

## Becoming Horse—Capitalism and the Human Identity: An Analysis of Boots Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You*

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**Abstract:** The aim of the article is to dissect the phenomenon of capitalist labor in the US as depicted in Boots Riley’s film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018). The primary focus of the article is the film’s rendering of the creation of horse humans which the article reads as a metaphor for class relations in the modern society. First, the article analyzes the film’s plot in the context of the cultural assumptions and beliefs connected with the figure of the horse. Next, it draws on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “becoming-animal” in order to unveil the revolutionary potential possibly latent in hybridization. Finally, after commenting on the ways in which capitalism weaponizes technological development, the article inscribes the notion of hybridization into the nature-culture dichotomy.

**Keywords:** Riley, capitalism, hybrids, becoming-animal

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The aim of the article is to explore the depiction of capitalist labor in Boots Riley’s film *Sorry to Bother You* (2018). In the course of this paper, I discuss the means by which the film represents its ideas, paying particular attention to the emergence of *equisapiens*, the horse-human hybrids the film introduces. The first part of the article explores the cultural significance of the said animal and establishes it as a point of reference for the film’s interpretation. Secondly, the article draws on the notion of becoming-animal as developed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in order to analyze the philosophical meaning of being transformed into an animal—the forced hybridization is treated as a potential metaphor for the process of becoming, which might eventually culminate in the process of becoming-revolutionary. In the third part of the article, I am concerned with the way in which the film under analysis both plays with posthumanist theories and underlines the possible threat stemming from technological development. The discussion is broadened by referencing the connections between technological progress and human bodily enhancements. Finally, the article focuses on inscribing the process of hybridization into the dichotomy of nature and culture. The process of hybridization—even if involuntary—is shown as potentially empowering and leading to the creation of new subjectivity, free from the limitations imposed by the capitalist paradigm.

First, it needs to be noted that the figure of the director is an important point of reference shaping the interpretation of the film. Boots Riley is a self-declared communist. Consequently, *Sorry to Bother You* may be treated as a political manifesto, which filters the critique of the capitalist system through the known political sensibilities of its author. Thus, in general, the film strives to stand on the side of the underprivileged and the excluded. The worldview of the director renders the paradigm of class struggle as one of utmost importance.

The film presents the story of a young black man Cassius “Cash” Green (Lakeith Stanfield), who begins his work as a telemarketer in the Regal View company.

Soon, an older colleague (Danny Glover) teaches the main character to use his “white voice” in order to communicate with predominately white clients. At the same time, the employees organize a general strike. Cash is promoted, becomes a premium caller, and betrays his peers by refusing to participate in the strike. His job is to organize contracts for the WorryFree company, which offers people life-long employment with no payment but in food and lodging. After being invited to a party organized by the WorryFree CEO, Steve Lift (Armie Hammer), Cash learns that the company intends to go one step further: Lift has already started to change people into half-human and half-horse hybrids, created in order to provide extra-efficient physical labor. Cash is offered to become a hybrid as well; he would work as a faux leader of the *equisapiens*, i.e. the horse humans community. Cash refuses, and instead reveals his boss’ plans to the public. Since the public is not moved, he goes one step further and crafts a plan to liberate the hybrids. Eventually, he learns that he too has been changed into a hybrid, despite his wishes. In the last scene, we see him leading a potentially revolutionary movement entering Lift’s mansion.

The film’s critique of capitalism is signaled already by the main character’s name—Cassius “Cash” Green. The main character can be seen as an embodied manifestation of capital: his everyday moniker means “money” and his last name is connected to the color of dollar bills. Thus, it is the financial aspect of life that seems to determine the film’s plotline. The main character’s entire journey—from rags to riches and the other way round—takes place in the realm of the economy. His continuous ascent up the social ladder cannot be reconciled with other aspects of life. Economic advancement leads to ethical deterioration: in order to earn huge amounts of money, the main character unwittingly decides to participate in the reinstatement of slavery in its modern form.

The color green appears as well when Cash learns about the creation of the *equisapiens*. The discovery happens by mistake, when instead of the jade door Cash opens the olive door and thus enters the wrong room, in which he finds the suffering hybrids. This is the moment which begins the process of Cash’s eventual internal change. Faced with the atrocity committed by Steve Lift, Cash begins to question his own deeds. Thus, the meaning of the color green loses its unequivocal and its different shades come to indicate potential paths one may take. Certainly, the interpretation of the color in financial terms remains a possibility. Nonetheless, the color can be interpreted as well as a symbolic cultural representation of hope, realized in the final scene which shows the commencement of a revolution. What is more, the color can be interpreted also as part of the collocation “being green,” with such interpretation underlining the character’s naïveté. The character’s actions stem not from rational decisions but from his naïve belief in the capitalist paradigm, which is omnipresent in the modern culture and thus shapes everyone’s subjectivity.

### **Becoming Animal—The Cultural Significance of the Horse**

The overbearing theme of the film may be described as a satirical critique of the capitalist society. The director’s aim is to start with satirical comedy on working in telemarketing and later swiftly change genre conventions toward a mixture of science

fiction and horror. The use of genre conventions as a tool for depicting the modern society is one of the characteristic features of the 2010s renaissance of arthouse horror films.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the film's storyline, hinged on a person's transformation into an animal, points to a number of cultural influences. First, the metamorphosis may suggest a connection with the Cronenbergian body horror, with Cronenberg's *Fly* (1986) providing the most obvious analogy. The human body becomes the source of terror as it undergoes physical changes which reveal the incongruous and overlooked aspects of the flesh and expose the animalism hidden within humanity. When their bodily experience degrades, humans are confined to a purely biological existence.

In other words, human form is not given to humans unconditionally. The dualistic nature of the body may be interpreted through the binary dynamics of "bare life/political existence, *zoe/bios*, exclusion/inclusion," which, according to Giorgio Agamben, describes the fundamental division within the Western societies (8). Political life may be removed from humans, for everyone lives in a state of constant risk of losing certain aspects of their existence: humans may be deprived of their social rights and demoted to life understood merely in biological terms. The emergence of bare life, Agamben argues, is facilitated by capitalism: "today's democratico-capitalist project of eliminating the poor classes through development not only reproduces within itself the people that is excluded but also transforms the entire population of the Third World into bare life" (180). In a world governed by the principle of financial gain, political existence is deemed redundant by the social elite. The free market weaponizes the processes characteristic of totalitarian regimes; physical violence is replaced with economic violence and human rights are once again at risk of being nullified.

A proper analysis of the dehumanizing transformation requires referencing Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) and the figure of Gregor Samsa. The twentieth century, according to George Steiner, "has raised the distinct possibility of a reversal of evolution, of a systematic turnabout towards bestialization. It is this which makes of Kafka's *Metamorphosis* the key fable of modernity" (6). Dehumanization, which found its most striking development in the Nazi death camps, has never been removed from the realm of possibilities.<sup>2</sup> Modern capitalism uses similar practices while utilizing human life. While the means of control are much more nuanced, the treatment of humans as biological workforce is still in place. In the fictional world of *Sorry to Bother You*, being transformed into an animal re-emerges as a symbol of the human condition and gains on factuality due to technological developments enabling the creation of human-animal hybrids.

Deciphering the semantic content of the film requires referencing the cultural meaning of the figure of the horse. On the most literal level, the function of the horse as a domesticated animal has always been connected to physical labor. In the past, horses were used to cultivate the soil or lead carriages. Therefore, the metamorphosis which humans undergo in the film reduces them in fact to live tools, completely deprived of independent subjectivity. Their primary function is to serve their owners, enabling

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1 Among the most critically acclaimed examples of this movement one may mention, among others, Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), Jennifer Kent's *The Babadook* (2014), or Ari Aster's *Hereditary* (2018).

2 See e.g. Zygmunt Bauman's *Modernity and the Holocaust*, Polity Press, 1991.

them to receive a steady income at their cost. This mechanism repeats the mechanism of slavery—a comparison often made in the film itself—which is based on dehumanizing particular social groups and depriving them of their rights.

The capitalist system repeats the mechanism of dehumanization characteristic to slavery. The transformation humanity undergoes under capitalism appears to result not only in individuals being stripped of their human traits but also in a general qualitative redefinition of the working class as a separate species—no longer *homo sapiens* but *equisapiens*. The rights of horse humans are neither included nor protected by the legal system, i.e. they become Agambenian bare life. In the capitalist society, sentient, non-human beings, such as horse-human hybrids or robots, are subject to exploitation, since the rights gained in the bygone centuries included only humans in their formulation.

The horse may refer us also to the historical beginnings of the modern world and the Industrial Revolution. After the first engines were invented and replaced horses as a means of transportation, the term “horsepower” began to denote the capability of machines to replace the organic labor of animals. What Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You* shows is the potential reversal of that process fueled by capitalist labor relations: in the presented scenario the economy reverts to one based on organic work, only this time horsepower is replaced by *equisapiens* power. This association transpires in the scene in which Cash begins to work as a power caller and is told that the company sells “gunpower” and “manpower.” Only later does it become clear that the latter term is used in a literal manner, with reference not to what modern corporations call “human resources” but to the actual use of humans as a source of power. What is more, the association is confirmed by the film’s symmetrical structure—Cash’s story both begins and ends in the same place, with him living in a garage sublet from his uncle. He is deprived of any actual dwelling and is forced to occupy a place destined for cars—machines whose power is measured in horsepower units.

Furthermore, there is a number of specific cultural meanings associated with the horse as an animal. First, in Christianity, the figure of the horse evokes the Riders of the Apocalypse as described in the Book of Revelation (ESV Bible, Rev. 6.1-8). Drawing on that, one could suggest that the emergence of posthuman horse humans is a sign of the end of times. This reading, in turn, would lead to the redefinition of the socio-economic order not as a historical phenomenon but as a metaphysical state which is nearing its end: its final demise is imminent. Led by the riders, the horses do not bring the apocalypse by themselves; they are subjugated to the capitalist moguls, whose greed may result in the eventual demise of humanity. However, the Christian apocalypse has a dual meaning. While the reading featuring the Riders of the Apocalypse comments on the ongoing destruction of the modern world, the apocalypse can also mean revelation. The aim of the film is to transcend the depiction of potential destruction and reveal what is usually hidden. The storyline regarding horse humans is clearly fantastical, yet its function is to hyperbolize actual interhuman relationships. What the film endeavors to impress upon its audience is that the world we inhabit is not so far removed from the world based on slavery, dehumanization, and exploitation.

The role of horses in bringing apocalyptic revelation is explored also in the famed story regarding Nietzsche’s descent into madness which followed his witnessing

a battered horse. We may interpret the horse as a symbol of subjective, down to earth apocalypse. In this case, the horse appears as a Christ-like symbol of suffering which, when recognized by the subject, soon becomes unbearable. The suffering may lead to the complete rejection of the world which from that point on appears unjust and repulsive. The horse thus joins other animals—e.g. the biblical lamb or Robert Bresson's donkey in *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966)—in becoming a symbol of undeserved suffering, and issues a call for action.

Actual depictions of humans as horses date back to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Riley reverses the classical depiction of horses as creatures superior to humans. In the fictional world of Swift's novel, horses can form a society that transcends the one created by humans. In the film, horse people are not offered a chance to organize themselves. From the very onset of their existence, they are strictly controlled by their creator, who plans to provide them with a false leader. Their micro-society is meant to serve the accumulation of capital. In the final scene of the film, we witness a moment which may signal the beginning of a revolution. Led by the transformed protagonist, the *equisapiens* storm the lodgings of the WorryFree's CEO. The film hints that the storming may result in much more than the overthrowing of a single exploiter: it may also initiate universal social change. What this seems to amount to is a call to arms issued by Riley the socialist. Horse humans—exploited and abused by humans—can overthrow the existing socio-economic system and establish a new one, which would be superior in its inclusiveness.

Finally, the film references as well the American mythologization of the horse as the symbol of freedom. Such mythologization has been present, first of all, in the Western genre. The trope of a lone ranger riding through the empty fields of the yet uninhabited frontier has left its mark on the collective American consciousness. Moreover, a sense of freedom is also what one immediately associates with the American wild horses. This association is based on a myth and dates back to the late nineteenth century. The American population of wild horses is an "industrial creation" (Norton Greene 165), as is not truly wild but feral. The horses descend from domestic horses reintroduced into nature by the colonizers after the original population became extinct 10,000 years ago. The myth establishes the horse as a symbol of wild nature, free from human influence. Even when over the years horses were reduced to a machine-like source of labor, Norton Greene observes, their descriptions still highlighted their aesthetic qualities, depicting them as both "functional and beautiful" (210). What the film shows is how modern horse humans meet the same fate: regardless of the language used to describe them, they are treated like machines.

The question of the *equisapiens'* subjectivity is of utmost importance. While the film clearly establishes that despite their animalistic appearance, the *equisapiens* are intellectually equal to humans, their cognitive abilities do not appear obvious to humans. In an interaction with one of the horse humans he releases, Cash starts to syllabize his sentences as if he were addressing someone incapable of understanding. His words are swiftly retorted—both characters, despite physical differences, come from the same city and speak the same language. Nonetheless, encountering such a liminal creature is a challenge, as one is required to recognize a fellow person (a neighbor) in the "other." Thus, the subjectivity of the *equisapiens*, even if self-

explanatory from their perspective, is a constant process of gaining (or fighting for) recognition. The struggle of the hybrids mirrors that of all the social groups which throughout history have been discriminated against and deprived of equal rights. The deprivation has often begun on the discursive level of dehumanizing and gatekeeping vocabulary. What Cash experiences is a confrontation with the “other” as elaborated on by Emanuel Levinas. Looking a horse human in the eye is a moment of ethical obligation understood as “the impossibility of indifference;” “the extreme urgency of this responsibility” cannot be measured (Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings* 142). One must recognize a person in the “Other’s” face: it is the face that “calls forth an enactment of ... personal responsibility” (Arnett 67). It may be claimed, Levinas writes, that “the phenomenon of the face is not in its purest form” in the horse, since “in the animal, there are other phenomena. ... But it also has a face” (“The Name of the Dog” 49). Hence, the ethical duty extends, to a certain degree, also to non-human entities.

### Becoming-Animal—The Philosophical Meaning of a Transformation

The process of acquiring subjectivity by hybrid humans in *Sorry to Bother You* can be analyzed in the light of the philosophical notion of becoming-animal developed by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980).<sup>3</sup> Before analyzing the “animal” part of the notion, the article will consider how the very notion of “becoming,” i.e. the relational<sup>4</sup> process between the elements of the given whole (“assemblage” in Deleuzian vocabulary) relates to the situation of the characters in the film.

First, the process of becoming is necessarily experienced by groups which are either located on social margins or generally underprivileged, i.e. women, sexual minorities, people of color, etc. “There is no becoming-majoritarian,” Deleuze and Guattari argue, “majority is never becoming. All becoming is minoritarian” (106). The adjective “minoritarian” should be understood as opposite to the normative, abstract standard of human being as assumed, for instance, by the upper class, e.g. “adult-white-heterosexual-European-male-speaking a standard language;” any “determination different from that of the constant,” Deleuze and Guattari observe, should “be considered minoritarian, by nature and regardless of number” (105).

3 *A Thousand Plateaus* is chosen as the theoretical basis of the analysis that follows since—together with *Anti-Oedipus* (1972)—it presents the most comprehensive and influential representation of Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical system. However, the notion of becoming was presented and developed also in earlier texts authored by Deleuze. For an in-depth analysis of the concept of becoming, see May, Todd. “When is a Deleuzian becoming?.” *Continental Philosophy Review*, no. 36, 2003, pp. 139–153.

4 In the opinion of Deleuze and Guattari, the relationship of elements is more important than the elements themselves. It is the very process of relationality that is at the center of their attention: line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived ... a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination; A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both. (Deleuze and Guattari 293)

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the process of becoming does not fit hierarchical schemata. To explain the state of becoming, the philosophers use the term “involution” instead of evolution: “the term we would prefer is ‘involution,’ on the condition that involution is in no way confused with regression. Becoming is involutory, involution is creative” (Deleuze and Guattari 238). In this light, the process of becoming-animal as presented in the film is not to be interpreted in a hierarchical manner. The first step required for regaining subjectivity is to escape from the limiting paradigm of the capitalist worldview which structures the world vertically on the basis of wealth. The transformation appears to work on a micro-scale, as a psychological process experienced by the subject. Becoming hybrid is therefore not an experience of regression as it would be in the evolutionary paradigm, but it happens to be a process without any intrinsic value, neither positive nor negative. It is a process of regaining and reconstructing subjectivity, i.e. “[b]ecoming-minoritarian as the universal figure of consciousness” which “is called autonomy” (Deleuze and Guattari 106).

When it comes to the notion of becoming-animal specifically, the philosophers divide this process into three, non-exclusive types, rooted primarily in the psychoanalytical tradition (Deleuze and Guattari 240-41). The distinction between the types is based not on the animalistic object of the process but on the specificity of one’s relation towards the said object. What Deleuze and Guattari are interested in is the ontology of relation: when analyzing Freud, James Urpeth contends, Deleuze and Guattari start “neither from little Hans nor from the horse, but from the more primordial *becoming-horse of little Hans*” (108). The first type of the animal is “the Oedipal animal,” one that “invites us to regress” (Deleuze and Guattari 240). This kind of relation is based on subjective perception and is the most idiosyncratic one. What is more, in line with Freud’s interpretation, it is also heavily intertwined in a familial relationship. The second type of animal Deleuze and Guattari mention in *A Thousand Plateaus* is “the State animal” (240), which corresponds with the Jungian theory on archetypes. According to the two philosophers, this kind of relationship with a symbolic animal is rooted in the subject’s affiliation with the cultural archetypes which shape the subject’s internal life. The Jungian animal is present in a vast array of myths, legends, beliefs, etc. Thus, this kind of relationship is more objectivized, as it transgresses the microscopic structure of a family and is based on a larger sociocultural structure.

It is, however, the third and the final type of animal that Deleuze and Guattari are most interested in: the so-called “demonic animal” (241). The demonic animal references the only type of relationship with an animal that actually enables and facilitates the process of becoming-animal. As the name suggests, in the case of a demonic animal we witness the phenomenon of supernatural possession. The relationship is not limited to relational self-positioning toward an external object, but it rather results in reciprocal flows between the external and the internal. The animal may become a spiritual, potentially unwanted intrusion which places itself in one’s internal, psychological structure. The structure of the relationship is not fixed since the demonic animal is defined by its multiplicity and constant changeability: the demonic animal ignites the ever-changing relational dynamics.

Still, it needs to be underlined that the types of relationality with animals Deleuze and Guattari list are not mutually exclusive, which means that a subject may bond with an animal which is at the same time Freudian, Jungian, and demonic. In other words, a particular animal is capable of a tripartite concomitance of bonds. First, it may refer the subject to their individual, subjective “me,” intertwined with their familial bonds. Secondly, it may evoke the sociocultural context based on fixed archetypes. And, finally, it may become a viral intrusion, which not only can have a potentially revolutionary effect but can also facilitate the process of becoming-animal.

The animalistic nature of the horse in Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You* is not straightforward. Since the transformation occurs in a larger social context, it is rather difficult to think of the horse as a Freudian animal: while it certainly bears some subjectivized meaning to certain *equisapiens*, it cannot be treated as a universal key for analyzing the processes they undergo. At the same time, the Jungian animal is certainly at play—being changed into a horse-human hybrid necessarily evokes a set of sociocultural archetypes and symbols associated with the animal. Even though individuals might not consciously assert the network of meanings referred to in the previous part of the article, the meanings are still culturally recognized and are bound to be acquired in the process of acculturation.

What seems most interesting to explore is the demonic nature of the horse part of the hybrid. Since the demonic animal is the only one capable of igniting the process of becoming-animal, one may wonder how this processual change occurs. The process of becoming-animal is always communal, i.e. it “involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity” (Deleuze and Guattari 239). As becoming can be multifarious in nature—Deleuze and Guattari mention, among others, becoming-child, becoming-woman, becoming-molecular, or becoming-imperceptible (248)—the process of becoming-animal can be translated onto many contexts, e.g. political, and can thus also initiate the process of becoming-revolutionary (292). It is this form of becoming that is apparent in *Sorry to Bother You*. The transition from becoming-animal to becoming revolutionary realizes Irving Goh’s statement that “in becoming-animal, one is also presented the possibility to create an adjacent space where life is free(d) from the capture of striating State politics” (55). The change experienced by the underprivileged is certainly marginal in nature: the final revolutionary movement is an uprising of the minority desperate to overthrow the existing system of social relations. In that way, the process of becoming emerges as a minoritarian revolutionary outburst of non-normative subjects.

The process of becoming may be interpreted as a unique opportunity to fight oppression and gain subjectivity in the process. Since the process of becoming-animal is based on involution, such reframing of the experienced situation—as it rejects the notions of progress and regression—removes the humiliation culturally associated with being changed into an animal. Thus, the demonic horse provides a framework for producing new, dynamic subjectivity. It also conquers the limitations imposed by the Jungian horse, which, in line with the traditional symbols and archetypes, would most likely treat the literal metamorphosis into an animal as a situation of degrading imprisonment.

When the film's storyline is read metaphorically, it seems that the process of becoming is shown as a solution for creating a society that is more just and fair. The dynamics of becoming-animal is based on rejecting the evolutionary stratifications governing the mindset rooted in the capitalist paradigm. The involution enables one to stop thinking about their class position in terms of humiliating degradation. The never-ending process of becoming rejects fixed social positions and allows for revolutionary change. Horse humans eventually reject the symbolic framework in which an animal is necessarily positioned below the human and begin to strive to establish new social frameworks, based on interconnectedness and social justice.

### **Becoming Post-Human—the Threats of Technology**

Another focus of *Sorry to Bother You* is the adverse effect that technological developments have on the modern society. Riley considers the influence of technology on class relations. The social elite, the film demonstrates, weaponizes science in order to solidify and strengthen their superior position. Potentially beneficial achievements—i.e. the technological enhancement of the human body—eventually lead to the creation of horse-human hybrids, which in the course of the film are not only objectified but also used and abused. In this section, the weaponization of science will be analyzed with reference to definitional frontiers of humanity: the borders between human, animal, and posthuman, as well as between nature and culture.

Technological development poses questions regarding the borders of human subjectivity. When analyzing what it means to be human, boundaries are of essence. What comes to mind is the human-animal border and the assumption that with language, culture, or social structures, *homo sapiens* has surpassed its predecessors and constitutes a new, qualitatively different entity. On the other hand, we should consider a postulated new entity capable of surpassing humans, e.g. a technologically enhanced humanoid. The humanoid is usually understood in strictly hierarchical terms, i.e. according to the evolutionary paradigm, that is as the end effect of a process moving from rudimentary forms of organic life, through humans and, eventually, to superior post-humans. However, this linearity is rather simplistic. One can hardly think about biological progress as a singular process with teleological orientation aimed at perfecting human qualities. What is more, reaching the next stage of development does not necessarily imply that the previous stages are lost. The organism's gains pile up: while new ones appear, the old ones are never nullified. The development of the human rational mind did not result in the removal of human biological traits, which still tend to express themselves in abrupt eruptions of primordial atavisms. Thus, the belief in the linearity of progress seems doubtful at best. Nothing is lost and the borders of humanity are never fixed. Both transgression and the regression toward a different form of existence can be described as ever-present possibilities, immanent to the human condition.

The transformation presented in *Sorry to Bother You* shows that the two types of borders, i.e. human-animal and human-posthuman, are not mutually exclusive. Technological development may be in fact interpreted as identical with human regression into an animal. The borders of the transformation humanity undergoes are not easily demarcated. Moreover, the transformation seems inherently dualistic. The

changes to human nature may be at the same time positive and negative, enriching and impoverishing, for they are largely rooted in what Jacques Derrida refers to as the dialectics of *pharmakon*, that is “this philter, which acts both as remedy and poison” and “can be—alternately or simultaneously—beneficent or maleficent” (70). The changes function as both medicine and poison. It can be thus said that Riley’s film reveals the danger inherent to technological development. Technology—theoretically oriented toward enhancing the quality of human life—hides in its very nature a potential threat of making people miserable.

The discourse regarding the progress and regress of human form may pertain to larger social structures as well. It may be discussed in relation to, for instance, political systems. While human societies develop, they are always at risk of falling back into previous forms of governance; the threat of an authoritarian regime always looms around the corner. Riley’s *Sorry to Bother You* explores the processes described above with reference to slavery. The practice, although widely regarded as barbaric and anachronistic, has never been actually lost as a possible social structure, since the more primitive stages of humanity never disappear and may resurface at any given point in history. *Sorry to Bother You* presents the reemergence of slavery as facilitated by the modern capitalist system. Capitalists weaponize the development of technologies and utilize them in order to reinstate social relations fully based on discrimination, violence, and exclusion. The props on the stage have changed but the core of the plot remains the same.

The process of crossing the borders of humanity is bound to evoke transhumanism, and it seems that Riley’s work is in dialogue with this kind of criticism. The film shows how striving for transhumanist subjectivity may potentially backfire and lead to the regressive hybridization of humans. Technological alterations to human bodies may end up as stimuli strengthening and broadening class divisions within the society. For instance, certain bodily alterations may become exclusive commodities, accessible to a narrow group of millionaires, while some modifications may be imposed on the underprivileged by means of economic violence. The technology of creating horse humans is the example of the latter: the only aim capitalists have is to multiply economic gains to the point of disregarding the majority of the society and forcefully transforming them into hybrids. The capitalist force may be defined, to quote from Shoshana Zuboff, as “instrumentarian power,” i.e. the quasi-totalitarian form of governance based on data collection, which is meant “to reduce human persons to the mere animal condition of behavior shorn of reflective meaning” (358).

The emergence of horse-human hybrids appears to be rooted in the binary dynamics of nature and culture. This dichotomy can be read in two ways and necessitates posing two symmetrical questions, regarding, first, the passage from the human (culture) to the animalistic (nature) and, secondly, the reverse transformation. At its core, the former is based on the process of naturalization. When the human, understood as an entity belonging primarily to the realm of culture, is removed from their native sphere, he or she is deprived of the possibility of change. In the case of *Sorry to Bother You*, the entire process is intertwined with class interdependencies since it is just the underprivileged working class that is transformed into hybrids. Once the underprivileged are pushed towards nature, their entire existence changes its ontic status. The hybrids’ existence can thus no longer be interpreted constructively. The

way any animal behaves is largely predetermined by its connate instinctive drives and desires. The behavior of the horse is considered to stem not from its environmental surrounding but rather from the mere fact of it being a horse, a representative of a particular species with predetermined set of characteristics. Thus, when capitalism relegates humans to the role of animals—whether discursively or literally—their social position is naturalized. Their belonging to the working class is then tautologically justified by the very fact of belonging—it is only natural that these animalized people are at the bottom of the social ladder, since that is where they are. The impossibility of changing one's internal characteristics precludes any social movement. Thus, the imposed movement from culture to nature results in humans being deprived of the rights typically associated with the realm of culture and regulated by law or legislation.

The other vector leading towards hybridity includes the movement away from nature and towards culture. In this situation, existence transcends its biological limitations and influences the superphysical sphere. The lower class of the society may be described discursively as anchored in biology. The exploiters may see their lives as reduced to pandering to physical needs like food or shelter. Unable to transcend their physical needs, the lower class are precluded from moving forward, for instance, into politics. The emergence of hybridity is thus tantamount to the moment when the embodied experience of the underprivileged enters the sphere of politics and gains its cultural representation. Their predicament is no longer natural but culturally mediated and can trigger potentially revolutionary change, as happens in the last scene of the film.

The consequences of the binary dynamics of nature and culture structure the predicament of the *equisapiens*. On the one hand, their transformation deprives them of humanity and reduces their existence to a purely biological fact. On the other, their new situation is paradoxically a means of emancipation that can fuel a revolution. The *equisapiens*, to quote from Agamben, are like “the werewolf, who is precisely *neither man nor beast*, and who dwells paradoxically within both while belonging to neither” (105). In the end, they function outside the fixed system of labels—their posthuman condition is similar to Donna Haraway's cyborg, free from “seductions to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity” (150). The emergence of *equisapiens* testifies to how the threats posed by technology can be used in a revolutionary and empowering manner: they can help both overthrow the fixed social order and forge a new, anarchic “nonidentity;” i.e. a form of “micropolitics” (Bruns 713) leading to a brand-new social structure.

## Conclusion

Boots Riley's film *Sorry to Bother You* uses artistic mediation to comment on the current social relations in the United States. In its critique of the capitalist system, the film can be read as a negative manifesto: while it does not present a new world, its critique of the current one is so potent that it justifies a revolution. The discussed contexts—i.e. the cultural meaning of the horse, the process of becoming-animal, and the threat of technological development—show various aspects of this critique. In addition to providing a noteworthy example of artistic activism, *Sorry to Bother You* offers a nuanced representation of the ongoing class structure in the United States.

On the other hand, the film's focus on ambiguity may be seen as a positive manifesto of emancipation. While traumatic and humiliating, social exclusion, which the film represents through the metaphor of forced hybridization, always carries within itself a possibility of revolution. Riley imagines a fictionalized version of our world in which the logic of capitalism is pushed to its limits. Bound to succumb to its internal contradictions, discussed throughout Marxist theory, such a world will necessarily occasion its own demise. As maintained by the accelerationist approach, capitalism's demise may only be achieved by fostering its potentially self-destructive logic. Thus, despite its grim depiction of reality, Riley's film seems hopeful: the world based on equality is bound to emerge. Eventually.

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