

Becoming a Cyborg

Andrew Seed

In the final scene of *The Beast*¹ Gabrielle (Léa Seydoux) realises that Louis (George MacKay) has had his affect neutralised by undergoing a strange AI mandated operation. Gabrielle falls to her knees and lets out an animal like shrill of desperation and despair. Her lover, over many lifetimes, no longer desires her, nor does he have the capacity to desire.

Lacan's formulation "desire is the desire of the Other" appears in several texts.^{2,3,4} The subject can never fully satisfy their desire because it is not their own. It is desire for recognition, for being wanted by the Other. In Seminar V², Lacan describes how desire has a continuous forward movement, that is to say, is metonymic, moving from object to object. This can bring much pain and frustration to the human condition but is also the source of vivacity and creativity. Gabrielle's primordial shrill cry expresses the loss of this life force, through the loss of the possibility of recognition, desire loses its forward movement, its metonymy and [the subject] collapses into horror. An eternal purgatory of being both engulfed by the *real* and simultaneously completely alienated from the *real*.

The Beast is an evocative warning against human subjects consenting to the transference of their agency to an AI model. In *The Beast*, society is run by a sophisticated AI model and Gabrielle cannot get any job apart from menial work unless she neutralises her desire to become more useful to the AI.

Lacan, in Seminar XVII⁵, connects the "function of surplus jouissance [*plus-de-jouir*]" in a relation to the consumption of "adapted in advance" objects – and his object *a*. Here we can imagine *gizmos* and take a reading of this seminar where *gizmos* can be thought to encourage direct access to jouissance through objects in the manner of compulsive and immediate pleasure. This circumvents the symbolic and its containing role. Without the containing role of the symbolic, jouissance cannot be sublimated. The object is consumed directly without working through and doesn't resolve but amplifies pleasure. Recall here Lacan's *plus-de-jouir*...

In the film *The Beast* these ideas are evocatively taken to their extreme in an imagined future. The proliferation of AI has reduced the need for a subjective structure and the final stage is to reduce any human desire to zero through a strange procedure involving an injection in the ear in a kind of flotation tank with black oil like liquid. Lacan indicates in Seminar III⁶ that if the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed it reappears in the real as an intrusion or delusion. In the film *The Beast*, the AI have two methods of preventing their human subjects descending into madness. The first is the procedure to reduce affect or desire to zero, the second is where the

¹Bonello, B., *The Beast*, France/Canada: Les Films du Bélier, 2023.

²Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V, The Formations of the Unconscious*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, Cambridge: Polity, 2017.

³Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI: Desire and its Interpretation*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. B. Fink, Cambridge: Polity, 2019.

⁴Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. A. Sheridan, London: Hogarth, 1977.

⁵Cf. Lacan, J., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, New York/London: Norton, 2007, p. 50.

⁶Cf. Lacan, J., *Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*, ed. J.-A. Miller, trans. R. Grigg, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 46.

AI takes the place of the Name-of-the-Father and operates a friendly but highly oppressive AI centred technocratic regime.

In an age where the game of *Fort!-Da!*⁷ has been diminished, every human subject who doesn't want to consent to becoming a cyborg should heed the warnings of *The Beast*. If you passively consent in the accessing pleasure through *gizmos*, you [very likely] consent to becoming a cyborg. Protect yourself before it is too late! It's hard work!

⁷Cf. Freud, S., *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. J. Strachey, ed. J. Strachey, London: Hogarth Press, 1955.