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An insult to life itself

Never-Ending Man, a documentary that recently enjoyed a limited release in the United States, shows an exchange between the animator Hayao Miyazaki, seventy-eight, and a group of young programmers from an artificial intelligence company. The programmers proudly show Miyazaki animation of a “man” with a body soft as jelly—legs, arms, torso, head flopping like gummy worms—squirming and twisting across the floor, dragging itself along by its empty head. “It doesn’t feel any pain,” they tell their hero. “This is what we have been working on.”

Miyazaki, a master of pencil, watercolor, and oil who has long resisted digital animation, is revolted—not only by the digital nature of the animation but by the broader contempt for life that the young animators express. He describes a disabled friend of his and says, “Thinking of him, I can’t watch this stuff and find it interesting. Whoever creates this stuff has no idea what pain is whatsoever. I am utterly disgusted. . . . I strongly feel that this is an insult to life itself.” The programmers struggle to respond. The documentary cuts to Miyazaki sketching and mumbling to himself, “I feel like we are nearing the end times.”

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