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Jori Snels

Abstract: The Material World Knight is an anime-style superhero from Lu Yang's artwork *The Great Adventure of Material World—Game Film* (2020) who battles oppressive binary systems on his quest for transcendence. This article uses discourse and visual analysis to study how this short film employs references to Buddhist philosophy and Japanese anime to reconceptualize subjectivity. The study draws on posthuman theory by Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway to show how the artwork produces a post-dualist, posthuman, relational concept of subjectivity while also complicating any straightforward interpretations in favor of maintaining complexity and "staying with the trouble."

Keywords: Buddhism, cyborg, death, gender, Lu Yang, posthumanism, subjectivity

"Confined by binary oppositions, one can only see a world made of one's own preconceptions about the world," warns Material World Knight. This anime-style superhero valiantly fights the oppressive binary systems that organize the Material World. The Material World Knight is the main figure in several artworks by Chinese digital artist Lu Yang (陆扬, b. 1984), most recently in *The Great Adventure of Material World—Game Film* (2020). In this artwork, the Material World Knight progresses through nine consecutive levels, reaching an ever-higher level of consciousness and ultimately breaking with any dualist notions of the self and the material world.

The artwork is based on Lu Yang's video game artwork *The Great Adventure of Material World—Game* (2019). In this article, however, I focus on the short film that Lu created based on the game, titled *The Great Adventure of Material World—Game Film* (henceforth referred to as *The Great Adventure*). This twenty-five-minute film is divided into nine so-called episodes that function like video game levels. At the end of each episode, the Knight has to go through a

portal to reach the next episode, where he meets new enemies who he has to defeat and non-playable characters who provide him with knowledge or help him acquire new weapons. Many of the characters he meets are either figures from previous works by Lu or avatar figures of Lu himself with a wide variety of bodies—both human and non-human. The film also includes cutscenes from the video game in which characters have conversations or hold monologues, as well as scenes based on fighting gameplay. The work thus maintains many of the visual, narrative, and structural tropes of the videogame but focuses more on the worlds he travels through, the conversations he has with other characters, and the insights he gains from those experiences about the nature of the self and the world.

In this article, I use visual and discourse analysis and a posthuman framework to study how *The Great Adventure* conceptualizes subjectivity. Several scholars have previously fruitfully employed posthuman theory to analyze artworks by Lu Yang. Gabriel Remy-Handfield (2020) and Sophie Xiaofei Guo (2020) have analyzed how Lu Yang's *UterusMan* (2013) rejects essentialist notions of sex and gender, and Gao Shiyu (2021) has studied subjectivity and embodiment in *Doku × The 1975 'Playing on My Mind'* (2020) and *Delusional World* (2020). I will draw on Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway to show how *The Great Adventure* rejects essentialist notions of the self and constructs a posthuman, post-dualist, relational concept of subjectivity while also complicating any straightforward interpretations in favor of maintaining complexity. I will first outline the plot of *The Great Adventure* and the Buddhist concepts on which it is based and will then analyze how the work reconceptualizes the notion of subjectivity through three key posthuman concepts: the cyborg, post-gender, and death.

Material World Knight as Traveling Toward Enlightenment

The Great Adventure consists of nine "levels"; two levels without title followed by six levels that are labeled "Episode 2–8." The Material World Knight starts off at what looks like a dystopian science lab displaying skeletons, fetuses, and organs in cases. He then travels through eight levels and corresponding spaces: (1) a busy city called the Material World;[1] (2) the Delusional World, which is a parallel world that defies all logic; (3) Heaven, a cheerful place full of cute anime characters; (4) Hell, which houses the Buddhist deities that embody the four elements, as well as many dead and tortured bodies; (5) a temple where the Knight is urged to find Vajra, a mystical Buddhist weapon; (6) an alternative version of the Material World filled with monsters; (7) outer space, where the Knight encounters giant floating consumer goods; and (8) an unidentifiable space in which there are two identical Knights and one has to defeat the other.[2]

Lu has explained that this narrative is structured along Buddhist ideas about reincarnation: "*The Great Adventure* was rooted in the concept of samsara, or

reincarnation through the six realms" (Wang Xin and Lu Yang 2020). In particular, two key texts from the school of Mahayana Buddhism have influenced Lu Yang's work: the heart sutra and diamond sutra (Pollack et al. 2021). These sutras explain that *samsara* is the endless cycle of reincarnation that humans go through, which involves an infinite suffering caused by people's desires and the inevitability of their mortality. The first few scenes of the film, in which the Knight travels from the Material World to the Delusional World, Heaven, Hell, and then back to the alternative Material World, seem to loosely follow this cycle of rebirth.

To end this cycle of reincarnation and achieve transcendence, the heart and diamond sutras state, a person needs to realize that objects and subjects have no essence but are dependent on each other for their existence, and that therefore there is also no essential self, and our belief in such material essences is an illusion (Brittanica 2014, 2016; Kloppenborg 2013; Nagel 2013: 31–32, 34; Silk 2017). The Knight seems to fully grasp this post-dualist insight when he flies into space, a movement that could be interpreted as a metaphorical ascension toward transcendence. When he defeats his self in the final scene, he has achieved enlightenment. According to Francesca Ferrando (2016: 248), it is this post-dualism that connects Mahayana Buddhism to posthumanism. In the next section, I will start my posthuman analysis of how post-dualism is expressed in *The Great Adventure* through these Buddhist concepts.

Material World Knight as Technological Cyborg

Posthumanism is a strand of philosophy that is rooted in a combination of post-humanism (i.e., a move against the humanist belief in the (cis-male, heterosexual, white) "man" as the universal ideal) and post-anthropocentrism (i.e., a move beyond any hierarchies of humans and other beings), which often involves a clear post-dualism (i.e., humans are not defined by a binary structure of difference) (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018: 1; Ferrando 2020: 2). Following this, the posthuman subject is generally considered to be: (1) perpetually in a state of becoming; and (2) always in relation to its environments (Braidotti 2013; Haraway 2016). The posthuman subject is thus not only always fluid but also formed through their entanglement with other beings, or in Karen Barad's (2003: 822) words, through "intra-active becoming." Barad coined this term to show that there is no binary between active subjects and passive objects but that instead all entities (human and non-human) are produced through their constant relating, their "intra-action" (Barad et al. 2012: 55).

A trope that is essential both to *The Great Adventure* and to posthuman philosophy is the cyborg, defined by Donna Haraway (1991: 149, 163) as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" and "a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self." The Material World Knight is a clear

example of the representation of the cyborg we often encounter in popular culture. He has a body and/or a suit that are made of artificial materials and technology, the aesthetics of which resemble those of the archetypical cyborgs from famous Japanese anime shows from the 1990s like *Shinseiki Evangerion* (Neon Genesis Evangelion, 1995–1996) and *Gunnm* (Battle Angel, 1993). These technologies provide him with superhuman powers like the ability to fly. The Knight is therefore a cyborg according to Katherine Hayles' (1999: 2) famous definition: "Central to the construction of the cyborg are informational pathways connecting the organic body to its prosthetic extensions." Indeed, because of the apparently seamless connection with technology, the Knight can expand the abilities of his body.

It is relevant to note here that although Hayles speaks of an "organic body," it is not made explicit in the film whether the Knight's body is organic or inorganic. In fact, whether the Knight's body is (partly) organic or fully synthetic does not determine whether he is a posthuman cyborg. As Rosi Braidotti (2013: 89) has explained, what makes humans cyborgs is their interrelation with technology and the way human and technology affect and codetermine each other. Like Hayles, she argues that there are no ontological separations between humans and machines, and she describes the cyborg as embodying the "posthuman notion of the enfleshed and extended, relational self" which involves a "bond of mutual dependence between bodies and technological others" (Braidotti 2003: 90–91). She furthermore understands the technological cyborg through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the "becoming-machine" because the cyborg has the power to produce nonhierarchical relations with other entities, including those that are not organic: "The 'becoming-machine'…indicates and actualizes the relational powers of a subject that is no longer cast in a dualistic frame, but bears a privileged bond with multiple others and merges with one's technologically mediated planetary environment" (Braidotti 2013: 92).

The relation between human and machine is thus understood as post-dualist and intra-active. We can also see this in the Material World Knight's use of a mecha. The term "mecha" was coined in Japan for a certain type of robot popular in anime series. These giant robots usually have a humanoid form or can transform into a humanoid form, are piloted by a human from within the robot's cockpit and are often used primarily for combat (Gatti 2021: 64–65). In *The Great Adventure*, the Material World Knight acquires his mecha when he returns to the alternative Material World and then uses it to fly into space to "fight in a higher dimension."

The Knight's mecha, which is called "material world mobile suit," can transform between the shape of a spaceship and a humanoid form. This common mecha series trope of robots being able to shapeshift already highlights that the mecha itself does not fit within any clear category of machine or human. This is expressed further through the relation between the robot and the pilot. First

of all, the material world mobile suit is connected through "informational path-ways" to the Knight and expands what his body can do. With his mecha, the Knight can fly into space, fight objects much larger than himself, and through the use of a heads-up display[3] in the cockpit he can also acquire additional data about his environment. Moreover, when the robot adopts its humanoid form, it also expands relationally with the Knight, as the Knight then uses the robot's arms as his own arms to punch and the robot's legs as his own legs to walk. Following Donna Haraway (2016: 12), we could argue that this is no longer just a human piloting a machine but a "becoming-with" of both entities. The embodiment and subjectivity of the Knight and the mobile suit is established through their intra-action.

What this "becoming-with" entails becomes clear when we compare the symbiotic relation between the Knight and the mecha to the aforementioned anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. This mecha anime, which was an import-ant inspiration for Lu Yang's artwork *The Beast—Tributes to NEON GENESIS EVANGELION* (2012), is set in a postapocalyptic future where humans have to fight aliens using their mechas. In a posthuman analysis of the relation be-tween the anime's main character Shinji and his mecha Eva Unit 01, Giuseppi Gatti (2021: 67, 69–70, 75–76) argues that Shinji does not pilot their robot but inhabits it. When Shinji inhabits the Eva, they establish a neural connection that not only allows Shinji to control the mecha's body but also causes him to feel pain when the mecha gets hit. In extreme moments, the robot can even take over Shinji's consciousness. Gatti therefore concludes that the relation between Shinji and Eva Unit 01 should be characterized as what Donna Haraway has called "sympoietic."

Sympoiesis is a term that originated in biology, but Haraway (2016: 1–2, 33) adopted it to argue that systems as well as beings cannot produce themselves but that instead they produce their self through their connections with others, through being-with. She asserts that sympoiesis is characteristic of the "Chthulu-cene," a concept that she proposes as an alternative for the "Anthropocene," and which she defines as "a kind of timeplace for learning to stay with the trouble of living and dying in response-ability on a damaged earth" (Haraway 2016: 2). Can we understand the relation between the Knight and his mobile suit as sympoietic? *The Great Adventure* is not clear about whether it is sympoietic to the same degree as that of Shinji and his mecha. We can, however, conclude that there is such a relationship between them in terms of embodiment: the robot can move because of the Knight and the Knight can expand the power and abilities of his movements because of the robot.

I would furthermore propose that it is the environment that the Knight tra-verses before he reaches enlightenment, those worlds that he wishes to leave behind, that can be characterized as sympoietic and chthonic. We see this, for instance, in the avatars of Lu Yang that show up in almost all of the film's levels,

each time with a replica of Lu Yang's own head but with bodies that range from those of naked humans of various ages and sizes, to those of a snake, a variety of monsters, and so forth.[4] As Gao Shiyu (2021: 278) has argued about similar avatars in Lu Yang's performance piece *Delusional World* (2020), these "fragmentary representations of Lu Yang's body" deconstruct dualist categories of the body and the human. Moreover, these avatars seem to produce an ever-growing web of connection, in which the Lu Yang avatars are "chthonic ones"—those "beings of the earth" that can take any shape or form but are always connected with others in a mutual becoming, a being-with (Haraway 2016: 2, 31–33).

Material World Knight as Post-Gender Cyborg

Returning again to the idea of the Material World Knight as a posthuman cyborg, I will now focus on how this concept can provide us with a better understanding of how gender is conceptualized in *The Great Adventure*. For this, I turn to Haraway's seminal text *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985). Haraway (1991: 150) coins the term cyborg in this text to break down the binaries that devalue women (in relation to men) and animals and machines (in relation to humans): "The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world." This world "might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (Ibid.: 154). The cyborg is thus an agent who does not fit any clear, valuated binaries like human/non-human and male/female, and rather lives within the ambiguity that this post-dualism brings.

Haraway (1991: 180) expresses this necessary ambiguity by stating that the cyborg neither adheres to a single identity, nor necessarily to only two: "One is too few, and two is only one possibility." Here, she aligns with Jack Halberstam and Judith Livingston's (1995: 8) argument about the queer posthuman body as being plural bodies. They argue that we should "insist on the 'someness' of every assemblage" rather than trying to fit every individual into a monist or dualist category. Similarly, in an interview with Wang Xin, Lu Yang explains that he regards all the worlds that he creates as "open-ended, non-binary, and multidimensional" (Wang Xin and Lu Yang 2020). He has also criticized how authors writing about him have often pigeonholed and emphasized his gender and gender expression and how the art world especially wants him to represent and perform a clear gender identity (Guo 2020; Wang Xin 2021). One of the ways in which he has expressed his resistance to this is by stating a desire to live without gendered labels and possibly even without being conscious of the body that he is in (Gaskin 2022; Wang 2021). We can see this friction between a desire to move beyond any notions of gender and sex and an understanding of gender as characterized by ambiguity and "someness" in how gender is portrayed in *The Great Adventure*.

Although the Material World Knight is portrayed as male in the film, he starts challenging the idea of sex and gender fitting within a neat binary right from the opening scene. This scene is set in a lab, where human skeletons and body parts are displayed in glass cases. Looking at a skeleton, the Knight questions identifications of gender—"Do these bones belong to a man or a woman? Is this skeleton male or female?"—and highlights how people evaluate others according to subjective, often binary criteria: "color; size; age; fatness or thinness; beauty or ugliness; gender." Subsequently, while looking at individual human bones, he questions how to define "human"—"These bones display human characteristics but can we call each piece a human being?"—and concludes that the ontology of the subject and the way we categorize its attributes lies within the subjective view of the other. In other words, he expresses a realization that the posthuman subject is relational and an assemblage. Gender identities are produced through intra-action with others but do not have to adhere to any dualities. In fact, the Knight will learn on his quest for enlightenment that it is important to transcend such binary thinking.

Does that mean that the Knight lives in what Haraway calls a "post-gender world"? Haraway has stated that "we're in a post-gender world in some ways, and in others we're in a ferociously gender-in-place world" (Gane and Haraway 2006: 137). What she means by this, is that we cannot ignore that the gender binary still structures our world, but that the cyborg subject does not have to identify themselves within that binary. To analyze whether the Knight's world is post-gender, we might look to an anime character that Lu Yang referred to in relation to his own desire to move beyond gender and embodiment. The character Izana Shinatose from the postapocalyptic mecha anime series *Shidonia no Kishi* (Knights of Sidonia, 2014–2015) can, according to Lu's (qtd. in Wang 2021) interpretation, "change gender depending on their mood." Roger Andre Søraa (2019: 57, 60), on the contrary, writes in his article about the representation of gender in Knights of Sidonia that the mecha pilot Izana is initially introduced as being "hermaphrodite third gender" but that they transition to female gender and sex after finding a male romantic partner.

Knights of Sidonia's portrayal of hermaphrodite, third gender people automatically transitioning to the opposite sex and gender of their romantic partner of course reinforces heterosexual cisgender norms and is in fact the opposite of what Haraway had in mind when she stated that the cyborg is a figure of the post-gender world (Søraa 2019: 66–67). It also seems to be the opposite of what Lu Yang had in mind when expressing a longing for the ability to change gender at will. However, this contrast does make it particularly clear that what the Material World Knight learns about gender is that it is an assemblage characterized by what Halberstam and Livingston called "someness." Søraa (2019: 61) describes Izana's gender as relational because their gender transforms from non-binary third gender to female to fit a binary, heteronormative standard. In

other words, it is relational because in Izana's world a romantic relationship is only possible between a man and a woman and so their gender is defined by the gender of their partner. Their partner's gender, in contrast, is not relational, as he already fitted the gender binary. What the Knight realizes is quite the opposite: everyone's gender is relational and produced through intra-action and that the gender binary only exists because it is constantly reproduced. The Knight thus becomes a posthuman cyborg, who understands gender as an assemblage, developed through intra-action, and characterized by someness.

Material World Knight as Already Dead

Many of the works in Lu Yang's oeuvre deal with themes of death, dying, and disease, often in combination with references to science and religion. Lu (qtd. in Tripp 2016) has previously stated: "My work reminds us of our transient and fragile existence." This focus on the transiency of life is also central in *The Great Adventure*. Already in the opening scene, the Knight is confronted with human skeletons, bones, and organs. Moreover, in the Delusional World he realizes, firstly, that countless people have lived before him and have passed away, and secondly, that life seems infinite because you do not know when it will end. "The indefiniteness of death gives us the illusion that we will live forever," one of Lu Yang's avatars explains to the Knight. At the same time, our awareness of the inevitability of death causes constant suffering. To end the cycle of reincarnation and the suffering that comes with it, the Knight will have to accept the transiency of life and, as an invisible character tells him in the last scene, "eradicate…the attachment to the self, the false belief in the existence of the material world."

Braidotti (2013: 131) makes a very similar statement about the difficulty of accepting our finitude: "Death is the…unrepresentable, the unthinkable, and the unproductive black hole that we all fear." Braidotti's ideas about death are based on two key beliefs. Firstly, like many posthuman scholars, she does not subscribe to the idea that there is a dichotomy between life and death (Ferrando 2019: 107–108; Zaag 2016: 334). Instead, she conceptualizes life as a cosmic, continuous force that is impersonal and inhuman, and is not ended by death but rather encompasses it. Secondly, following Gilles Deleuze, she makes the distinction between personal death, which is the end of the "individualized ego," and impersonal death, which is the death that produces our becoming and connects us to all other beings (Braidotti 2013: 131). This impersonal death is the finitude that is inherent to human life, defines our temporality, and constitutes our becoming: "Death as a constitutive event is behind us; it has already taken place as a virtual potential that constructs everything we are. The full blast of the awareness of the transitory nature of all that lives is the defining moment in our existence. It structures our becoming-subjects, our capacity and powers of relation and the process of acquiring ethical awareness" (Ibid.: 132).

She does not mean this in the Heideggerian sense that human conscious-ness is defined by the awareness that we are moving toward death (Braidotti 2013: 132–133). Rather, she means that "we carry death inside us as a conscious retrospection" (Zaag 2016: 334). For the Material World Knight, death is not only behind him on the level of consciousness but also literally, since he is going through cycles of rebirth, which means he has already died before. When he is still within that cycle, death structures the plot of the film but also determines his own temporality and influences his sense of self.

For Braidotti (2013: 135), death is impersonal because, like life, it does not reside within the individual. We do not own life, we only momentarily inhabit its flow, which will continue after our bodies are no longer here, and neither do we own death. Death, then, is for Braidotti (Ibid.: 136–137) the "becoming-imperceptible of the posthuman subject." It is the moment in which one releases one's sense of the individual self and becomes part of the "generative flow of becoming" in which all beings are connected. Through this impersonal death, the posthuman produces a self that is "not-One," nor "an anonymous multi-plicity." We could also use Halberstam and Livingston's terms and say that this posthuman self is an assemblage characterized by someness.

We can then understand the infinite cycle of life, death, and rebirth as it is portrayed in *The Great Adventure* as what Braidotti (2013: 135–136) calls the "life-death continuum" and the "generative flow of becoming." The latter is ex-pressed in the many ways in which the Knight's self is shown to be relational, as I have previously explained through the notion of the cyborg. However, how should we then read the Knight's eventual enlightenment? Is this the ultimate realization of the posthuman? As I mentioned earlier, the belief of Mahayana Buddhism that enlightenment relies on is the realization that there are no duali-ties and that the self and other are all without essence can be characterized as posthuman because of its post-dualism (Ferrando 2016: 247–248). Therefore, we can understand enlightenment not only as a person's transcendence from the cycle of life and death but also as a posthuman, impersonal death in itself. The realization that the self is without essence—necessary to reach enlighten-ment—is here understood, following Braidotti, as the death of the subject and the disappearance of the individual self.

However, there is also a fundamental difference between a reading of the Knight's quest though Mahayana Buddhist philosophy and Braidotti's vitalist materialist strand of posthumanism. Since Lu Yang has based his journey on the former philosophy, the Knight concludes that because beings are without essence, the material world is an illusion. Read this way, we can assume that he is already in the process of leaving behind the material world when he ends the cycle of rebirth and transcends to space and that he finalizes that process when he has destroyed the self in the final scene. This would mean that, rather than remaining a posthuman cyborg whose self is produced intra-actively

through becoming-with others, and instead of trying to "stay with the trouble" of the material world, he leaves that world and its beings behind. This idea of transcendence does not fit Braidotti's theory. For Braidotti (2013: 135–136), death is the opposite of transcendence: radical immanence. Her theory relies on the fundamental premise that subjects exist only as a result of their intra-action and does not fit with the idea that one could transcend beyond a material world. It is also this relationality, Braidotti contends, that makes the posthuman subject an accountable one (Ibid.: 49).

Thus, we can conclude that the Knight's enlightenment can be read both as no longer being posthuman and as becoming fully posthuman. The latter reading, however, is at odds with Braidotti's posthuman theory of radical immanence. I contend that these contradictions in *The Great Adventure* are actually very valuable because they foreground that the posthuman subject is inherently ambiguous and that living with that complexity is important.

Conclusion

As I have shown, *The Great Adventure of Material World—Game Film* produces a vision on subjectivity that is posthuman and post-dualist in its embodiment and relation to technology, its understanding of sex and gender, and its portrayal of death. The Material World Knight is a technological cyborg, as his relationship with his body suit and mecha robot is that of a continuous process of relational becoming. He is also a post-gender cyborg in the sense that he understands sex and gender as an intra-actively produced, post-dualist assemblage. Death in *The Great Adventure* is portrayed as both generating the Knight's posthuman becoming during the cycle of reincarnation and the moment that he fully becomes posthuman when he reaches enlightenment.

By reading this artwork through a posthuman lens and in relation to the Buddhist ideas in which it is rooted and the anime series that it references, it becomes clear that the work simultaneously presents a posthuman form of subjectivity, while also complicating a posthuman reading. Questions like whether the Knight has an organic body, to what degree the relationship between the Knight and the mecha robot is sympoietic, how much agency the Knight has in adapting his gender, and whether the Knight is fully posthuman or no longer posthuman when he reaches enlightenment, are not given clear-cut answers. By maintaining this complexity, the work emphasizes the value of "not [being] afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" and the necessity of "staying with the trouble" (Haraway 1985: 154; 2016: 3).

I believe my analysis of this artwork makes clear the value of analyzing concepts from Buddhist philosophies, as they are presented in Lu Yang's oeuvre and elsewhere, through a posthuman framework. Further research should be done, however, on where Buddhist and posthuman theories coincide and where they contradict, for instance, with regards to the concept of transcendence,

both theoretically and as it is represented in works like *The Great Adventure*. This would also create opportunities for imbuing posthumanism with elements from Buddhism and for expanding a Buddhist-posthuman framework that can be applied to analyze the many other works by Lu Yang that include references to Buddhism as well as to other posthuman artworks in general.

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Notes

[1] The term "Material World" is used in the artwork as the English translation of 器世界, which comes from the Sanskrit *bhājanaloka*, of which the literal translation is not "material world" but "container world." This Buddhist concept refers to the inanimate world, which functions as a container for all living beings (Buswell Jr. and Lopez Jr. 2014). In the Chinese version, the characters 世界 mean "world." Nowadays, 器 usually refers to "implement" or "utensil," but its original meaning was "vessel," just like in the Sanskrit term (Sears 2020). Gary Zhexi Zhang (2019) argues that 器 could also be understood to mean "technics." Therefore, he relates the concept 器世界 to Lu's own interest in how technologies can affect people's consciousness. Wang Xin (2019, 19) has furthermore pointed out that because of its multiple meanings, the character 器 combines in *The Great Adventure* "the Buddhist notion of the phenomenal world and transhumanist speculation."

[2] Wang Xin (2021: 104) has pointed out that having to kill an other, identical self, echoes the plot of the famous Chinese sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West* by Wu Cheng'en (吴承恩, c. 1500–c. 1580) "in which the invincible Monkey King struggled to beat his doppelgänger, and ultimately his own ego/inner demon."

[3] A heads-up display (HUD) is a transparent display projected in front of the face of a pilot to enable them to view any relevant data without moving the head, so that they do not lose vision of their surroundings. It is often used in high-tech (military) vehicles and a common trope in science fiction movies and series.

[4] Lu Yang often uses virtual avatars in his work to experiment with being a post-dualist cyborg. In both his *LuYang Delusional Mandala* series (2015–2016) and his *DOKU* series (2020–ongoing) Lu has created avatars of himself that play with notions of gender and the body. See Jihoon Kim (2019) for a discussion of how Lu's production of an avatar using 3D scanning technology enables him to create a posthuman subjectivity that breaks the boundaries between the real and the virtual.

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