introduced in 1960 to describe a human whose physiological functions are enhanced by artificial means, such as biochemical or electronic modifications (Clynes and Kline 27). However, within a broader context of posthumanism, it can function as a philosophical metaphor transcending binary oppositions.

Still, posthumanism itself remains “too human”: it is after all a theoretical framework developed by humans, and it therefore cannot entirely escape the ontological and epistemological assumptions of human thought. This constitutes a major critique of posthumanism, exemplified by Paul James, who points out that while proponents of the posthumanist approach aim to tackle significant issues caused by humanity and humanism, a fundamental problem is that their critique often either reproduces the very conditions it seeks to challenge or devolves into disclaimers that create internal contradictions (31). Posthumanists also recognise this dilemma, as reflected in Braidotti’s argument of “posthuman, all-too-human”: “our posthuman times, with their large inhuman component, are all too human” (*Posthuman Knowledge* 9). In essence, posthumanism is “too human” as it is inherently constrained by the human perspectives of the posthumanists who formulate it. The key issues addressed by posthumanism, such as the impact of technological advancement on social structure and the growing environmental problems caused by humans, are, fundamentally, human concerns. Posthumanists seek to address these problems, but their efforts eventually stay directed toward human interests rather than those of nonhumans (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 20–22).

Such a paradox of seeking to move beyond the human while remaining confined by human perspectives is reflected in posthumanist discourse in contemporary cinema, as exemplified by *Under the Skin*. This dilemma of being “beyond the human, yet still too human” is manifested through the limited scope of cinematic posthuman embodiment. Such representations frequently visualise hybrid human-nonhuman forms that resonate with Haraway’s conception of the cyborg as a figure that transcends traditional human binary divisions, namely gender binaries (65–66). At the same time, they often get constrained by human thought patterns, privileging the genuine human embodiment over nonhuman modes of existence. For Molloy et al., this tendency reflects a fundamentally conservative stance towards both gender and nonhuman embodiment (121).

Admittedly, being “too human” has been a significant challenge within posthumanism studies, but it does not constitute a theoretical obstacle requiring immediate resolution, nor is there a simple solution to the issue. The critique of human nature from a posthumanist perspective does not entail a complete rejection of everything that is considered human. As Ferrando suggests, posthumanism is not completely against humanity and it is aware of the impossibility to eliminate the hierarchical and humanistic presumptions of humans (32).

According to Jennifer Cotter et al., posthumanism morally rejects the “arrogance” of humanism and its assertion of an awareness regarding the destructive methods of humanist “intentionality” (3). Posthumanism critiques anthropocentrism for overemphasising humans while neglecting nonhuman agents. This does not entail ignoring humans, but calls for a more inclusive viewpoint that acknowledges the significance of nonhuman entities. Moreover, an excessive preoccupation with eliminating the influence of human subjectivity is impractical, as in the current situation, the thinkers, practitioners and even the critics of posthumanism are themselves human. Ultimately, posthumanism cannot fully transcend the limitations of the human mindset, but offers an approach that moves beyond traditional human-centred methods.

Breaking Stereotypes: A Nonhuman under a Human Skin

Under the Skin is written by Glazer and Walter Campbell, based on the 2000 eponymous novel by Michel Faber. This film stars the American actress Scarlett Johansson as an alien disguised as a woman. Its plot revolves around a group of sapient aliens who hunt local single human males in Scotland for unknown purposes. Those aliens cover their bodies with human skins to hide their identities and one of them (Scarlett Johansson) poses as a human female (fig. 2). This alien woman⁵ lures men to the aliens’ hideout where they are killed and skinned. Initially heartless, she gradually develops human emotions during her hunts. After escaping from her alien partners, she attempts to assimilate into the society of humans, but struggles with digesting human food and becomes fearful of having sex with a man (Michael Moreland) who invites her to his home. In the end, the alien woman is caught by a human logger (Dave Acton) who attempts to rape her and her human skin gets torn apart during the fight, revealing her black nonhuman body. After that, the frightened logger burns her alive, putting an end to her endeavour to become human.

⁵ In *Under the Skin*, there is no evidence that the aliens have a sex determination system. Nevertheless, I still describe the alien protagonist according to its human skin as “alien woman” in later sections to avoid any confusion, except in particular situations, such as the following footnote, where I find it more suitable to use the pronoun “it” rather than “her”.



Fig. 2, *The alien woman in her human skin*, 2013.

The nonhuman character design in *Under the Skin* challenges the stereotypical portrayal of alien creatures in films, such as *Arrival*, which tend to envisage the extraterrestrials by deliberately adding visual elements opposite to humans. This film avoids intentionally emphasising the visual difference between humans and nonhumans, instead presenting a nonhuman character under a human skin. In *Under the Skin*, human skin functions as a conceptual boundary between humans and nonhumans, operating as a metaphor for a traditional anthropocentric logic in which the body is positioned as the primary locus of identity and the key marker of distinction between species. However, the film destabilises this assumption by reconfiguring skin not as a fixed biological constant, but as a flexible and mutable interface. Accordingly, the boundary between human and nonhuman is no longer presented as stable or essential, but as permeable and variable. According to Molloy et al., this represents a type of “cinematic use of women cyborgs”, enabling us to explore posthuman embodiment and examine the ambiguous materiality that emerges from the erosion of humanism’s rigid separation between humans and nonhumans (109).

In *Under the Skin*, acquiring human skin represents “becoming human”, while losing it leads to dehumanisation. There are two key plot points in the film portraying the process of “unskinning”, symbolising the procedure of dehumanisation. The first scene is when a

human victim gets everything under his skin “vaporised”, leaving just his skin; the second is near the end of this film, when the alien woman gets her human skin ripped apart by a logger trying to rape her. Both scenes are about dehumanisation, but from different perspectives. The first one is about a man losing everything except his human skin, while the second is about a nonhuman losing only its⁶ human skin. Therefore, in relation to the acquisition or loss of the human skin, *Under the Skin* raises two critical questions about the definition of human in posthumanism: what is human, and what is the difference between humans and nonhumans?

Many films address the two questions vaguely, often reflecting the issue at a relatively superficial level: the human body, typically represented as human skin, determines what is human and distinguishes humans and nonhumans. A considerable number of such films differentiate between human and nonhuman characters primarily on the basis of outward appearance, specifically, whether or not they possess a human body, while neglecting what is ostensibly contained within that body. In these cases, nonhuman characters, despite lacking a human body, are rendered as human beneath their nonhuman exterior. Their subjectivity remains fundamentally anthropomorphic, as they exhibit behaviours, cognitive patterns, and emotional responses closely aligned with those of humans. This tendency is evident in the alien “E.T.” in Steven Spielberg’s *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), who behaves like a human baby, thinks like a human child and displays an unconditional friendship with humans. Some other films, such as *Arrival*, challenge these anthropomorphic stereotypes by assigning nonhuman cognitive and behavioural patterns to the aliens, but still fail to break the stereotypical alien character design visually. This underscores how the stereotypical design of nonhuman characters tends either to anthropomorphise their traits or to overemphasise visible markers of nonhuman embodiment, while neglecting a substantive articulation of their intrinsic nonhuman qualities.

On the contrary, *Under the Skin* engages these questions in a comparatively more rigorous manner, disrupting the stereotypical cinematic characterisation of nonhumans by foregrounding and critically interrogating the apparent opposition between human and nonhuman embodiment. It visualises a form of posthuman embodiment predicated on a

⁶ In this specific context, I believe it is more appropriate to use the pronoun “it” for the alien protagonist to emphasise the intrinsic nonhuman quality of this extraterrestrial being, which exists independently of and does not depend on its acquired human skin.

hybrid condition that traverses and destabilises the boundary between humans and nonhumans. The human body does not define what it means to be human. Rather, being human encompasses much more than just the outer layer of the body; it goes under the skin. Like in Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1978), people are substituted by alien replicas, each serving as a flawless biological copy of the original person, yet lacking the essence of humanity. In *Under the Skin*, this idea is illustrated in the death scene of the human victim, where the human essence once beneath the skin is stripped away, leaving behind empty skin that symbolises dehumanisation. Furthermore, in this film, the difference between humans and nonhumans is not in the human body but in what lies inside this body. In the film, the aliens disguise themselves as humans and deceive almost every human they come across by successfully concealing their true identities under human skin. But despite their ability to blend in, they are fundamentally nonhumans due to their lack of humanity. Their disregard for human life and human ethics is consistently noticeable throughout the film. For William Brown, this film effectively depicts a nonhuman character whose behaviours, ethics, values, and modes of perception are fundamentally distinct from those of humans, in part by offering a nonhuman perspective on humanity itself: "*Under the Skin* offers us an intriguing look at how an alien might view our world – in a detached, curious fashion, as in one scene when the alien allows humans to drown at sea and a baby to be abandoned without showing any emotion whatsoever" (17–18).

"Too Human": The Limited Scope of Cinematic Posthuman Embodiment

Despite the extent to which *Under the Skin* articulates posthuman embodiment, its scope remains constrained by an over-reliance on existing humanistic frameworks, particularly in its treatment of gender. The film paradoxically reinforces gender stereotypes by emphasising the male-female binary, instead of approaching gender from a posthuman mindset that transcends these distinctions. While *Under the Skin* initially presents a hybrid condition that blurs the line between human and nonhuman, it unfolds into a humanistic narrative in which a nonhuman being seeks to become human, more specifically, an alien woman striving to become a human woman. This film has the potential to portray a posthuman cyborg character that transcends the humanistic gender binary within a posthuman framework; nonetheless, it exhibits obvious limitations of being "too human" by

conceding to traditional gender norms. As Molloy et al. note, “portraits of artificial women are more successful at rehearsing humanistic perspectives on female embodiment than at envisioning posthuman womanhood” (110).

In a posthumanist view, the gender binary – particularly as it relates to gendered embodiment – is rooted in humanistic thought, emphasising the dualistic foundation of humanism. Critical posthumanism, therefore, frequently challenges this binary, advocating for a cyborgian conception of gender (Molloy et al. 107). This can be clearly seen in Haraway’s notion of the cyborg, where she argues that the persistence of the male-female binary reinforces humanist frameworks, imposing rigid boundaries and dichotomies that limit our embodied experience:

We are responsible for boundaries; we are they. Up till now (once upon a time), female embodiment seemed to be given, organic, necessary; and female embodiment seemed to mean skill in mothering and its metaphoric extensions. Only by being out of place could we take intense pleasure in machines, and then with excuses that this was organic activity after all, appropriate to females. Cyborgs might consider more seriously the partial, fluid, sometimes aspect of sex and sexual embodiment. Gender might not be global identity after all, even if it has profound historical breadth and depth. (65–66)

Under the Skin explores such a cyborgian concept in a limited capacity. It constructs a condition of hybridisation through its nonhuman characters, whose embodiment traverses the human-nonhuman divide and for whom gendered bodies are acquired rather than innate. Nevertheless, the film continues to reproduce entrenched gender biases grounded in humanistic dualism. *Under the Skin* strengthens the humanistic othering of cyborg women and revives classical cinematic strategies that fetishise women’s bodies, reaffirming the binary distinctions between women and men, as well as humans and nonhumans (Molloy et al. 112). The film primarily highlights the subordination of women under male dominance in patriarchal structures. For instance, one alien character under a male human skin (Jeremy McWilliams) assumes a domineering role over the alien woman. He keeps gazing at her with a commanding stare, inspects her in a dark room and even calls other alien men to pursue her when she spares a human victim. The alien woman temporarily escapes her pursuers and gets saved by a human male who offers her shelter. After being together for a while, she

closes her eyes, signalling her willingness to have sex with him; the man responds without hesitation. This underscores the entrenched gendered hierarchies of male dominance in which men are seen as both exploiters and potential saviours of women. In this sense, Vernon Shetley interprets *Under the Skin* as highlighting the role of female allure in systems of exploitation. She compares this film with Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and posits that both films share the same premise: that a female figure controlled by a man becomes fascinated by another man, and defies her controller to gain autonomy (16).

Throughout the film, gender stereotypes conveyed through sexual innuendo also overshadow the posthumanist vision of the relationship between humans and nonhumans. The alien woman, despite her nonhuman nature, embodies a range of female stereotypes. She is both a femme fatale who uses her charm to entice men and a damsel in distress subjected to sexual harassment and dependent on a good man for rescue. For Dijana Jelača, such feminist and gender themes in *Under the Skin* present a seeming paradox: "while their protagonists are nonhuman, they are also indisputably feminine in traditionally humanoid ways" (384). In this regard, the film employs its nonhuman protagonist as a vehicle for the objectification of women, portraying the female body as a sexualised object to gratify the male gaze. As Molloy et al. further point out, this paradoxical approach significantly restricts the examination of the nonhuman dimensions of this alien, who is also a human-like cyborg. *Under the Skin* emphasises the nonhuman aspects of its cyborg woman while simultaneously imbuing her with qualities traditionally associated with femininity within belief systems that rely on the male/female binary, such as humanism. This approach restricts the capacity to explore the nonhuman dimensions of this cyborg figure (119).

The persistence of the gender binary and stereotypical cinematic representations of women in *Under the Skin* partly stems from Johansson's physical allure and star persona. Johansson's superb performing skills successfully bring the alien character to life: she has received many related accolades, including the nomination of Best Actress in the British Independent Film Awards (2013)⁷ and from the Chicago Film Critics Association (2014).⁸

⁷ Vincent, Alice. "British Independent Film Awards: Dame Judi Dench and Scarlett Johansson nominated." *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 Nov. 2013, www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/film/film-news/10440958/British-Independent-Film-Awards-Dame-Judi-Dench-and-Scarlett-Johansson-nominated.html.

⁸ Loring, Michael. "'Birdman' Garner Nine Chicago Film Critics Association Nominations." *Chicago Sun-Times*, 13 Dec. 2014, www.chicago.suntimes.com/2014/12/12/18457154/birdman-garners-nine-chicago-film-critics-association-nominations.

Nevertheless, the stardom achieved from her highly accomplished performance is largely linked to the expression of feminisation, which subsequently contributes to the character's pronounced feminisation, leading to an exaggeration of dualistic gender ideologies rooted in humanist frameworks rather than a sustained engagement with the film's themes of posthumanism. In this regard, a posthumanist reading reveals that the exploration of themes related to posthumanism in *Under the Skin* is insufficient, as this film is "too human" (Brown 18). The film could have addressed more posthumanist topics, such as critiquing gender binary representations, but its inextricable human nature, especially Johansson's human female figure, impairs deeper posthuman embodiment:

And yet the (all too) human limitations remain: humans, or more specifically men, cannot connect with their conspecifics. This may make Johansson a star (rather than a human being), but if, as outlined at the outset of this chapter via N. Katherine Hayles, feminism was one of several discourses, including posthumanism, designed to make humans view their enworlded and connected nature (women and men are not different species), then a posthumanist discourse, as well as a feminist one, are required not only to reflect the contemporary world, but also to critique the representations of it which are presented in (these) films. (Brown 18)

On a deeper level, the limited scope of cinematic posthuman embodiment in this film reflects the intrinsic constraint of posthumanism itself. It is symptomatic of that tendency to be "too human" we have previously analysed: despite its evolutionary and progressive vision beyond human-centred frameworks, posthumanism is still fundamentally shaped by human conceptual structures. While its discourse can blur the boundaries between humans and nonhumans, its articulation of posthuman embodiment cannot fully escape the human mindset. As a result, posthuman imaginaries⁹ tend to stay grounded in human understanding, eventually favouring human embodiment over nonhuman forms of existence. *Under the Skin* can be seen as a narrative of "becoming human", and, more specifically, "becoming woman", which contradicts Haraway's "cyborg" transcending species

⁹ The sociological term "imaginary" refers to the compilation of values, institutions, laws, and symbols that inform how individuals perceive their collective social life. According to Manfred B. Steger and Paul James, "Imaginaries are patterned convocations of the social whole. These deep-seated modes of understanding provide largely pre-reflexive parameters within which people imagine their social existence—expressed, for example, in conceptions of 'the global,' 'the national,' 'the moral order of our time'" (23).

and gender binaries (65–66). In this process, the alien woman, initially a hybrid of human and nonhuman, actively seeks to become fully human, particularly striving to embody a “real woman” within the male-female dichotomy. After spending a few days under a human’s skin, the alien woman yearns to become a human woman. This is noticeable in several scenes where she tries to adapt to human life – eating human food, watching TV shows, visiting an ancient castle with a man, as well as accepting his help crossing puddles and walking down stairs during their journey. She even starts to feel uneasy about her original nonhuman nature, as evidenced by the scene when she consents to have sex with the man but abruptly stops to examine her human genitals and then runs away into the forest. Her actions indicate that she is afraid of revealing her nonhuman identity. This suggests that the film still assumes nonhumans inherently aspire to human qualities, reinforcing a hierarchy that privileges humans over nonhumans.

The ‘exposure scene’ near the end of the film serves as an even stronger indicator of an anthropocentric triumph as well as a victory of patriarchy. In this scene, the alien woman is attacked by a male logger who initially attempts to rape her. After fighting back effortlessly, her human skin is torn away, exposing the nonhuman body before he finally burns her alive (fig. 3). This scene illustrates that a human perspective functions as the default lens in *Under the Skin*, particularly when the cyborg’s hybrid nature becomes visually apparent (Molloy et al. 120). This scene signifies the alien woman’s failed attempt to fully become human, accentuating her inability to cross the divide between human and nonhuman, and reinforcing the human-nonhuman binary. It also resembles patriarchal supremacy, as the flames engulfing her nonhuman body evoke imagery of a witch hunt, where the femme fatale who lures men is punished by them. The film thus concludes with a triumph of traditional humanistic values: humans defeat the nonhuman that harms them and men prevail over the femme fatale. As Molloy et al. observe, “While *Under the Skin*’s contrast of human and nonhuman materiality is aesthetically compelling, its tight alignment of The Female¹⁰ with femme fatale conventions indicates its conservatism regarding both gender and nonhuman embodiment” (121).

¹⁰ In the book *Screening the Posthuman*, the alien woman in *Under the Skin* is referred to as “The Female” (Molloy et al. 108).



Fig. 3, The 'exposure scene', 2013.

While *Under the Skin* engages with posthumanist themes, its narrative principally follows a humanistic framework rather than a posthuman paradigm transcending dualistic ideologies. Within this context, the human-nonhuman hybrid condition in *Under the Skin* can be read as a metaphor for posthumanism's "too human" dilemma. The alien protagonist is a nonhuman inside a human body, resembling a hybrid form of posthuman embodiment. This hybridity symbolises the central paradox of posthumanism: while it seeks to transcend humanist conceptions of subjectivity, identity, and embodiment, it remains articulated through human forms and conceptual frameworks inherited from humanism. The "becoming human" narrative in this film reflects how human perspectives inevitably overshadow nonhuman subjectivities within posthumanist discourse. Asserting that nonhumans desire to become human is clearly anthropocentric, but insisting that nonhumans must not have such a desire reproduces a similar form of anthropocentrism, since it still imposes a human-derived normative framework onto nonhuman subjectivity. In both cases, the nonhumans are interpreted and regulated through human conceptual categories; correspondingly, the nonhumans' longing to become human demonstrates that, even in a posthuman framework, humanity remains the dominant reference point, rendering posthumanism "too human". This constitutes the inherent but understandable

limitation of cinematic posthuman embodiment, which is inescapably bounded by human epistemic conditions in cinema and beyond.

Conclusion

We have shown that *Under the Skin* explores posthuman embodiment through a posthumanist lens by depicting a human-nonhuman hybrid condition. By illustrating a nonhuman entity inhabiting a human body, the film challenges the anthropocentric assumption that the body determines identity, demonstrating the cinematic potential for representing a cyborgian existence in which the human body and human identity are no longer synonymous. Nonetheless, such a posthuman embodiment is limited by a persistent tendency to be “too human”, which reveals a broader tension within posthumanist inquiry itself: while it seeks to question traditional anthropocentric approaches, it is structurally dependent on the very human-centred perspectives it aims to critique (James 32–37). Referring back to our initial question of whether there is an evolutionary or progressivist path to posthuman embodiment, we can now offer a tentative answer: while we can imagine and stage posthuman and nonhuman subjectivities beyond human-centred frameworks, such imagined forms ultimately remain circumscribed by human modes of perception and understanding.

To address this “too human” limitation, posthumanism needs to engage in sustained reflection on how it can acknowledge its own humanity while systematically interrogating the anthropocentric biases embedded within its theoretical structure. Rather than treating this drawback as a contradiction that invalidates posthumanism, it can serve as an impetus for self-reflexivity. Posthumanist thought is required to acknowledge its historically situated human origins and continually examine the influence of anthropocentric assumptions on its attempts to conceptualise ideas that extend beyond human-centred frameworks. Therefore, posthumanist discourses should not aim to eliminate human influence entirely, but to develop a more accountable mode of thinking that recognises its situated human perspective while remaining open to forms of existence and subjectivity that transcend it. Taken together, despite its inherent limitation of being “too human”, posthumanism can inspire us to engage in an extensive self-examination of the body, prompting us to move beyond the conventional belief that the body is a biological fact and a fixed demarcation

between humans and nonhumans. Instead, it invites us to rethink the body as something that can be transient, fluid, surpassed, and reconfigured.

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