
The Ecological Posthuman in Lee's Tarboy and Tan and Ruhemann's The Lost Thing

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Başak Ağın,

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Abstract: In her article "The Ecological Posthuman in Lee's *Tarboy* and Tan and Ruhemann's *The Lost Thing*" Başak Ağın analyzes the posthumanist and ecological elements in two animated short films, James Lee's *Tarboy* (2009) and Shaun Tan's and Andrew Ruhemann's *The Lost Thing* (2010). Ağın posits that the two animated short films display a disanthropocentric worldview through the enmeshed relations between humans, techno-sentient beings, and natural-cultural hybrid bodies. The intermingled fusions of these biotic and abiotic forms are inherently characterized by a sense of posthuman ecocriticism. Basing her arguments on the notions of agential realism and new materialisms, Ağın contends that *Tarboy* and *The Lost Thing* present portrayals of posthuman entanglements.

Başak AġIN

The Ecological Posthuman in Lee's *Tarboy* and Tan and Ruhemann's *The Lost Thing*

Given the increasingly complex relations between the cognitive capabilities of the human and "other" beings and things, taking human consciousness as an epiphenomenon (and not as a central choreography to define *homo sapiens*) has become one of the core characteristics of recent posthumanist discussions. In other words, the emergence of the posthuman subject follows from the pursuit of re-framing the human from a disanthropocentric view. This is what in the two animated short films, I discuss, James Lee in *Tarboy* (2009) and Shaun Tan and Andrew Ruhemann in *The Lost Thing* (2010) showcase through their employment of naturalcultural hybrids and conscious machines in their storylines. Bringing together the culturally produced and the naturally born, these films seem "fundamentally ambivalent about the breakdown of the distinctions between human and machine, between personal consciousness and machine consciousness" (Csicsery-Ronay 191). Through such ambivalence emerges a posthuman hybridity highlighting the entangled relations between the human, the nonhuman, and the technological. In this human-machine symbiosis, posthuman bodies interact with one another as always emerging and boundary-transgressing forms. Both animations designate humans "in a dynamic co-evolutionary spiral with intelligent machines as well as with the other biological species with whom we share the planet" (Hayles, "Unfinished" 164). Thus, through their apt portrayal of the continuous construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of naturalcultural blends as posthuman figures, the films indicate "an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity" (Bennett 31). The directors concentrate on "the co-extensive materiality of humans and nonhumans" (Alaimo and Hekman 9), emphasizing "a strong symbiotic and interdependent relation" between the two (Heersmink 122). As opposed to Isaac Asimov's imaginary of robots or in contrast to evil robots which seek to destroy or displace humankind in science fiction dystopias, Lee's and Tan and Ruhemann's posthuman robots exist in a state of flow, as an enmeshment of the carbon-based and the silicon-based. Instead of reiterating a dichotomy between the two approaches, hence, these films propose a blend of organic and inorganic bodies through the emergent condition of the posthuman, thus formulating human-robot relations as a "complex and supple network" (Serres and Latour 105).

Lee replaces humans with robots to question the centralized position attributed to humans and envisions a fictional world of *robo sapiens* replacing *homo sapiens*. This is not a displacement of the human, but an extended fantasy of a posthuman robotic world. In a world like this, where the once centralized human is already sidestepped and dethroned, "the coming to life of the technological other," as in the form of *Tarboy* and the sentient robots, no longer functions to "fragment the self, to mathematize and mechanize it, to make it into an object of domination" (Rutsky 26). *Tarboy* emerges as the technological other in an apparent enmity with the dominant hybrid figure, but it holds the position of a subject in control. Moreover, as a humanoid figure and an enmeshment of the informational (robot) and the chemical (tar), *Tarboy* epitomizes the link between "the natural life forms" and "cultural forms of life" (Helmreich xi). Thus, it emerges not only in the body of the seemingly superior subject, but also in the form of the object that reverses the domination. In the opening scene of *Tarboy*, a young robotic body, the grandson, asks his robot grandfather to tell him a bedtime story. The story that the robot grandfather tells turns out to be the story of the film's protagonist, *Tarboy*, and the grandfather starts narrating how the main character promised to take revenge from his humanized suppressors. The story begins with the words, "once, there were three rich 'Fat Cats,' who ruled the world." The Fat Cats symbolize multinational corporations that dominate the world, and they use robot slaves in their mines to make high profits. As the story follows, *Tarboy* is understood to have been among those robot slaves once. Not needing the robot slaves anymore due to discovering better methods of production, the Fat Cats "destroyed their slaves and dumped them into the tar pit," causing these slaves to die a painful death. However, not to the knowledge of the Fat Cats, the robots' "collective consciousness (in the form of memory chips) survives and combines itself with the tar." As a result of this, "a boy made of tar, who named himself *Tarboy*" emerges, and his only desire is to strike back at the Fat Cats. *Tarboy*, being born out of a collective consciousness, stands for the multi-faceted concept of the posthuman. It thus disengages certain "sets of relations, concepts, or practices" between the dominant and the dominated figures from the fixed contexts and stable realms that draw their boundaries (Sharon 177). After severing the robot slaves from their singular, permanent, and unchanging categories, *Tarboy*, as a posthuman collective figure, then, relocates, reconfigures, and calls these previously separate entities "into new relations within a new system or assemblage" (Sharon 177). In other words, the posthuman body of *Tarboy* emerges as a complete system of networks, rather than as a monolithic body to denote a single robot. Within the body of *Tarboy*, there lies the collective consciousness of the robots, and thus, they re-emerge as a form of embodied consciousness only to act as one, "positive and dynamic energy that is the primary reality of subjective and social being" (Sharon 177).

The story continues as the fight between *Tarboy* and his enemies follows: "After defeating the armed robots, [*Tarboy*] pursued one of the agents into a dark building. There, he was stalked by another dangerous robot, whom he could not spot in the dark. Their confrontation, however, was interrupted by a janitor, who came in and turned on the lights and some music [so that] *Tarboy* was able to overcome his foe. Although *Tarboy* was skilled in combat, the Fat Cats were cunning, and were able to lay a trap. The Fat Cats gathered in one place, and when *Tarboy* arrived, they turned on a number of giant heat lamps. Being made of tar, *Tarboy* immediately began to melt [and] in a matter of seconds, he was a mere puddle." At the end of the story, the grandfather surprises both his grandson and the audience, saying that he was the janitor who turned on the lights and the music that day. He also

shows a jar, which contains the remnants of Tarboy, waiting to be resurrected one day. Despite its alleged destruction by the enemy, Tarboy is still there, waiting to be "resurrected," or rather to "emerge." In such potential possibility of emerging, or becoming, Tarboy signifies potentially emergent multiplicities within a complex flux of heterogeneous assemblages. This is a compound, a fusion, or a blend of consciousness, digitalization, mechanism, chemical bodies, and a human-like form. Tarboy, therefore, exists, in a sense, within the blurred lines between being and not being. It is, because the grandfather robot possesses the remains of Tarboy in a jar, which signals the likelihood of Tarboy's survival and its promising potentialities. It is not, because it is kept in a jar, which means there might never come a moment when it re-emerges to avenge the subservient robots that have been sent into the tar pit. In this regard, Tarboy's case resembles that of Erwin Schrödinger's 1935 thought experiment called "Schrödinger's cat." Both Tarboy and Schrödinger's cat bear a 50% probability of being or not being. Moreover, their existence depends entirely on other possibilities at hand, which means their materiality cannot be separated from a seemingly exterior environment.

Among numerous discussions of Schrödinger's cat, perhaps the most relevant one to the case of Tarboy would be Karen Barad's posthumanist account. Taking her starting point from this cat paradox, Barad explains that "the overall state of the entangled system after one hour is a superposition of two states -- a nondecayed atom together with a live cat, and a decayed atom together with a dead cat -- with either possibility being equally possible" (169). She also clarifies her point by explicating that certain interpretations of the cat paradox are misleading, and eliminates the four most commonly offered interpretations. She notes, firstly, it is not the case that "the cat is *either* alive *or* dead (we simply do not know which)," secondly, it is not the case that "the cat is *both* alive *and* dead simultaneously (this possibility is logically excluded, since 'alive' and 'dead' are taken to be mutually exclusive states), thirdly, it is not the case that "the cat is *partly* alive and *partly* dead (a kitty in a coma)," and finally, it is not the case that "the cat is in a state of being *neither* alive *nor* dead (perhaps in the sense of a vampire cat living among other 'undead' creatures)" (169; emphases in the original). Instead of these popular accounts, she offers a posthumanist explanation to the case, and notes that "*the cat's fate is entangled with the radioactive source* -- and not merely epistemically, as Schrödinger and others suggest, but *ontically*; that is, the cat and the atom do not *have* separately determinate states of *existence*, and indeed, there is no determinately bounded and propertied entity that we normally identify with the word 'cat,' independently of some measurement that resolves the indeterminacy and specifies the appropriate referents for the concepts of 'cat' and 'life state' ... There is no determinate fact of the matter about whether 'it' is dead or alive" (169-70; emphases in the original).

Following Barad's argumentation, Tarboy's case is linked metaphorically to the case of Schrödinger's cat. As is the case with the cat and the atom, Tarboy's emergence as a collective posthuman body is strongly related to the behavior of its oppressors and to the environmental and social conditions surrounding it. Tarboy carries the possibility of re-emerging if similar conditions arise. Also, these conditions are directly connected to the attitude of the Fat Cats. Thus, such possibility (of re-emergence) for Tarboy is only linked to the probability of the re-emergence of the very conditions that paved the way for its existence in the first place. Without the Fat Cats and their entangled relations with the robots and the tar pit, Tarboy would not have materialized. If the Fat Cats, or any form of an oppressor, continue to exploit robot-workers, then, Tarboy will surely retaliate. If not, Tarboy will remain sealed in the jar, still always carrying that ultimate possibility. On the figurative level, this is also highly significant in the sense that the end of the human is directly related to the end of the other species that have long been oppressed or suppressed. Also, the factors that shape the possibility of Tarboy's emergence are both socially and physically connected to one another. From this perspective, Tarboy showcases the entangled relations between humans and nonhumans. Being a posthuman *robo sapiens*, Tarboy is independent of "any one origin or destination or component" (Weinstone 28-29), and its state of life is indeterminate. In other words, it is this multiplicity of components and probabilities that makes Tarboy a posthuman body. Tarboy not only fluctuates between animal, human, and technology, but also inherently involves an indefinite potentiality of emerging and re-emerging. Its body circulates within and through these up-and-coming states. Along with all these emergent possibilities, *Tarboy* also offers a means of rethinking the boundaries between the organic and the inorganic. Water and tar, being blended in the water cooler/dispenser machine, symbolically, fuses together the organic, the inorganic and the technological to indicate a posthuman form. With its fluid body, Tarboy appears in an always already nascent condition of the posthuman. Then, it could be argued that Tarboy, as the posthuman subject, reinterprets within its human-like body the meaning of being human. It leads the audience to consider letting go of the exclusionary status of controlling and dominating the other, attributed to humans. In the midst of the techno-cultural unconscious, as the film suggests, the human needs not to be separated from the nonhuman and/or technological domain. Only then could the natural/cultural processes that shape our interactions be acknowledged to help us better understand the agentic powers outside our control at work. As R. L. Rutsky contends:

The position of human beings in relation to [the] techno-cultural unconscious cannot ... be that of the analyst (or theorist) who, standing outside this space, presumes to know or control it. It must instead be a relation of connection to, of interaction with, that which has been seen as 'other,' including the unsettling processes of techno-culture itself. To accept this relation is to let go of part of what it has meant to be human, to be a human subject, and to allow ourselves to change, to mutate, to become alien, cyborg, posthuman. This mutant, posthuman status is not a matter of armoring the body, adding robotic prostheses, or technologically transferring consciousness from the body; it is not, in other words, a matter of fortifying the boundaries of the subject, of securing identity as a fixed entity. It is rather a matter of unsecuring the subject, of acknowledging the relations and mutational processes that constitute it. A posthuman subject position would, in other words, acknowledge the otherness that is part of us. It would involve opening the boundaries of individual and collective identity, changing the relations that have distinguished between subject and object, self and other, us and them. (21-22)

Despite its surface technological orientation, therefore, *Tarboy* presents a chance to reconsider our position in a techno-cultural world. By giving us an opportunity, for a moment, to stop asking "where ... 'we' humans end and 'they' technologies begin" (Van Den Eede 152), it underlines how humans and technologies are entangled, thus aiming to highlight our kinship with those very technologies we seek to understand. *Tarboy*, thus, through the body of its main character, incorporates the mixture of water and tar into the machinic systems, thereby scrutinizing the possibility of emergent conditions of the posthuman within a world without the domination of humans. The Fat Cats, being human-like figures, whose domination seems to end with the likelihood of *Tarboy's* revenge, for instance, are intended to propose the idea that such kind of world is possible. These figures also symbolically suggest that the film is strongly critical of capitalist methods of production and consumption. In other words, by highlighting the direct relationship between the Enlightenment views of human exceptionalism and our cultural habits of consumerism, the film presents a critique of our current ways of living in throw-away society. It accentuates the fact that we must acknowledge, as Rosi Braidotti maintains, a new, emergent form of "post-anthropocentric life beyond the species," and while doing so, we must bear in mind that "the global economy is post-anthropocentric in that it ultimately unifies all species under the imperative of the market and its excesses threaten the sustainability of our planet as a whole" (63). In line with Braidotti's argument, *Tarboy* holds a mirror up to the need for the promotion of a more horizontally aligned, and perhaps greener culture, by emphasizing the link between the false belief that humans are the only capable agents in this world and the exploitative practices of the capital holders.

Taking a similar stance in its weight on the indivisibility of human and nonhuman spheres, and presenting a critique of the dull, consumerist lives of humans, shaped by exceptionalist policies, Tan and Ruhemann's *The Lost Thing* opens with an ontological divide between the realm of humans and that of nonhumans. The film raises the question of "what it means to be human, organic, or natural" (Heise, "Plasmatic" 305), along with its inquiry into the meaning of being a sentient machine. *The Lost Thing* takes place in a dystopian Australia, where an ordinary man called Shaun, who enjoys looking for bottle tops for his bottle top collection, discovers on the beach a hybrid and genderless creature that looks like either an industrial boiler, or a crab, or an octopus, or all of them at once. As the meeting point of the nonhuman animal and the technological, the creature is in fact example of Haraway's cyborg, a hybrid body that transcends the boundaries of gender, twisting myth and reality, and highlighting a kinship between the animal and the machine. Although it is not a cybernetic organism that is mostly based on information technologies, nor does it involve highly technological or digitalized components, it still merges machine and organism within a heterogeneous fusion. In this, it also enmeshes social reality and fiction, for the existence of such a creature is only available in an animated film. The film, therefore, not only blurs several boundaries, but also gives ecologically concerned messages, which mainly showcase how human exceptionalism results in humans' segregation from nature. In the film, the world of humans, which is deliberately estranged from that of nonhumans, is monotonous, grey, and heavily industrialized. The human figures, thus, portrayed when walking around or commuting between work and home, are alienated from the natural environment that they belong to, and they lead dull and extraordinarily plasticized lives. In this modern world, haunted by industrialism, "humanity," as Braidotti writes, "is re-created as a negative category, held together by shared vulnerability and the spectre of extinction, but also struck down by new and old epidemics, in endless 'new' wars, detention camps and refugee exodus" (187).

In the metaphorical sense, Braidotti's observation is true for the human realm in *The Lost Thing*. Although it is the creature that is meant by the title of the film, in an underlying message, humans are also lost in their own disappointed and detached lives. In this sense, humans are also lost things. Apparently, humans' isolation from the natural domain of nonhumans is not only the result of an extremely industrialist society with its rigid norms, but also their own choice, as if to defend themselves against what they see as any possible contamination from the nonhuman world. Such self-imposed detachment from the natural environment has led humans to become indifferent to the colors of life and nature. This deliberate distinction between the human and the nonhuman domains, however, is not intended to connote any technophobic trace, but rather a critique of anthropocentrism and extreme industrialization in the film. The hybridity of nature and culture, the organic and the inorganic, and the born and the technological is celebrated through the vivid depictions of the nonhuman realm, thus marking the importance of the indivisibility of the human from the nonhuman and the technological as always already hybrid entities. The impression that this far-future plastic environment (of humans) creates, on the other hand, is one that resonates with the tone and atmosphere in George Orwell's *1984*. The streets of the human domain are filled with workers all dressed in the same way. People are simply going to work, dressed in monocolors, such as white, grey, and black, with dull expressions on their faces, showing no sign of joy. The surroundings are covered with mottos like "today is the tomorrow you expected yesterday," which gives a rather urging sense of action, probably calling for work, since the human characters seem to do nothing else. Likewise, consumerist and extremely technological advertisements like "buy sensible shoes," which appear underneath the traffic lights, indicate how everything in the human world is organized around simply utilitarian purposes. The rusty equipment and tools that the beach cleaners use remind one of the modernist disillusionment with technology and the feelings of isolation and alienation it leaves behind. Humans are now the marginalized others in a totally culturally produced world because, in this completely technological environment, there seems to be no blue or green color that a natural environment would reflect. In this sense, in the human realm of *The Lost Thing*, culture has co-opted nature. It is only on the beach that it is possible to see some remnants of what was to be nature, but the beach is also filled with waste and garbage, so culture has strongly infiltrated nature. Even the hours that humans spend on

the beach, during which they are in touch with nature, are limited. When the mechanical alarm sound is heard signaling the end of the beach hours, they all pack up and leave for the city. There is no place left for nature in this techno-dystopian world, and there are no plants or animals visible to the audience, indicating the fact that humans have entirely segregated themselves from the rest of the ecosystem, creating a self-inflicted otherness. The impact of all these elements in the film is that the audience is presented with a self-critique on having forgotten that culture and nature are indivisible, and so are the human and the nonhuman.

In a world as such, *The Lost Thing* calls into question the concept of "normative subjectivity," categorizing humans and nonhumans in a hierarchical order (Nayar 9). By problematizing the idea of technology "as a mere prosthesis to human identity," the film intends to reconceptualize human-technology relations as "integral" (Nayar 8; emphasis in the original). It is through the figure of the creature that the audience grasps how important it is to acknowledge nonhuman animals and technological bodies as vital to our lives. Indeed, the creature, being a neither/nor case, a no-origin hybrid with no gender boundaries, like Donna J. Haraway's cyborg, is a posthuman entanglement of the animal and the technological, through which the audience is able to empathize with the nonhuman forms, be they living or nonliving. As such, the creature exemplifies what Hayles writes when she sees "no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals" (*How We* 3). The creature, then, leads the audience to question their own human sides with the capacity to think, feel, and act. Left all alone and ignored, the *Lost Thing*, as Shaun calls it, seems to have been deserted and it seems to be reduced to an inert and passive state, simply because it does not belong anywhere. Being the unknown and unwanted other, it is destined for loneliness, and perhaps, death, until Shaun finds and starts an interaction with it. Nobody else but Shaun shows any interest in the creature, which shows the indifference of humans to the world that surrounds them. After they play games, build sandcastles, and realize that they enjoy each other's company, Shaun decides to take the *Lost Thing* to its homeland, as he realizes that the creature is really lost and out of place. Shaun attempts to find the creature's owner (or the place it belongs to) but is not able to, because everybody else around is either too busy or too indifferent. He, then, asks for help and visits a friend, Pete, who "has knowledge about everything." Despite Pete's attempts to find out what this creature is, or where it comes from, by looking into books like "What Miscellaneous Abnormality Is This?" or conducting medical-chemical experiments on the creature, the only answer they can come up with is that "it doesn't belong anywhere, and it didn't come from anywhere." Thus, this no-origin posthuman creature totally challenges the concept of the world as they know it. Not knowing what to do, Shaun takes the creature home, where his parents respond negatively to his new friend, worrying that it might be filthy or it might carry diseases. They completely disregard the existence of this new life form. The predominant discourse in Shaun's world, as the film shows, centralizes the human figure by disregarding all the others that do not seem to fit in, and this is always through a form of marking or labeling the other as the abnormal, the unclean, and the diseased. There are also small details that support this, such as the headline of the newspaper that Shaun's mother is looking at, which reads: "Flamingo Recaptured." This headline, indeed, clearly indicates that humans are dominating the world of the nonhuman others, in a sense, culture always permeates nature. Humans are, in fact, marginalizing those that seem out of place by either ignoring them or by imprisoning them. As the headline indicates, the bird's obvious attempt to escape has proven unsuccessful. Actually, the headline implicitly gives an overtone of victory (of humans over the nonhuman other). Apparently, Shaun's *Lost Thing* would also share the destiny of the flamingo, but it is not captured; perhaps because it cannot be categorized under any known species to be displayed in a zoo. Thus, it is simply ignored, discarded, and unwanted. It is evident that, in this human-dominated world, the nonhuman animals are used for entertainment purposes only, and they stand as bodies that reflect humans' desire to take control over the world.

As for the hybrids, like the *Lost Thing*, they actually stand for a "rather complex symbiotic relationship [that] has emerged in [this] cyber universe" (Braidotti 113). However, although the nonhuman hybrids display such an affirmative natural/cultural emergence, for humans, this is perceived as no more than a fear factor, caused by "beliefs about the technological future 'life' of the body," which "are complemented by a palpable fear of death and annihilation from uncontrollable and spectacular body-threats" (Balsamo 1-2). From this perspective, it becomes even clearer that Shaun's parents, like many others in their society, feel threatened by the existence of such posthuman bodies, not realizing that they are also posthuman figures. Blasé to the posthuman conglomerations of bacteria and diverse multiplicities inherent in the human body, they disavow what they regard as the other. Hence, they intentionally segregate themselves from the rest of the living and the nonliving world, pushing themselves to the dangerous edges of a so-called modernity, which inevitably isolates them from their own natural habitats. Perhaps Shaun is the only person that has the potentiality to overcome such dichotomy. However, being raised in a human-dominated culture, he does not quite know what to do with the *Lost Thing*. Sitting uncomfortably, due to his conflictual state, with his parents and the *Lost Thing* in the living room, he then sees a television advertisement that says: "Do you have objects without a name? Do you have things that do not fit?" (*The Lost Thing*). On hearing this, Shaun gets excited as he believes that this advert might show him the way out, since the advertisement tells the audience not to worry at all. After all, they say that "The Federal Department of Odds and Ends" is there to take care of all the unknown and unlabeled "items," like Shaun's *Lost Thing*. Taking the train to the city, among all the unhappy citizens, Shaun takes the creature to the Department, which is located in a tall, grey building, which looks like a huge depot with metal lockers. As he tells his story to the audience, Shaun says that the building "smells like disinfectant" (*The Lost Thing*). In those scenes where the audience meets the commuters or in those that portray the federal department in its utmost greyness, the ontological divide between the human and nonhuman realms grows wider. With reception desks

incredibly higher to symbolise the extreme authority that the power-holders now exert on people, the human domain is under its own threat; that is, humans have created a world of segregation and loneliness, which imposes sameness and dullness on people, instead of celebrating diversity. Office equipment like rusty metal lockers also add to the modernist fear and alienation. The appearance and the smell of the building tell a lot about what is going on inside because these qualities are indicative of humans' life-threatening control over nature and their necropolitical activities of determining who is to live and who is to die. The act of cleansing the unfamiliar other with the use of disinfectants inevitably labels this other figure as the disease-carrier or the dirty body-threat. Thus, it is evident that humans are in an "ecophobic" state of mind, to borrow Simon C. Estok's concept (<<https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2182>>). They seem to believe that "the inhuman forces" might infiltrate their world, and when "moved into the body," they might have an "intensifying [effect on] the spectral reminders of the corpse-to-come" (Braidotti 113). They obviously see the entanglement of nature and culture as simply equivalent to "antibiotic-resistant viruses, random contamination, [and] flesh eating bacteria" (Balsamo 2). Therefore, these human figures continue to take measures in their own methods, simply by trying to isolate their world from that of nonhumans. Figuratively, therefore, this is the story of a conflict between nature and culture, as a long-held value in the history of humankind. In a posthumanist stance, it is a critique of how we have never been able to understand that human history resides in the history of nature.

This inability to understand the fact that human-nonhuman relations at all levels, be it in the form of nature-culture fusion, or in the form of human-robot blends, leads to a fatal consequence for every being in the world. This is allegorically given in the animation, too. The light bulbs that turn off automatically as the creature and Shaun walk along, for instance, allow metaphorical readings of the unknown path to darkness and foreshadow that a dark end awaits those creatures that are left there. This place, the Federal Building, as Shaun realizes, cannot be the homeland of the only colorful thing in Shaun's world. Shaun, then, reaching the reception desk, is presented with a huge pile of papers to fill in and sign, in order to submit the creature to the hands of the departmental authorities. At that moment, however, a relatively smaller creature, which is the mixture of a cassette player (that is located on its back) and a crocodile (with its tail that shows behind the coat it is wearing), seeming to be working there as part of the cleaning staff, approaches and says: "If you really care about that thing, you shouldn't leave it here. This is a place for forgetting -- leaving behind. Take this." This hybrid of cassette player and crocodile gives Shaun a card with an arrow sign that seems to have a curly tail, indicating that it leads the creature to its homeland. This wavy shape of the arrow is significant because unlike the monolithic and regular shapes that dominate the human realm, it connotes difference, diversity, and multiplicity. Taking the advice of this hybrid, naturalcultural being, Shaun and the Lost Thing follow the signs on the roads, which seem to be there all the time despite the fact that one needs to look for them to be able to see them. On their way to the homeland of the creature, even some clouds seem to take the shape of this strange arrow, which can be interpreted as a confirmatory mode of the naturalcultural emergence of the posthuman. That is, the homeland of the creature is not only a place of culture, technology, and production, but also a place of nature, diversity, and celebration. It is, therefore, a signal of a posthuman world. For once, the organic and the inorganic, the self and the other, the human and the nonhuman, including the hybrid monster, the air, and the culturally made -- like the roads -- come together to form a co-operating basis of life. On the way, Shaun and the creature also come across what can be called some cultural nodes of representation, like statues that stand for human communication: Two human beings (most probably male), dressed in suits, seem to be talking to each other, as one of them is holding a microphone in his hand, interview the other. But the heads of the statues are not ordinary human heads, as one is shaped like a television monitor, and the other is like a camera recorder, connected to one another through metal tubes. These two figures are significant as they successfully portray the virtuality of human communication, which is only possible through technological devices. Symbolically, the directors are hinting at the power relations within a male-dominated society, controlled by the mass media.

Clearly, the virtual reality that surrounds humans has now erased the embodied consciousness and the lived experience of the combination of nature and culture. Humans are deprived of their natural sides, their embodiments, and their materiality. They have turned into purely and simply cultural beings, whose lives are dominated merely by information. Still, Shaun, thanks to the existence of this creature, rediscovers his naturalcultural self, and embraces his otherness. At least for a brief period of time, he re-experiences what it means to be an embodied consciousness. Similarly, with the help of Shaun to find its way home, which appears to be filled with many different colorful and hybrid creatures that are the combination of machines and organisms, the creature becomes the posthuman ecology that defeats the discourse of otherness. It, in a sense, subverts the discourse of the underprivileged and the oppressed. Both Shaun and the creature, for a brief moment, are able to overcome what Cary Wolfe would call a "species-specific" discourse that strictly underlies the distinctions between the human and the nonhuman. For a short while, therefore, in *The Lost Thing*, the posthuman shows itself as becoming-machine and becoming-human, underlining the co-emergence of naturecultures. The multicolored world of the posthuman hybrids, unlike that of the segregated humans, is an embodiment of erased structuralisations and categorizations. As Braidotti writes, "the relationship between the human and the technological other has shifted in the contemporary context, to reach unprecedented degrees of intimacy and intrusion. The posthuman predicament is such as to force a displacement of the lines of demarcation between structural differences, or ontological categories, for instance between the organic and the inorganic, the born and the manufactured, flesh and metal, electronic circuits and organic nervous systems" (89).

As can be seen in Braidotti's approach, the intrusion of nature into culture does not necessarily hold negative connotations. It can be understood, in the posthumanist sense, that it is the never-

broken intimacy between the organic and the inorganic, the human and the robot, and the born and the made. Such intimacy, indeed, deconstructs power discourses in the sense that it breaks down the universalized figure of an autonomous human hero. In other words, it reframes the category of the human in a new sense so as to destabilize it as a so-called "origin and source of meaning, of action, and of history" (Belsey 7), underpinning that a genderless, multifaceted, multicolored world of the posthuman amalgams (of living and nonliving symbiosis) is possible without human domination. As such, the "naturalized" difference between "superior-masculine" and "inferior-feminine" becomes practically non-existent (Nayar 17). In such an enmeshment, where all previously constructed dichotomies get blurred into one another, the naturalcultural *robo sapiens* replaces the so-called mastery of the human, only to erode the very concept of mastery itself. Thus, "the myth of the sovereign and autonomous, coherent and unified self" of the human collapses and melts into the being of naturecultures.

It is possible to argue that there emerges a "need to cultivate a tangible sense of connection to the material world in order to encourage an environmentalist ethos" (Alaimo 16). Therefore, "envison[ing] individuals and groups as part of the planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (Heise, *Sense of Place* 61) is of utmost significance; in fact, these "imagined kinships" are not simply existent on a metaphorical form, but also on a literal level, as indicated by the concept of naturecultures. As Heise underlines, "what is crucial for ecological awareness and environmental ethics is ... not so much a sense of place as a sense of planet -- a sense of how political, economic, technological, social, cultural, and ecological networks shape daily routines" (*Sense of Place* 55). In this regard, both *Tarboy* and *The Lost Thing* present us with a chance of imagining these imagined and literal kinships of plastic and organic, mechanisms and biological bodies, and humans and machines by offering a fluidity of naturecultures.

Note: "The Ecological Posthuman in Lee's *Tarboy* and Tan and Ruhemann's *The Lost Thing*" is an excerpt from Ağın, Başak. *Posthuman Ecologies in Twenty-first Century Short Animations*. PhD Diss. Ankara: Hacettepe U, 2015. Copyright release to the author.

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