

# The Disease Called “Human”: *King Kong* (1933), the Sinthome, and the Inescapable Anthropomorphization in Monster Cinema

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the figure of the monster—not merely as a metaphor for social anxieties or cultural projections, but as a cinematic sinthome: a structural knot that binds together the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary. Focusing on *King Kong* (1933) and the *Planet of the Apes* reboot series, this study examines how cinematic apes function as sites of rupture where the human confronts its own limits. Drawing from Lacan’s late theory of the sinthome and Hiroshi Fujita’s notion of the “third term,” the paper contends that Kong is not simply a racialized or eroticized Other, but a sinthomatic figure that stages the impossibility of representing the inhuman Real. Skull Island emerges not as an exotic locale but as the Real’s terrain—a cinematic “navel” where the structure of meaning opens onto its own failure. Tracing the visual and narrative strategies that humanize Kong, the paper reveals how this gesture functions not as empathy but containment, transforming the monstrous into the tragically knowable. This paradox is extended in the *Planet of the Apes* films, where the Simian Flu acts as a viral sinthome: a material contagion that collapses the distinction between the human and its Other. Here, the virus that grants apes language and intelligence also annihilates the human, enacting a metaphysical inversion that reveals “the symptom called human.” Ultimately, this paper argues that monster films like *King Kong* and *Planet of the Apes* do not merely reflect humanity’s unconscious; they expose it. In staging the impossibility of visualizing the Real, they become sinthomatic texts—cinematic knots through which we glimpse, however briefly, the beyond we cannot name. The monster is not the Other, but the trace of an unrepresentable Real—an image that insists, resists, and never stops being written.

**Keywords:** Monster Cinema, Interopticality, Psychoanalysis, the Real, the sinthome

## Section I. *King Kong* (1933) as a Monster Film: The Real and Its Cinematic Interface

When Eiji Tsuburaya, the renowned special effects director behind *Godzilla* (1954), set out to create Japan’s foundational monster film, he did so with a powerful memory in mind—his youthful encounter with *King Kong* (1933), a cinematic experience so intense that it reportedly kept him awake for three nights. As he later recalled, “When I saw this film long ago, I was so shocked and excited that I couldn’t

sleep for three days” (“Eiji Tsuburaya: The God of Tokusatsu”). Tsuburaya’s aspiration was not merely to imitate the technical marvel of *King Kong*, but to create a Japanese monster film that echoed its capacity to engage with something larger than narrative or nation—a film that would gesture toward the limits of human experience.

In a now famous observation, film critic and scholar Tomohiro Haraguchi points out the striking visual correspondences between *King Kong* and *Godzilla*, particularly the scene in which the monster attacks a train—an unmistakable homage. As Haraguchi notes, “King Kong attacks an elevated train in New York,” and in a mirrored scene, “Godzilla destroys the Tokaido Main Line in Shinagawa,” with an identical sequence from the train driver’s point of view (Haraguchi 42). Such moments establish *King Kong* not merely as a progenitor of the monster genre but as a foundational “optical code” in what we might call a nonlinear visual history—a history governed not by strict chronology but by intervisual reverberation, a phenomenon that the writer of this paper has theorized as “interopticality”.

To consider *King Kong* a monster film is not merely a matter of genre classification; it is to consider the film as an attempt to visually engage with what Lacan would call the Real—the domain of experience that resists symbolization, that which lies beyond the Imaginary and Symbolic orders. The monster, in this sense, is not a metaphor but a screen through which the impossible can flicker into perception. It is not just Kong who appears on screen, but an entire epistemological crisis: What is this thing that cannot be fully known, that resists language, and yet insists on being seen?

This question finds echoes in the narrative logic of *King Kong*. The film charts a voyage from the known (New York) to the unknown (Skull Island), from civilization to a primal space of unarticulated forces. In this respect, Skull Island becomes a cinematic space that embodies Hiroshi Fujita’s notion of “the third term”—a site that is neither fully assimilable into symbolic discourse nor purely imaginary. For Fujita, the third term refers to an excess within structure, a place of unresolvable tension that both enables and destabilizes meaning (Fujita 44). In Lacanian terms, this excess is the Real, and its representative within the Symbolic structure is *the sinthome*—a unique, untranslatable knot that binds the subject together.

Kong, then, is not simply a monster; he is a sinthome. He is the visual knot that ties together the registers of Symbolic (language, civilization), Imaginary (image, desire), and Real (trauma, death, excess). He is the being whose impossible presence reveals the fault lines of the Symbolic order. That he is ultimately destroyed is not a narrative accident, but a structural necessity. The Real, when glimpsed too directly, must be expelled. As Thomas Wartenberg notes, Kong’s transformation from savage to romantic “hero” necessitates his death as “the sacrifice necessary to protect the life of his beloved” (Ch. 8).

This duality of Kong is also evident in Yoshiki Takahashi’s observation that the monster “was never imagined as merely a giant ape” but rather as a “hybrid of human and ape,” an image whose “monster-

like” appearance deliberately preserves a disturbing ambiguity between species (Takahashi 7–8). Indeed, “Kong’s ‘humanity’ was not entirely erased,” Takahashi continues, and “the fact that we can see the human in Kong is significant” (8–9). This hybrid body—simultaneously familiar and alien—is precisely what psychoanalytic theory identifies as an embodiment of the Real.

Kong’s domain, Skull Island, emerges as a space where gods roam—a primordial scene that stages not just mythic otherness but the Real itself. As Takahashi puts it, “Skull Island is the realm of gods... and Kong rises as the mightiest among them” (10). In this space of gods and monsters, Kong appears not only as a creature of myth but also as a structural excess—an impossible figure that cannot be fully domesticated by the symbolic.

This drive toward the Real is mirrored in the film’s production history. Brian Eggert emphasizes that Merian C. Cooper’s vision was not rooted in sentimentalism but in the desire for “escapism”—a journey into “unknown lands” inspired by his fascination with Paul du Chaillu’s tales of gorilla hunting in Equatorial Africa (Eggert). The goal, Eggert explains, was to bring back footage from the edge of the world—an attempt to confront “something never before seen,” and in doing so, “smash the illusion of escapism and confront the audience head-on.” The monster film, in this regard, becomes a mode of visual rupture— a staging of the unrepresentable.

Thus, *King Kong* is a monster film not because it features a monstrous creature, but because it is a cinematic encounter with the Real. It is a film that stages the impossible and binds it into the visual tissue of the possible. And in doing so, it inaugurates not just a genre, but what the author of this paper calls a psychoanalytic optics— a way of seeing the unseen, of glimpsing the beyond from within the frame.

In the next section, I will survey prior interpretations of *King Kong*, focusing on race, gender, and economics. But the groundwork laid here reminds us that such interpretations, however illuminating, always risk reducing the monster to metaphor. What if Kong is not a metaphor but a rupture? What if the monster is not a stand-in for the human, but a challenge to it?

## **Section II. Precedent Studies of *King Kong*: Race, Gender, and Economic Allegories**

Over the decades, *King Kong* has inspired a dense network of interpretive discourses. Noël Carroll calls the film “one of the miracles of cinema,” noting its astonishing multivalence: “Kong as Christ, Kong as Black, Kong as commodity, Kong as rapist, Kong as enraptured by *l’amour fou*, Kong as Third World, Kong as dream, Kong as myth, Kong according to Freud, according to Jung, and even according to Lacan” (Carroll 213). These varied readings do not signal thematic confusion but rather reveal Kong’s position as a site of symbolic excess, a figure in which meaning itself becomes unstable.

Among the most influential strands of interpretation are those addressing race and gender. As Tomonori

Nishiyama argues, Kong's stop-motion puppet was created as a racialized hybrid—"a Black body inhabited by whiteness," an uncanny echo of the minstrel show tradition where white performers in blackface mimicked and exaggerated Black features through apish gestures (Nishiyama 171). He further notes that Kong, as well as Ann Darrow, are presented as bound bodies—"spectacle-bound slave" (173)—subject to the gaze and spectacle of a symbolic order organized around race and gender hierarchies.

This racial reading is deepened in Thomas Wartenberg's psychoanalytic critique, which insists that *King Kong* subverts the Hollywood stereotype of the hypersexual Black male. Wartenberg writes, "*King Kong* demonstrates the problems with Hollywood's attribution of a monstrous sexuality to Blacks by presenting Kong as a chivalrous hero, capable of love rather than mere lust" (Ch. 8). In this context, Kong's desire is transgressive not simply because he desires a white woman, but because it traverses the species boundary: "Kong's sexual desire is for human beings, thereby transgressing the natural boundary between the species" (Ch. 8).

The critique of gender also operates in parallel. As Nishiyama describes, Ann is not only racialized in her vulnerability but also constrained by her role as "a slave exhibited as cinematic spectacle, reduced to an object of the voyeuristic gaze" (173). In this sense, Kong's rampage through New York—provoked by flashbulbs and stage lights—can be read as a violent disruption of the spectacle, an attempt to destroy the apparatus that turns both Ann and himself into objects of commodified vision.

Carroll, in his own economic reading, observes that the film's jungle imagery functions as a coded allegory of the capitalist market during the Great Depression. The Darwinian struggle—"monsters struggling tooth-and-claw for survival"—is aligned with economic competition (Carroll 220). As he notes, "the Darwinian jungle was a readily accepted figure for the market in the culture in which *Kong* was made" (221), rendering Kong simultaneously as a product of nature and a symbol of economic anxiety. The monster, in this reading, is both a commodity and crisis.

Yet these frameworks, while politically vital, risk reinscribing Kong within the human-centered symbolic. To understand Kong merely as a metaphor for race, gender, or capital is to miss his radical function as a figure of the Real. Indeed, Carroll hints at this in noting Kong's emergence from "fog" and "grey-miasmatic connotations of obscurity, primordialness, fantasy, dreamlikeness, and ghostly presence" (224). Kong marks a threshold, the "image of death" that haunts the symbolic order (224).

In Lacanian terms, Kong can be situated not merely as a signifier, but as a sinthome. That is, not a representation of repressed content, but a "visual knot" that binds and stabilizes the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real orders. Kong is not the Other; he is the "third term," the rupture within structure that enables meaning and at the same time threatens its dissolution. Fujita's reading of "dynamic structure" aligns with this view. He explains that this structure "has a kind of 'hole' that connects it to the dimension of

continuity” and that this hole is the “navel” of the structure, “a passage to the outside” (Fujita 55). In this sense, Kong is that navel—the sinthome that tethers the filmic world to its unrepresentable exterior.

Takahashi, too, emphasizes Kong’s irreducible excess. He notes that although director Merian C. Cooper disliked Edgar Wallace’s “more humanized Kong,” he still insisted that Kong exhibit both simian and human traits—a monstrous hybrid (Takahashi 7-8). Despite attempts to strip Kong of overt “humanity,” his “hybrid” nature remained, which Takahashi meant by his remark that “it is crucial that traces of the human can be seen in Kong” (9).

This tension, between the monster as Other and the monster as (almost) human, structures the entire narrative. The monster’s capacity to evoke empathy is also its domestication. As Wartenberg argues, “Kong accepts his death as the sacrifice necessary to protect the life of his beloved” (Ch. 8). His humanization, then, is not salvation but doom. To be rendered knowable within the Symbolic is to be sentenced to death by it.

This is why Kong remains a sinthome: he is not a metaphor to be decoded, but an eruption that exposes the insufficiency of our codes. He is simultaneously the Real in its visual form—not a figure to be interpreted, but a presence that insists.

In the next section, we will examine this contradiction further, focusing on the mechanics of Kong’s humanization as a narrative gesture that reveals the impossibility of representing the beyond—and thus the impossibility of cinema fully capturing the sinthome of the human.

### **Section III. The Humanization of Kong: From the Real to the Symbolic**

Kong’s ontological status within the narrative of *King Kong* is initially grounded in his alterity. As Carl Denham famously describes, he is “neither beast nor man, something monstrous, still living, still holding that island in the grip of fear” (qtd. Wartenberg, Ch. 8). Yet over the course of the film, this monstrous exterior is gradually peeled away and replaced with anthropomorphic traits, culminating in Kong’s sacrificial death atop the Empire State Building. This process—Kong’s humanization—functions not only as a narrative device but also as a symbolic operation, transposing the unrepresentable Real into the assimilable Symbolic.

Wartenberg details this transformation through the lens of psychoanalysis, noting that Kong’s desire “transgresses the natural boundary between the species” (Ch. 8). This boundary-crossing desire inscribes Kong within the space of abjection, making him both horrifying and erotically compelling. As previously noted, Wartenberg writes: “King Kong demonstrates the problems with Hollywood’s attribution of a monstrous sexuality to Blacks by presenting Kong as a chivalrous hero, capable of love rather than mere lust” (Ch. 8). This romantic framing is most pronounced during the Manhattan sequence, where “Kong accepts his death as the sacrifice necessary to protect the life of his beloved” (Ch. 8). He becomes

“socialized” through love—a moralized and anthropomorphized figure.

However, this very act of humanization functions as containment. By giving Kong emotions, motives, and even moral agency, the film renders him legible. It sutures the rift he once opened in the symbolic fabric. In Lacanian terms, the Real—that which resists symbolization absolutely—is here domesticated through cinematic empathy and narrative structure. The monster, in becoming human, ceases to be monstrous.

This paradox is where the *sinthome* becomes theoretically indispensable. As Lacan’s late concept, the *sinthome* is the stabilizing knot that binds the Real, Symbolic, and Imaginary, allowing the subject to endure what otherwise would be unbearable. Kong’s function, then, is not simply to be a stand-in for the racialized Other or for desire, but to be a *sinthome*: a visual and psychic knot around which fear, fascination, eroticism, and myth are braided. Jacques-Alain Miller writes, “the symptom isn’t exactly knowledge in the real because it implies an element of belief,” and yet “it could be that the symptom... is for the analyst knowledge in the real” (Miller, “The Symptom, Knowledge, Meaning and the Real.”). It is not knowledge in the scientific sense, but a kind of structuring force that allows symbolic coherence in the face of the unrepresentable.

Takahashi’s reading of Skull Island as “the realm of gods” adds another layer to this discussion. Kong, as “the strongest god” among monsters (Takahashi 10), exists not merely as an evolutionary anomaly but as divine excess. In this light, his destruction is akin to sacrilege—what Stuart Schneiderman, reading Lacan, would call a moment when we confront the Real: “The gods are real, and so are the dead—not because death creates a void in the real, but because our only access to the real is through the disappearance of our conscious sense of being alive” (Schneiderman 109).

But this godlike status is not sustained. Instead, as Takahashi notes, Kong was intentionally sculpted to appear simultaneously human and ape—a hybrid figure whose anthropomorphization was refined and rejected, only to reemerge in subtler ways: “The final design... was ‘monstrous, yet vaguely anthropomorphic,’ preserving the hybrid character” (Takahashi 7–8). His eyes, his gestures, his mourning—these are not accidents but symptoms of the Symbolic invasion, or more precisely, infection.

We can thus say that Kong is not the Real but rather the trace of the Real—what must be “aped” but never reached. This notion of “aping the beyond” becomes a central motif: any attempt to represent the unrepresentable is doomed to mediation. Kong, in this sense, becomes the impossible attempt to visualize what lies outside human comprehension. He is what Fujita calls the “third term”—a “hole (*trou*)” in the Symbolic that links to another dimension of continuity, or what he calls the “navel of the structure” (Fujita 55).

This third term cannot be directly grasped, and yet it is precisely what guarantees the fluidity of meaning in what Fujita calls the “dynamic structure” of the psyche—a structure that is “a system of lack”

(Fujita 52). Kong is this lack made visible, the symptom of “the human” as such. We might even say, following Fujita’s title, that Kong represents the human as a disease or a *sinthome* of the human: a figure that exposes the very impossibility of representing humanity’s Other without becoming a projection of ourselves.

In this context, the humanization of Kong is not simply a betrayal of his monstrosity but the very symptom of our symbolic need. As the film brings the viewer closer to Kong—through his gaze, his grief, his gentleness—it simultaneously veils the Real he embodies. We cannot encounter the Real directly; we must translate it, project onto it, and finally kill it.

The following section will further investigate this structural limit through the concept of the “third term,” turning to Fujita’s argument to understand how Kong and Skull Island function as thresholds between the Symbolic and the unthinkable Real.

#### **IV. Kong as the Real: Skull Island and the Third Term**

At the psychoanalytic edge of cinematic language lies the question: can film represent the Real, or merely stage its absence? In Lacanian theory, the Real is not empirical reality but that which is foreclosed by the Symbolic order—what remains unassimilable and resistant to language. Kong, in this sense, is not simply a character or metaphor; he is the *sinthome*—a unique knot of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real that supports subjectivity itself.

Skull Island is the spatial embodiment of this Real. As Fujita argues, all symbolic structures are founded upon a void, a point of rupture he names the “third term”, or what he calls “a hole” (Fujita 52). This third term is a “structural navel”, not part of the structure but a necessary outside that grants it coherence. Like Freud’s navel of the dream, Skull Island resists interpretation: it is not just unknown—it is unknowable.

Kong emerges from this space. He is “neither beast nor man, something monstrous, still living, still holding that island in the grip of fear” (Wartenberg, Ch. 8). As such, he stands not as a mere monster but as the Real’s emissary— a being outside law, representation, and time. High atop the Empire State Building, when he falls, he is not just defeated; the Real is domesticated. Yet, as Jacques -Alain Miller reminds us, “the real is without law”—a formula that “severs the connection between nature and the real.” Psychoanalysis, he asserts, reveals that “in psychoanalysis there is no knowledge in the real. Knowledge is an elucubration about the real” (Miller, “The Symptom, Knowledge, Meaning and the Real.”). Following Lacan, one might reformulate this claim more rigorously: Kong’s divinity is not a matter of theology but of psychoanalytic structure—he is not God, but the Real misrecognized as God, a figure that resists signification even as it anchors it.

The 2017 film *Kong: Skull Island* articulates this structural role directly: “This planet doesn’t belong

to us. Ancient species owned this earth long before mankind. And if we keep our heads buried in sand, they will take it back.” Kong, like the Real, cannot be assimilated into human sovereignty. He exists outside of history and law, as an “unbearable ‘too much’ of something” (Loose).

As Takahashi notes, Skull Island is “the realm of gods,” and Kong appears as “the supreme god” among them, representing not brute force but ontological excess (Takahashi 10). This echoes Schneiderman’s reading of Lacan already quoted: before: “The gods are real... not because they create holes in the Real, but because our only access to the Real is through the vanishing of perception” (Schneiderman 109). Kong’s death is thus not the end of a creature, but the closure of a rupture.

This visual operation is enacted through cinematic techniques. Eggert highlights how Cooper and Schoedsack’s escapist documentary realism builds “a magic show where the impossible lives and breathes.” Fog, matte paintings, and back-projection render Skull Island not as a setting but as a symptom. “Fog... coincides with the approach to the island, capping off the theme of mystery... the island itself is the image of death” (Carroll 224).

Kong is the symptom—or more precisely, the sinthome. As Miller writes, “the symptom is knowledge in the Real,” but not in the scientific sense. It is a knowing that cannot be known, a “wanting-to-say” that “never stops being written” (Miller, “The Symptom, Knowledge, Meaning and the Real.”). Fujita similarly describes dynamic structures as “a system of lack... a hole that opens onto a dimension of continuity” (Fujita 52). This, precisely, constitutes the very essence of “the third term”: the unrepresentable Real from which symbolic order draws its coherence.

Thus, Kong films ultimately present us not with the Real itself—which, by definition, cannot be shown—but with its sinthomatic trace. The viewer’s desire to understand Kong, to humanize him, to mourn him, is not a failure of reason but a structural necessity. As the Symbolic flails against the Real, it knots itself tighter, creating a space of survivable contradiction.

This is why Kong is both monster and martyr. He stages our impossible relation to the outside. He is, as Fujita says, “a structure’s navel”—a point that opens onto that which precedes, exceeds, and haunts the human.

In the final section, we turn to *Planet of the Apes*, where the logic of the sinthome mutates from individual to viral form. There, apes do not merely mirror humanity—they become its symptom. And the question of the Real resurfaces, not as a place, but as a contagion: the unassimilable that nonetheless infects every image of the future.

### **Conclusion: The Sinthome and the Viral Logic of the Human**

If Kong is, as we have argued, a sinthomatic knot that binds the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real, then his narrative does not merely dramatize the impossible representation of the Real—it also anticipates a

broader cultural and psychoanalytic logic: the humanization of the inhuman as symptom. This trajectory is vividly extended in the rebooted *Planet of the Apes* series, particularly in *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (2011) and *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (2014), where the figure of the ape becomes not only an agent of symbolic rupture but a viral vector of the human condition.

At the center of this new simian mythology lies the Simian Flu: a genetically engineered virus (ALZ-112 and its mutation ALZ-113) that enhances ape intelligence while simultaneously decimating the human population. This paradox is crucial. The virus performs what Lacan would call a *sinthomatic* function. Like the *sinthome* in *Seminar XXIII*, the virus is a fourth ring—a material support—that knots the registers of biology, language, and symbolic structure. It grants apes access to subjectivity even as it eradicates the human.

Here, the viral logic reveals the structure of the human as always already pathological. The virus that humanizes the ape also annihilates the human. This paradox dramatizes what Fujita has called “ningen to iu shoukou”—“the symptom called human.” As Fujita writes, “This dynamic structure cannot complete itself; it is a system of lack, punctured by a hole”—what he calls “the third term” (52). The Simian Flu is that hole: a vector through which the non-human becomes subject, and the human reveals itself as a failed closure, an open wound.

This structural aporia—this inability to think the Real without also humanizing it—returns us to *King Kong*. Kong, too, is not merely a monster but a figure who mimes the human. His anthropomorphic gestures, romantic attachments, and facial expressions stage “the symptom of the human”—a visible, cinematic attempt to grasp the beyond, which only re-inscribes the interior. As Nishiyama’s observed, Kong’s transformation from monstrous force to tragic lover renders him both a spectacle and a sacrifice: a figure who becomes humanized only at the cost of his death.

In both *Kong* and *Planet of the Apes* series, the figure of the ape serves as what we might call a philosophical vector. It is not simply that the ape becomes human, but that the very attempt to represent the non-human Other reveals the impossibility of such representation. In Lacan’s terms, the Real cannot be symbolized. But it can be staged—as a rupture, a *sinthome*, a cinematic gesture. Thus, both franchises dramatize what might be called “aping the beyond.”<sup>1)</sup>

This “aping” is not mimicry in a reductive sense. Rather, it is a performance of the impossibility of direct access to the beyond. The Real—the outside of language, culture, and human epistemology—can never appear in its own terms. It can only be mimed, symptomized, or more figuratively, “aped”. The monster does not represent the Real; it repeats the human attempt to frame it. And in doing so, it reveals the structural limits of representation itself.

Yet this failure is generative. As Wartenberg has noted in his analysis of *King Kong*, as we remember, the film “breaks new ground in its criticism of Hollywood’s racist representation of Black men”

(Wartenberg Ch. 8) by presenting Kong not as a purely sexualized threat, but as a chivalrous and affective being. His transformation is a symptom—not of his own character—but of the symbolic system that needs to resolve the Real by turning it into narrative, into drama, into death.

As Freud taught us, the symptom is a compromise formation. It is an expression that simultaneously conceals and reveals. In this way, Kong's gestures, like the Simian Flu's paradoxical effects, function as *sinthomes*. They tie together what cannot be unified: the symbolic with its own impossibility, the human with its limit.

The implications of this framework are far-reaching. In an age marked by ecological collapse, genetic engineering, and post-human imaginaries, the ape emerges as the symptom through which the human confronts its own extinction. The virus in *Planet of the Apes* is not merely biological—it is metaphysical. It infects the boundary between subject and the Other, nature and culture, life and signification<sup>1)</sup>.

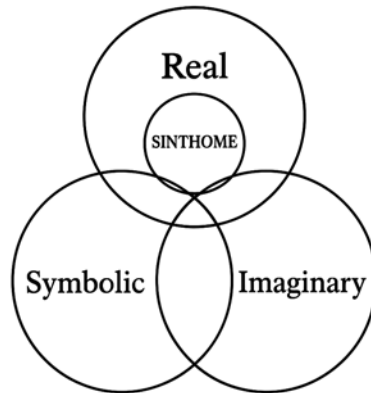
The question—*Can King Kong represent the beyond of the human?*—is itself a paradoxical formulation. It presupposes the representability of that which, by definition, evades capture. The Real cannot be directly represented. And yet, the question remains productive—if one reconceives representation not as resemblance, but as rupture, as failure, as a *sinthomatic* staging. Kong, the Simian Flu, and Skull Island are not allegories of the beyond; they are its material traces—its scars, its gestures, its symptomatic residues.

As Jean-Louis Comolli reminds us, cinema does not merely record the Symbolic order; it registers what escapes it. That remainder is the Real. And it is precisely through the genre of the monster film—with its compulsive, spectacular failures to visualize the inhuman—that we are brought closest to the threshold of the human. Not as essence, but as symptom. As Fujita incisively writes, “We ourselves are first and foremost the symptom called human” (Fujita 65).

Ultimately, *King Kong* and *Planet of the Apes* do not offer resolutions to the Real—they *sinthomatically* sustain its wound. These films are not narratives of closure, but cinematic knots: intricate entanglements of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real that refuse coherence in favor of exposure. They remind us, with unsettling precision, that “the human” is not a stable subject but a contingent torsion—a fragile stitching together of failure, lack, and desire. The Real resists capture. It cannot be filmed. But the *sinthome*, as a gesture of that resistance, can be staged. And in such staging—in the cinematic faltering to represent what exceeds representation—we momentarily glimpse the unrepresentable: the inhuman core that makes us human<sup>2)</sup>.

## Notes

- 1) The diagram below visualizes the *sinthome*—that is, the Kong/Humanization Virus—as the knotting point that binds together the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real.



In this paper, the *sinthome* is situated in proximity to the Real, insofar as it belongs to the realm of the beyond. This affinity is not incidental but structurally grounded, as Jacques-Alain Miller—Lacan’s foremost reader—emphasizes when he writes: “*Deuxième version – le sinthome. C’est un système. C’est bien au delà du bout de réel, c’est le réel et sa répétition – on verse au crédit du réel la répétition dont il est le ressort*” (Miller, “IV. – 9 février 2011”). The *sinthome*, according to Miller, is not merely adjacent to the Real; it is its recursive operator—the very mechanism by which the Real insists through repetition. It is not a representation of the Real but its symptom: a structural surplus, a residue that knots the subject to what cannot be symbolized or imagined.

In this light, Kong—as *sinthome*, as Real—is not simply a character or mythic figure but the site where the Real resurfaces in the symbolic order of cinema. His reappearances are not signs of narrative reinvention but symptoms of trauma’s structural return. Thus, Kong eternally returns—not as remake, but as rewriting. He is cinematically “written again” in a recursive loop of the Real: from Honda Ishirō’s *tokusatsu* works (*King Kong vs. Godzilla* [1962], *King Kong Escapes* [1967]); to John Guillermin’s iterations (*King Kong* [1976], *King Kong Lives* [1986]); to Peter Jackson’s monumental reinterpretation (*King Kong* [2005]); and into the MonsterVerse canon of Legendary Pictures, including *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), *Godzilla vs. Kong* (2021), *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire* (2024), and the forthcoming sequel anticipated in 2027. These cinematic rearticulations do not resolve the trauma Kong embodies—they stage its very persistence. Through the *sinthome* that is Kong, cinema endlessly repeats the impossibility of integrating the Real, reminding us that what cannot be symbolized must be staged, again and again.

- 2) At first glance, a critical contradiction emerges between the two cinematic representations of the simian subject: while *King Kong* dies as a consequence of his humanization—infected, so to speak, by the virus of humanity—the apes in *Planet of the Apes* grow more intelligent and ascend to power through precisely the same process of humanization. How can one reconcile these seemingly

opposed trajectories?

The answer lies in the structure of the sinthome and its position within the Borromean topology. In the case of Kong, humanization is not a gradual evolution but a traumatic rupture: a puncturing of the Real by an Imaginary fantasy (the White Woman) that is then inscribed into the Symbolic as an irreconcilable excess. His encounter with the woman is not the acquisition of language or rationality, but rather the foreclosure of his *jouissance* as a creature of the Real. Kong's death is therefore not merely physical but structural: he is crucified upon the intersecting rings of the Symbolic and the Imaginary, fixed as a sinthome—an unassimilable remainder that holds the three orders together only by virtue of his demise.

In contrast, the apes in *Planet of the Apes* do not undergo a traumatic irruption of the human; rather, they evolve within a Symbolic structure vacated by humans. The viral logic here is not that of fatal infection but of structural substitution. Humanity, in its decadence, recedes from the Symbolic, leaving a vacancy into which the apes are able to step. The “simian sinthome” in *Planet of the Apes* thus marks not the collapse of the subject but the reconstitution of a Symbolic order in which apes become the bearers of rationality, law, and speech—at the expense of their former human masters.

Therefore, both narratives activate the logic of the sinthome, but in opposite directions. Kong dies because he cannot be sutured into the Symbolic without excess. The apes rise because they are able to replace the absent human signifier. What at first appears to be a contradiction is, in fact, a mirror logic of viral transformation—one that reveals the sinthome not as a fixed position but as a dynamic function in the Real's articulation with the Symbolic and the Imaginary.

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