

# *Confused Robots and Incompetent Humans in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's Bigbug (2022)*

 alternative francophone  
pour une francophonie en mode mineur

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**Résumé :** Jean-Pierre Jeunet s'est intéressé à la représentation des corps humains en difficulté dans ses films tels que *Delicatessen* (1991), *La Cité des enfants perdus* (1995) et, plus récemment, *Bigbug* (2022). Dans le monde fictif de *Bigbug*, en 2045, les êtres humains sont enfin libérés des tâches ménagères. Cependant, ils n'ont plus leur libre arbitre. En raison d'une erreur du système d'intelligence artificielle, les personnages humains de ce film sont confinés dans une maison avec des robots domestiques. Cet article étudie la relation entre les corps humains et l'intelligence artificielle dans *Bigbug*, à travers le prisme du transhumanisme et des études sur l'animalité. Par transhumanisme, j'entends une tentative de transformer et d'adapter son corps avec ou sans technologie. Je soutiens que l'humour de Jeunet incite ses personnages à s'adapter et à se transformer continuellement dans un espace limité. De plus, l'animalité est abordée différemment dans ce film : au lieu de comparer les animaux aux humains, les androïdes IA Yonyx identifient les humains aux animaux, se moquant de l'animalité des êtres vivants. En référence au terme « terminal films » de Steen Christiansen, cet article examine comment des corps humains immobiles et restreints coexistent avec l'intelligence artificielle et lui résistent dans notre quotidien.

**Mots clés :** intelligence artificielle; *Bigbug*; Jean-Pierre Jeunet; transhumanisme; animalité

**Abstract:** Jean-Pierre Jeunet has been working on the presentation of struggling human bodies in his films, such as *Delicatessen* (1991), *La Cité des enfants perdus/The City of Lost Children* (1995), and most recently, *Bigbug* (2022). In *Bigbug's* fictional 2045, human beings are finally liberated from the duties of house chores. Nevertheless, they no longer have self-determination. Because of the A.I. system's error, human characters in this film are confined in a house with house robots. This article studies the relationship

between human bodies and artificial intelligence in *Bigbug*, through the lens of transhumanism and animality studies. By transhumanism, I mean an attempt to transform and adapt one's body with or without technology. I argue that Jeunet's sense of humour functions as an impetus to encourage his characters to continuously adapt and transform themselves in limited space. Moreover, the animality was discussed differently in this film: instead of comparing animals to humans, *Yonyx*, the A.I. androids identify humans with animals, mocking the animality of living beings. Referring to Steen Christiansen's term "terminal films," this article examines how immobile, restricted human bodies co-exist with and resist artificial intelligence in our everyday household.

**Keywords:** artificial intelligence; *Bigbug*; Jean-Pierre Jeunet; transhumanism; animality

In a fictional 2045, human beings are finally liberated from house chores. Instead of humans, a female household robot grates hard cheese with its sturdy robot arm. Her finger is attached to a whisk, and she can serve grilled crickets right away.<sup>1</sup> However, sometimes by mistake she will automatically advertise coffee products when you order some tea from her. A gigantic floating advertising screen visits each house, encouraging purchases based on personal needs.<sup>2</sup> If you do not pay for your robot eye subscription, the provider company might extract your eyeballs. Other than some possible deprivation of your privacy and bodily freedom, this futuristic society offers endless convenience and unlimited accessibility of goods, provided you pay.

This brief summary describes the social background in Jean-Pierre Jeunet's film *Bigbug* (2022). Jeunet presents "assemblages" (Deleuze & Guattari 3-25) of media, machines, and animals (Christiansen 264) to suggest a new definition of the humanity. In *Bigbug*, human bodies are immanently hybrid: they have intercourse with robots, are transplanted with artificial eyeballs, and sometimes are treated in the same way as domestic pets for artificial intelligence. In Jeunet's diegesis, it is meaningless to strictly distinguish humans from other species, such as robots, artificial intelligence, and animals. Moreover, with a little bit of humor, he puts the human characters in the lowest position of the social hierarchy. They seem secondary to the advertisements and subscriptions that continuously play on outdoor screens via the bodies of home robots, computers, and televisions. In Jeunet's world, human beings no longer have self-determination. They have to accept technologies and substances into their bodies if artificial intelligence recommends them, and they must buy certain products even if they don't want to. For example, with a subscription service or a purchase, humans can easily enhance their physical capability, such as vision. Instead of worshipping these transhumanist achievements, Jeunet portrays them as comical and sometimes even pathetic. In his films, these transhuman or nonhuman characters are not defined by otherness. They are just struggling, funny beings, who would do anything to survive and not die. This ridicule of transhumanist bodies matters, especially in the context of alleviating repulsion against them.

<sup>1</sup> In fact, her features share some similarities with "Rosie the Robotic Handmaid" from the 1960s TV series *The Jetsons*. The biggest difference between them is that instead of having a robotic face, Monique has a human face, played by Claude Perron.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, this situation is not too different from Meta or Instagram inserting advertisements on each user's main page. In the film, the advertisements are more explicit and physical since they pop up in front of one's private space.

Modified bodies are one natural outcome of basic human desire, wanting to adapt to an abrupt, rapidly changing climate of society, nature, and culture. Rather than portray them as uncanny or horrific creatures, Jeunet just describes them as funny and desperate people.

In this article, I argue that Jeunet's most recent film, *Bigbug*, can be analyzed through the theoretical lens of transhumanism and posthumanism since the film portrays a situation where humans and robots are confined to a limited space, which connotes facilitated *assemblage* between human and nonhuman bodies. The humans and nonhumans in the film attempt to transcend their bodily limits, and they do not hesitate to combine their bodies with external substances. The idea of transhumanism has existed long before, but it was Julian Huxley who first coined the term transhumanism in 1957: the human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity (Huxley 76). Following Huxley's designation, other scholars, such as British philosopher and futurist advocate Max More understand transhumanism as a philosophy of life that seeks the continuation and acceleration of the evolution of intelligent life (More 6-12). Moreover, Ray Kurzweil, a computer scientist and a futurist, advocates for singularity, a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed (Kurzweil 22).

Meanwhile, posthumanism emphasizes ways to co-exist with beings of otherness. For example, Rosi Braidotti suggests the posthuman as a navigational tool to learn who that “we” is, and how to keep that collectivity open, multiple, and non-hierarchical (vii). Her insight into the posthuman also aligns with Donna Haraway's “The Companion Species Manifesto.” (91-198) In the manifesto, she explained that her “Cyborg Manifesto” and “Companion Species Manifesto” are not too different from each other: “Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and nonhuman, the organic and technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways.” (96). Both Braidotti and Haraway are interested in demolishing a solid hierarchy between different species. Likewise, the films of Jeunet openly present bodily modification and transplants.

For instance, at the beginning of *Bigbug*, the characters talk about their neighbor who went blind due to an artificial eye subscription. Their neighbor, Igor, originally subscribed to a service called “HawkEyez.” With this service, his visual field increased by forty degrees, and his night vision and color identification were enhanced. Nevertheless, six months later, his eye prostheses are taken back, along with his biological eyeballs, when he misses his installment payments. It is a tragic incident, however, as almost every human character in this film lacks self-determination and bodily freedom once they are deemed “bankrupt” by the group of humanoids known as the Yonyx. Instead of making these situations very serious and criticizing the nonhuman antagonists, the film rather chooses to jest about such tragedies. In the film, human characters are stranded in their own houses because they are not capable of controlling the house without relying on artificial intelligence.

Jeunet believes that humans can at least laugh off their difficulties and continue living. Humor is a part of Jeunet's optimism about the future of humanity, and it serves to make transhumanism more accessible to a majority of people. He dilutes the adversity of human beings with humorous encounters and interactions with nonhuman characters. This dilution of hardship with humor reduces antagonism against nonhumans at the same time. For instance, *Bigbug* opens with android-made comedy shows that satirize the animality

of human bodies by comparing them to companion dogs—an opening sequence that might be a bit uncomfortable for some viewers. The juxtaposition of the Yonyx, the androids, with house robots who aspire to be human or sincerely love human characters enables viewers to laugh at or even sympathize with the nonhuman characters. When Greg, the sports robot, confesses his emotion toward Françoise, the human owner, thereby revealing their physical intimacy in front of everyone, one can realize that Jeunet is not trying to present nonhuman beings with a coherent perspective. Just like human beings, it is impossible to define all of the nonhuman characters with a few words. Some want to exploit human bodies, while others desire to be more like humans. In the world of Jeunet, nonhuman characters are not just simple machines, but their interests are even more complicated than those of humans.

*Bigbug* is the latest example of a long-running concern with nonhuman bodies in Jeunet's work. After his first feature film *Delicatessen* (1991) was a huge success, Jeunet has been consistently directing films on the theme of violated, transcended, or transformed bodies that focus on transhumanism and the nonhuman, such as *The City of Lost Children* (1995) and *Alien Resurrection* (1997). The nonhuman creatures and their interactions with human characters have been his main theme since the 1990s. He centers his films on nonhuman beings who are also the result of bodily separation and adaptation. For instance, in *The City of Lost Children*, it is Irvin, the separated brain in a vat that has the most knowledge and wisdom. He cooperates with other nonhuman characters and seeks a way to survive together. In this sense, Irvin is considered more of a posthumanist character than a transhumanist. Transhumanism focuses on more of an individualistic achievement and transformation, while posthumanism cares for coexistence and sustainability.

The presentation of various nonhuman bodies also contributes to posthumanist understandings of the bodies: the cohabitation of different bodies in his films reinterprets definitions of diversity in contemporary society. For example, Cary Wolfe, the author of *What Is Posthumanism?*, contends that posthumanism comes before and after humanism, before the embodiment and embeddedness of a human being were constructed and after an attempt to redefine the definition of human (Wolfe xv). This means that posthumanism is also an attempt to demolish a hierarchy between different groups of species and races, actively denying what many advocates of humanism and the Enlightenment believed. When one thinks of the word “diversity,” in general, it is considered within the range of different human beings. When it comes to “biodiversity,” the word usually implies organisms, excluding robots, cyborgs, or artificial intelligence. The creatures made by Jeunet redefine this diversity in a posthumanist manner: organic and nonorganic beings coexist in a contemporary society, and it is important to find a way to blend in with one another.

One way to synthesize organic and nonorganic substances in one's body would be to have transplants or prostheses. Elizabeth Ezra also focuses on Jeunet's technique of prostheses: his films depict the severing of ties with the past and its prosthetic restoration through the medium of film itself and through other media representations (Ezra 10). In his films, bodies never remain in the same state as when they were born. They are grafted, regrown, separated, and duplicated. However, this severing of bodies is conducted in a rather witty and delightful manner, as compared to the films of New French Extremity (NFE), a term coined by James Quandt in 2004 to describe taboo-breaking movies produced in France in the late 90s and early 00s. Some of Jeunet's films are contemporaneous with NFE and include images of cannibalism, violence (*Delicatessen*, 1991), fanaticism, and severed bodies (*The City of Lost Children*, 1995).

Nevertheless, they only share similar concepts, and the tone is completely different. While the scenes of excessive violation and violence sometimes cause unpleasant feelings for certain viewers – the moments of peeling one’s skin in Mariana de Van’s *In My Skin* (2002) or continued, intolerable torture in Pascal Laugier’s *Martyrs* (2008) – the adaptation of bodies in Jeunet’s films provides visual pleasure and laughter. For example, the bodies of animals in *Deux escargots s’en vont/Two Snails Set Off* (2017), a short animated film made in collaboration with Romain Segaud, are prosthetic bodies: they are combined with plant bodies, such as acorns and leaves. These creatures *look* adorable; it is difficult to link these plant bodies to those of horror and gore. However, their physical construction provides us room to discuss the continuous transformation of the nonhuman and human bodies that interchangeably oscillate in Jeunet’s films.

By mixing traits of plants, animals, and nonhumans (robots and artificial intelligence in *Bigbug*) in one character, he prioritizes non-normative bodies over human characters. By doing so, one can understand the term diversity in a more expanded manner. Being diverse does not only mean racial diversity, but it also means being diverse species-wise, transcending the categories of human/animal, and including the nonhuman/nonorganic. *Bigbug* visualizes a future space where humans and nonhumans live in symbiosis, thereby emphasizing human incompetence. Jeunet has been exploring the relationships between human and animal bodies by showing them being influenced by each other. Traditionally, bodies that have been hybridized, considered nonhuman, or declared as limited were usually understood as the objects of transformation rather than the subjects in media. For instance, Julia Kristeva’s understanding of the *abject* divides a border between “I” and the object – that of being opposed to the I (Kristeva 1). The creatures of otherness have been described as beings who suffer from a complex, an obsession, or anger, who should be feared and ostracized. Christine Cornea, a specialist on science fiction, claims that the alien, monster, or robot of science fiction may provide an example of otherness, against which a representation of “proper” human subjectivity is established, interrogated, and, on occasion, problematized (Cornea 176). David Cronenberg’s *The Fly* (1986) is one of the most representative examples: a man combined with the body of a fly falls into despair and self-hatred, eventually losing everything he had.

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

## **AM I A ROBOT DREAMING OF A HUMAN? OR A HUMAN DREAMING OF A ROBOT?**

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

At the end of the film, the entire group of Yonyx is destroyed with their own hands – with a systematic error, they end up recognizing themselves as “dangerous,” and self-destroy nevertheless, Jeunet’s film highlights human incompetence through a satire of a highly developed society. A case in point that demonstrates his intention is a story shared in *Bigbug*. Léo, Max’s son, tells the story of Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi’s dream to the robots. He uses the story to distract them so the other characters can start a fire in the house; however, in a broader context, this story also resonates with the theme of this film. Through a consistent blur between humans and nonhumans, the film asks us a question on the boundary between human and nonhumanness. What if we are in fact robots dreaming about becoming human? What if what we see, feel, touch, and eat is all a part of a virtual experience?<sup>3</sup> This blur between human and nonhuman also contrasts with the beliefs of traditional humanism; for instance, Descartes believed that animal bodies can also be deemed machines, since both lack reason and language. He explains that even though a machine can imitate a human body’s movement by having bones, muscles, nerves, arteries, veins and all the other parts, it is still devised by men, and still, it is just a machine. The same logic applies to animals (Descartes 22). In contrast, Zhuangzi, a Chinese philosopher who lived around the 4th century BCE, had a different conception of the border between humans and animals. *Bigbug* introduces his anecdote to emphasize the ambiguous distinction between humans and robots confined in the same house: “One night, a man named Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly. After happily fluttering over the flowers, he awoke prey to doubt. Am I a man who just dreamed he was a butterfly? Or a butterfly dreaming he’s a man? ... Therefore, you are humans dreaming that you are robots.”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> These questions were continuously asked in the novels of Philip K. Dick, such as *Paycheck* (1953), *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* (1966), and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968). Questions such as “Who am I?”, “Is this true?”, or “Am I really myself?” are frequently used in many SF films and TV shows these days, but Dick was a pioneer in this genre. It would be a promising project to trace him and other science fiction writers’ influence in contemporary French cinema.

<sup>4</sup> This was the citation made by Leo, one of the human characters in the film, to distract the robots’ attention for their escape plan.

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

*Bigbug* legitimizes the domestic robots as beings who have a right to explore their own bodies. Moreover, rather than simplifying them as "good robots," Jeunet puts up Yonyx, as antagonists who ridicule human bodies. Their role is different from that of housekeeping robots such as Einstein and Monique. By making housekeeping robots go against Yonyx, the film shows them as reliable, loyal friends because they also want to be human. While Einstein has gained more mobility and accessibility, human bodies in the film are locked and controlled. In other words, the mobility of human bodies is decreased ironically due to the development of technology. Although Einstein is considered "a robot from the old times,"<sup>5</sup> he is the only character who was physically enhanced. Before the union, he could be carried easily because he only had a head and a partial shoulder. Also, he was able to attach his head anywhere, such as to Monique's body. The head and shoulder of Einstein, combined with Monique's body, is the most fluid body in *Bigbug*. Lisa Blackman, who works on the intersections of body studies and media psychology, considers bodies as open systems that connect to others, human and nonhuman, such that they are always unfinished, mutable, and in dynamic processes of becoming (Blackman 120). This understanding of bodies as open systems aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's conception of the *rhizome*: it ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles (Deleuze & Guattari 7). The bodies in *Bigbug* resemble the physical adaptation, due to the development of technology, eventually dreamed of by transhumanists. The appearance of Monique+Einstein resonates with the theme of the film: in the world of *Bigbug*, humans might lose mobility and nonhumans might gain it.

This dark joke regarding human bodies trapped in limited space shines when Einstein makes a joke about COVID. He says, "The new COVID-virus has dropped. COVID-50. Universal lockdown for at least three months has been decreed." Victor cries in despair, "You promised me in the name of human solidarity!" The mentioning of COVID in the film not only fosters the audience's empathy but effectively raises a question about human mobility and adaptation in the era of high technology. Through COVID-19, we have witnessed a dismantling of the very boundaries between home and work by relegating many workers and teachers to their home offices, thus profoundly unsettling conventional boundaries (Gammel & Wang). As well as presenting the hybridized bodies, *Bigbug* adds complexity to this blurred boundary between different places of everyday life, through the representations of robots for home use.

The blurred boundaries within confined space function as a crucial factor in this film because Jeunet shows incompetent human bodies that cannot adjust themselves to extreme weather in the house. Due to the malfunctioning of the air conditioning system, the house goes through a severe "winter" and "summer" in a short period. This unfolding of the narrative reminds viewers of rapid climate change.

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<sup>5</sup> When the characters first encounter him, one of them asks if he is from a yard sale, then Victor replies, "I work in smart prosthetics, but my hobby is old-school mecano." It is also fascinating that Victor works in prosthetics – he is an assembler of body parts in modern days.

*Bigbug* can also be a contemporary parable that postulates personal space as our world, and, with a wrecked world climate system, human beings struggle. Again, the only beings who can survive this harsh, radical weather are the robots, and they help out human beings by distributing warm blankets or cooperating with their plans to attack one of the Yonyx who surveils them.

The secluded setting in the films of Jeunet enables and reinforces an organic, linked relationship between human characters, making them seem like one collective that requires consistent communication. In his films, bodies live in confined spaces. For example, in *Bigbug*, it is the moving billboards that visit the houses, not the other way around. A similar setting of exhibiting confining bodies in limited space is also presented in his other films, such as *Delicatessen* and *The City of Lost Children*. The characters either cannot leave the house during the whole film (*Delicatessen*),<sup>6</sup> or live in the middle of the ocean, refusing any contact from the outside world (*The City of Lost Children*).

People are living in a space where time is now organized according to imperceptible fragmentation of the technical time span (Virilio 444). Bodies do not have to travel because they are connected to each other by technologies. This description of “ubiquitous bodies” is a bit different from our bodies in reality, since in the film, rapid technological advances interfere with physical travel. In other words, *Bigbug* portrays a society where an individual has no choice but to be vested in the flow of inordinate information. By being confined to the limited space, the characters also end up sharing personal information about each other, and each individual’s originality is thoroughly ignored by the surveillance from Yonyx. Ironically, the collective group is recognized as a whole human body to him. By making the human characters mimic animals or go through ideological verification, he tries to solidify the hierarchy between themselves and humans. According to the Yonyx group, humans are inferior to themselves, and they make fun of the animality that humans contain. Because they always belong to their designated space, it becomes almost impossible to imagine the characters outside that space. For instance, at the beginning of *Bigbug*, there are several attempts made by the characters to escape the house. Françoise, one of the trapped humans, tries to use her dog to open the door, and Victor, Alice’s ex-husband, dashes his car into the house. The house in this film is not just a background; it functions as a critical plot device that interacts with the characters.

Therefore, one can say that this house functions as a landscape, not a setting. A landscape is more than just a setting; it is a complex idea, expressing the link between human beings and their context, and has a cultural and subjective dimension (dell’Agnese 78). Because the human characters are locked in this house, they are forced to interact with house robots more intimately than before. As they adjust their bodies to this newly established landscape, that is, where they cannot leave the house for a vacation to “Isola Paradiso,”<sup>7</sup> a clear border between the house and outside is created. However, it is a border that the characters cannot easily admit. Alice, the homeowner, has a huge glass door, enabling the characters to clearly see outside. To them, it seems like they can easily break the glass or open the door, but they fail to do so until the very end of the film. This “transparent” border that defines *Bigbug*’s landscape is differentiated from other dystopian films, such as Ben Wheatley’s *High Rise* (2015) or Bong Joon Ho’s

<sup>6</sup> Even after the protagonists succeed in surviving in the end, instead of leaving the house where cannibalism is allowed, Louison and Julie play instruments on the roof.

<sup>7</sup> Isola Paradiso is described as an artificial island, constructed for vacation. According to the promotional video clip that Victor’s new partner Jennifer played, it is equipped with distilled water pools, hypoallergenic beaches, an adjustable microclimate, and anti-UV sunshine. Compared to the house where they are locked in due to the severe control of the smart home system Nestor, this place surely looks like a “paradise.”

*Snowpiercer* (2013), in which the landscape is divided vertically or horizontally, respectively. *Bigbug*'s transparent but completely inaccessible border stimulates the characters to adapt to their new environment effectively because otherwise, they would have to die, due to the inability to control the AI system for their survival, such as the air conditioning system.

The impossibility and unnecessary of bodies traveling in space can also be understood with the idea of “terminal films” that Steen Christiansen suggested. According to Christiansen, “terminal films” are:

films that portray a dissolving boundary between human biology and media technologies, participate in a larger cultural shift in how we perceive human ontology... My argument, that the concept of the human is dependent on media technologies, is located within a posthuman critical tradition, extending from the shared belief that the human is not a stable entity in the world but is rather continuously articulated within an assemblage of media, machines, and animals. (Christiansen 264)

This is to say that the “*assemblage*” happens not only between humans and animals/robots, but also with media technologies because those have already become inseparable body parts of human lives, as we use our fingers to type and scroll through the screens for shopping, reading, and watching images. The film shows a situation where human bodies have to modify themselves because of an abrupt technological error. That is, when the AI system that normally takes care of humans' everyday needs is impaired, humans are at a loss since they are not used to a life without AI. Because of this dependence, human bodies lose freedom of movement instead of expanding it.

There is a moment demonstrating the absurdity of life enhancement by AI, which indeed reduces the quality of human life. There have been discussions about the term AI Assurance (Lorente 13) to ensure that AI systems are, among other things, ethical, unbiased, and fair. Because humans are already living with AI systems, in films and reality, these systems must function without any error, enhancing everyday lives, from obtaining information to shopping, transportation, and entertainment. *Bigbug* instead suggests “the control problem,” a notion suggested by Nick Bostrom (127). Bostrom (129) explains that there are two sides of methods for controlling AI: *capability control methods*, which aim to control what the superintelligence can do, and *motivation selection methods*, which aim to control what it wants to do . When the characters try to turn on the air conditioner, the android Yonyx refuses their request, explaining that under the new eco-law, turning up the AC or heating requires ministerial approval. Under one single condition, Yonyx allows their usage of the AC: the human characters have to be on the show “Homo Ridiculus.” This situation reveals two sides of “the control problem”: humans could not control the air conditioning system managed by the AI, and at the same time, the superintelligence, that is, Yonyx wants to control human beings. For the show, Yonyx makes them mimic animals, such as a bear, a snake, a seal, an elephant, and a dog. Through this show, Yonyx attempts to prove that human beings are inferior to them, and not too different from the animals. In another episode of “Homo Ridiculus,” a Yonyx actor eats *foie gras* made from human flesh—a critique of anthropocentric ideologies in which animals (e.g., geese) are deemed inferior and thus can be made to suffer for human consumption. In the diegesis of *Bigbug*, human bodies are being ridiculed and belittled for being imperfect and inefficient. Yonyx despises and bans the acquisition of a certain number of books. To them, artifacts from before their birth are taboos and obstacles of their world.

After finding numerous books in her library, Yonyx decides to test Alice's level of inaptitude to the emerging society. He asks questions such as “What is the greatest human invention?” and “Do you agree

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

Instead of comparing animals to humans, the androids identify humans with animals, reducing humans to simply one type of animal rather than a separate category of existence. To Yonyx, humans are not too different from a species to be exterminated like vermin or weeds or bugs. The third possible meaning of the title, *Bigbug*, can be derived from the AI’s conception of human bodies: because human beings are organically born into this world, to them, humans share more similarities with the bugs, and even though the Yonyx members resemble human bodies, it is only the superficial appearance, just like a different clothing. Moreover, unlike the group of Yonyx, who can entirely function individually, human beings in this film have to heavily rely on each other, like a herd of cattle. In this extreme situation where they cannot control anything in their own house, such as temperature change or communication with the exterior world, the characters have to be creative to cope with their problems. For example, to avoid Yonyx’s thermal sensor, the human characters wear clothes that they froze on purpose and attack them. This method was not based on high technology, but they were able to change their body temperature, which can also be understood as bodily modification.

The film broadly deals with animality: humans and animals are not too different from each other, from the perspective of androids. By bluntly dividing two groups – organics and non-organics – Yonyx claims that they are “the future of humanity.” In their propaganda broadcast, they narrate, “Unlike human workers, Yonyx needs neither food nor drink. Human soldiers are vulnerable to extreme temperatures. Yonyx is the future of humanity!” To them, they are superior (i.e., human) and the biological humans are inferior (i.e., nonhuman).

## CONCLUSION

Jeunet has always been exploring the dynamics between humans and nonhumans in his films. In *Bigbug*, by confining human and nonhuman bodies to the same space, he presents a sketch that describes humans as subassemblies of society. Unlike robots, androids, and artificial intelligence, humans are vulnerable to sudden changes in weather and are also depicted as overly sentimental beings. Because of their physical and emotional fragility, human characters in *Bigbug* experience a miniature version of multiple crises in the house, such as climate change, pandemic and quarantine, thought verification, and miscommunication with artificial intelligence. Regardless of the limits of human bodies, the robots in this film desire to be transhumanist transcending their nonhumanness. They mimic human traits – such as

humor and sex drive – to be admitted as “humans” or rather by humans, not robots. The combination of two robotic bodies – Einstein’s head and Monique’s torso imply the fusion of different nonhuman bodies, asking the audience what it means to be human. Previously, Einstein had a high intelligence but did not have a full body. As a serving robot, Monique was able to fully function but lacked enough intelligence to behave like a biological human. If there is a being that can think and act like humans, can we also call them human? By suggesting a being combined with intelligence and physical capacity, *Bigbug* raises a discussion on our relationship with nonhuman beings, especially in this era of ChatGPT and artificial intelligence. One day, we might end up communicating and working with more nonhuman entities, rather than human fellows. With humor and satire, *Bigbug* wittily presents our “what if” future, believe it or not.

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