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Constructing Womanhood and the Female Cyborg: A Feminist Reading of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*

An Honors Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Women and Gender Studies
Bates College
In partial fulfillment for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Zoë Seaman-Grant

Lewiston, ME
March 24, 2017

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Abstract

Female cyborgs have occupied the collective imagination since 1927's iconic science fiction film *Metropolis*, reappearing in various popular films and television shows since *Metropolis*. Some feminist critics argue that depictions of female robots and cyborgs in earlier film and television reinforce sexist norms about female characters in film and television through imagining gendered robots and cyborgs in the form of an "ideal" female body and robots programmed by male scientists for their own purpose; others, however, argue that these same cyborg depictions disrupt traditional binaries of male/female and the biological/technological. How do more recent cinematic and televisual texts' portrayals of female cyborgs extend or complicate these critiques, especially as the representational strategies of texts such as *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* draw from contemporary cultural anxieties about gender, labor, and technology reflected in popular narratives about "the end of men" or the displacements of an increasingly technologized American work force? Attending to the complex ways in which gender, race and sexuality are articulated in these recent fictional texts through a human/robot distinction they both reinscribe and unsettle, and drawing primarily from feminist film studies, cyborg studies, and feminist theory, I argue that *Ex Machina*'s and HBO's *Westworld*'s female cyborgs ultimately re-purpose a trope that conventionally and ostensibly re-entrenches gender and racial norms toward a feminist critique of how U.S. popular culture generally negotiates the perceived promise and peril of new technologies through "old" technologies of race and gender.

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Introduction

I first saw *Ex Machina* (2015) in a darkened theater in Brooklyn on the film's opening night during the spring of my sophomore year of college. Two of my friends and I had just returned from a spring break trip to Cancun. We were spending a few days in New York City before heading back to school, and my friend, now a graduate student in film school in Los Angeles, stumbled upon tickets for the premier of *Ex Machina*. She insisted that we *had* to go; critics had been raving about the film and watching a movie would be a great way to recover from a week of not sleeping enough. While not totally convinced by my friend's pitch, I agreed to go to the movie. I was anticipating a boring indie film that I would barely be able to stay awake for. Yet ten minutes into it, I was hooked. I went home that night and demanded that my parents find a movie theater showing *Ex Machina* so we could all talk about the gender politics of the film. That night began a two-year odyssey of researching and reading every book, watching every movie and reading all the academic criticism I could about female cyborgs. I talked about female robots over dinners with my friends. I brought up new science fiction films about artificial intelligence on dates, even when the other person appeared deeply disinterested. Over the past two years, I have managed to convince most of my friends to watch *Ex Machina* and, afterwards, have subjected them to hours of questions about their thoughts on the film.

The female cyborg is a fascinating figure that straddles the line between the technological and the biological. She disrupts the notion of the natural. She rejects the division of femaleness and technology. Yet she is also a trope that reinforces hegemonic ideologies of gender and race. This figure, a symbol of the possibilities of modernity, exemplifies the degree to which gender and race are entrenched in our understandings of future possibilities. The ambivalence of the female cyborg, her ability to be both radically transgressive figure and frustratingly familiar, entranced me. This thesis became a way for me to attempt to disentangle the knotted threads of the female cyborg and explore the enduring popularity of the female cyborg.

A Brief History of Constructing Women

The fantasy of creating an artificial woman continuously reappears in fiction and the minds of scientists and roboticists. Even before modern technology made the female cyborg possible, the fantasy of constructing an artificial woman was still the subject of stories and myths. Perhaps the most famous early work featuring a man who wishes for a woman who is built to please him and fulfill his fantasies is the ancient myth of Pygmalion, made famous by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Ovid's poem, Pygmalion, a sculptor, builds a sculpture in the shape of a woman that appears so lifelike and beautiful that Pygmalion promptly falls in love with it. Pygmalion prays to Venus to find him a woman who is just like his sculpture, and Venus transforms Pygmalion's sculpture into a live woman named Galatea. Pygmalion becomes enamored with this figure crafted by his own hand, a woman that sprung straight from his fantasies. Pygmalion subsequently finds all other women unsatisfactory because they can never compete with his fantasy woman. The myth invites no critique of Pygmalion's obsession with his sculpture. Instead, it provides a happy ending: Pygmalion and Galatea grow old together and eventually have a daughter, validating Pygmalion's obsession with his creation.

The myth of Pygmalion and Galatea has endured centuries of different artists and cultures reimagining the creation of an artificial woman for male pleasure. These artificial women "were often shaped not only by men's fantasies but also men's beliefs about women themselves – their inherent traits or 'nature,' their usual behavior, and their proper (culturally assigned) social roles."[1] While the form of the artificial woman might change, she is consistently created in order to suit the desires of men. Importantly, the desires of men vary widely across cultures and artificial women are constructed in order to embody the idealized woman of that particular time or culture. This thesis examines the construction of modern artificial women in fiction and how they intersect with modern idealized norms of femininity, with particular attention to how technologized female bodies embody and draw attention to racialized and gendered ideologies.

Donna Haraway argues, "the cyborg has no origin story", that the individual cyborg is a blank slate without the trappings of gender or race or power. However, the figure of the cyborg has a lengthy history and has emerged from centuries of myths and stories like Pygmalion.[2] These myths and stories reveal an enormous amount about the modern cyborg. The myth of Pygmalion has inspired songs, paintings, plays and novels, with perhaps the most famous being George Bernard Shaw's 1912 play *Pygmalion*. In *Pygmalion*, a professor, Henry Higgins, trains a poor London woman, Eliza, to pass as a duchess. Eliza eventually leaves Higgins to marry a man who is in love with her and use her newfound skills to enter London's high society. Unlike Galatea, Eliza is unwilling to remain with the man who has crafted her in his image. Interestingly, Joseph Weizenbaum named his artificial intelligence program ELIZA after Eliza in *Pygmalion*.

While Pygmalion may have originally been a myth, eighteenth century Europe witnessed mechanics and experimenters who sought to create automatons that could play the flute, dance or draw.[3] In 1784, a watchmaker, Peter Kintzing, and a cabinet-maker, David Roentegen, created a female automaton for Marie-Antoinette who could play eight different melodies on a miniature harpsichord.[4] These automatons of the eighteenth century emerged out of a line of thinking that became popular during the Enlightenment, when philosophers began to imagine the human body as a machine. For example, a French physician and philosopher during the Enlightenment, Julien Offray de La Mettrie, famous for his work *L'Homme Machine* (1747), described the human body as "a machine which winds its own springs. It is the living image of perpetual movement."[5] La Mettrie was merely one among many French materialists who became enamored with the idea of the human as a machine, and materialism quickly became a dogma of the Enlightenment.[6] Importantly, this illustrates the ways notions rationality and masculinity underpinned the initial creation of artificial humans.

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[1] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and Other Artificial Eves* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015), 9-10.

[2] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1990), 175.

Notably, eighteenth-century android builders, philosophers, and artist did not evince preference for a particular sex, conceiving androids as gendered male and female androids in fairly equal measure.[7] It was only in the nineteenth century that the android began to be disproportionately gendered as female in the cultural imagination in which androids came increasingly to figure as subjects of fantasy and, ultimately, fear. With the advent of global Industrialization early in this century, literature takes up the android as a popular trope. As Andreas Huyssen notes, "as soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic, inexplicable threat and as harbinger of chaos and destruction… writers began to imagine the android as woman."[8]

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[3] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies," in *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (New York: Routledge, 2000), 60.

[4] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 35.

[5] Julien Offray de La Mettrie, *L'Homme Machine:A Study in the Origins of an Idea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1960), 15.

[6] Natania Meeker, "The Materialist Tropes of La Mettrie," *The Eighteenth Century* 48, no. 3 (2007): 245.

[7] Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis," *New German Critique* no. 24 (1981): 226.

However, even as the roots of the cyborg can be traced back to an ancient myth, the cyborg is "very much a contemporary creature in terms of its embodiment and signification."[9] The cyborg did not emerge as a popular figure in science fiction until the 1970s with development of new scientific fields like cybernetics and AI research. Furthermore, the cyborg became central to debates about the posthuman, a very recent critical discourse. In 1960, two aeronautics experts first used the word "cyborg" in a paper discussing ways to insert technology into the human body in order to explore outer space. For Manferd Clynes, the author of the paper, the cyborg was *more* human rather than less. The cyborg made space exploration possible in a way that could never be possible without augmentation of the human body. After 1960, the popularity of cyborgs exploded. Part of the cyborg's enduring popularity is likely because the cyborg addresses very contemporary concerns. The cyborg "serves as a metaphor for the deep dependence of Western culture on technologies [and] the increasing significance for late capitalism of the processing and circulation of information rather than production and consumption."[10] The cyborg has become so dependent on technology that technology becomes integrated within the body. The blurring of the lines between human and machines have become increasingly important with the increasing daily presence of technology and the use of technology in order to enhance our lives. The cyborg represents the ultimate hybrid of human and machine, with human and machine finally combined into one organism.

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[8] Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine," 226.

[9] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema and Contemporary Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 34.

[10] Elaine Graham, *Representations of the Post/Human: Monsters, Aliens and Others in Popular Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 202.

Along with being a hybrid of the machine and the biological, the cyborg is also an amalgamation of two different philosophical perspectives on the human body. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, philosophers debated the workings of the human body, with philosophers torn between the mechanist and vitalist perspective. The mechanist perspective argues that humans operate in ways similar to machines – we are governed by instincts and biology and human nature is predictable and universal. The other perspective, the vitalist perspective, believes that "a 'vital spark' exists within humans that sets them apart from both animals and machines… while [rationalists] argue that no essential difference exists and view the human as a mechanical organism operating according to certain laws and observable principles."[11] This debate was central to early philosophers, with late eighteenth century thinkers like Descartes and Julian Offray de la Mettrie defending the mechanist perspective and Romantics of the nineteenth defending the vitalist perspective as a reaction against the rationalism of the eighteenth century.

The cyborg bridges the divide between these positions. The cyborg is simultaneously a mechanical being, the dream of a rationalist, yet still possesses some element of the vitalist thinker. For example, the hypermasculine Terminator in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) is simultaneously an efficient killing machine and emotionally demonstrative, curious about what it means to be fully human—in stark contrast to his taciturn, emotionally blank counterpart in the first *Terminator* film[12] While the Terminator operates as an easily programmable, technologically advanced weapon, he also presents human elements that seem to push back against his machine "nature".

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[11] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 35.

[12] Elaine Graham, *Representations*, 209.

Creating artificial beings in the real world is becoming increasingly possible with modern technological advances. Hiroshi Ishiguro has built the modern Galatea in the Osaka University's Intelligent Robotics Laboratory. "Erica," affectionately referred to by its creator as "the most beautiful and intelligent android in the world," is widely deemed one of the most realistic androids ever created.[13] In the words of Daniel Culpan of *Wired*, "you could easily be forgiven for mistaking her for a sentient mortal if you squinted a bit."[14] Ishiguro is famous for creating lifelike humanoid robots. His two most recent, and famous, creations are female.[15] Erica's vaunted realism is as much a function of its performance as an AI—i.e., Erica's abilities as a conversationalist—as it is the machine's good looks. The robot's face is a composite of those of thirty actual women, selected by Ishiguro for their superior beauty. Interestingly, Erica is modeled as a Japanese-European 'haafu.'[16] For Ishiguru, the most beautiful robot in the world is a mixture of Japanese and European facial features and is named Erica, a traditionally Anglo name. The most beautiful Japanese robot in the world is, apparently, white. When asked about his invention's implications for human-machine relations, tellingly Ishiguro responded, "it means that one day humans and robots will be able to love each other."[17]

The dream of creating lifelike robots has never been confined to the pages and screens of science fiction. Even before the Industrial Revolution, inventors sought to create artificial humans out of metal, clay or magic. With the development of ever more lifelike robots by roboticists like Ishiguro, that dream appears to be on the cusp of finally being realized. I am arguing that the gendering of this project is not incidental. It suggests that the issues of specifically female agency, embodiment, and affective labor raised in the science fictions I am discussing not only reflect advances in the present-day robotics field but also raise troubling questions about how femininity, as a cultural logic, mediates persistent anxieties about what it means to be human in the face of technological developments that seem poised to erode the concept's very boundaries.

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[13] Justin McCurry, "Erica, the 'Most Beautiful and Intelligent' Leads Japan's Robot Revolution," *Guardian*, Dec. 31, 2015.

[14] Daniel Culpan, "These Uncanny Valley Robots Will Really Creep You Out," *Wired UK*, Aug. 14, 2015, http://www.wired.co.uk/article/uncanny-valley-robot-videos.

[15] Before Erica, Ishiguro created Geminoid F. Geminoid F starred in the film *Sayonara* (2015) and was the first movie to feature a human starring opposite a human actor.

[16] Scott Wilson, "Say Konichiwa to Erica, the Android Who Can Have Completely Natural Conversations," *Rocket News 24*, Aug. 25, 2015, http://en.rocketnews24.com/2015/08/05/say-konnichiwa-to-erica-the-android-who-can-have-completely-natural-conversations-%E3%80%90video%E3%80%91/. Haafu is a Japanese word that is used to refer to individuals who are mixed race. Erica is modeled to appear as half-European and half-Japanese.

[17] Justin McCurry, "Erica, the 'Most Beautiful and Intelligent,'" Dec. 31, 2015.

Throughout her long and storied history, the female artificial being provides affective labor for male companions and creators. Though separated by centuries, Galatea and Erica share striking similarities in this respect. Both are envisioned as the most beautiful women in their respective worlds and both are built for little more than providing conversation and affection.[18] Galatea becomes Pygmalion's wife, offering him emotional support and love while Erica is designed to carry on conversations and provide emotional responses like anger or love to her human interviewer.[19] Even with a technology like artificial intelligence that threatens to disrupt the entire definition of humanity, that technology is being deployed in order to create artificial women that behave in traditionally feminine ways. Artificial intelligence is not threatening, Erica seems to say as she discusses her favorite dog, the Chihuahua. Instead, artificial intelligence can be placed in the body of the female robot in order to create a more perfect woman. In this case, the perfect woman will always listen to you and always have patience for your responses. Perhaps, one day, she'll even love you.

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[18] Rupert Wingfield-Hayes, "Meeting the Pioneers of Japan's Coming Robot Revolution," *BBC*, Sep. 17, 2015.

[19] Erica can discuss dogs, her favorite hobby and her favorite movies, among twenty other topics of conversation.

The figure of Erica effectively mitigates anxieties about technology being a disruptive force that displaces men from their positions of privilege. Technology, a force long blamed for eliminating jobs in factories and heavy industry that are disproportionately held by men, is no longer a threat in the form of Erica, but rather a tool that reinscribes traditionally gendered roles, with man still at the center of the social interaction and the woman as willing companion. She will not be working in the factories, but rather engaging you over dinner after you come home from your job that has not been eliminated by the forces of mechanization.

The female cyborg occupies a space of fascinating contradiction – she is sometimes a reassuring figure of traditional femininity, like Erica, and, often, a figure that embodies anxieties about women and technology entering the workforce and erasing the jobs traditionally held by men. The female robot is the lover and the monster, a subject of simultaneous erotic fascination and horror.[20] In my thesis, I examine the female robot as a figure used to articulate contemporary anxieties about shifting roles of gender and technology, particularly the popular cultural narrative of white men being doubly displaced from jobs by women entering the workforce and increasing mechanization.

Robots like Erica do not appear out of the ether, but rather emerge from the imaginations of filmmakers, authors and artists who have created the female robot over and over again onscreen and on the pages of science fiction novels. Erica is the fictional female robot made real, given flesh and blood in the form of wires and silicon skin, but she is made possible by the decades of films that envisioned the possibilities available to the scientists of today. The persistent popularity of cyborgs in film demonstrates that cyborgs continue to connect with audiences on a deeply personal level. Cyborgs explore a question that constantly plagues us in a rapidly changing world, where the possibilities of technology are ever growing – what does it mean to be human in this brave new world? The figure of the cyborg is a signifier for dramatic shifts in our cultural understandings of humanity's relationship to technology. Importantly, the cyborg has remained popular despite enormous changes in technology's role in our everyday lives. The cyborg adapts to new worlds and manages to retain its connection with film audiences. The image of the cyborg "is the single most important one in the [science fiction] genre… it measures out our changing attitudes toward science, technology, and reason itself, as well as the shifting foundation beneath our conceptions of the self in the twentieth century."[21] Female cyborg films explore the simultaneous seduction and repulsion of technology through the body of the female cyborg.

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[20] Minsoo Kang, “Building the Sex Machine: The Subversive Potential of the Female Cyborg,” *Intertexts* 9, no. 1 (2005), 18.

Early representations of female cyborgs often featured male scientists who, after finding a human woman imperfect, decide to design a female cyborg in the woman's exact likeness that is the perfected version of the human woman. In Auguste Villiers' 1886 novel *L'Eve Future (Tomorrow's Eve)*, Thomas Edison creates a female cyborg, Hadaly, for his good friend Lord Ewald after Ewald falls in love with an 'imperfect' human woman, Alicia.[22] Hadaly is physically identical to Alicia, but is spiritually pure while Alicia is not. Ewald falls in love with Hadaly though, as with almost every story featuring female cyborgs, Hadaly drowns at sea at the end of the novel. Ewald, inconsolable, commits suicide. Villiers' novel "was written amid the nineteenth-century's great burst of mechanical inventions and industrially produced facsimiles in the arts, and Alicia's double, Hadaly, is presented as technological wonder, a fantasy female that surpasses the original."[23] Female cyborgs are continuously reimagined in order to represent certain cultural norms or fascinations, and Hadaly embodies the period of fascination with emerging technologies, particularly those of Thomas Edison.

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[21] J.P. Telotte, *Replications: A Robotic History of the Science Fiction Film* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995): 5.

[22] Interestingly, Hadaly means "ideal" in Persian.

L'Eve Future drew heavily from the rapid technological developments of the late 19th century, even going so far as to include a fictionalized Thomas Edison. While *L'Eve Future* is often celebrated for its exploration of emerging technologies, Villiers has also been consistently criticized for the sexist themes of the novel. Perhaps most significantly, the sexism of *L'Eve Future* demonstrates that "technology does not change a social environment but instead strengthens and enforces preexisting gender roles."[24] *L'Eve Future* may focus on the possibilities of technology, yet ultimately the novel is simply "using science in place of divine intervention in updating the Galatea myth."[25] In many ways, *L'Eve Future* is a retelling of the Pygmalion myth with clay replaced by technology. Similarly, modern cyborg films draw upon new advances in technology in the 21st century, including relatively inconspicuous developments like Apple's Siri and the constant data collection of large tech companies like Google. Spike Jonze's Academy Award-winning film *Her* (2013) explores a romance between a human man and his operating system (OS), drawing on current developments by Apple and Google with OS.

Cinema's first female robot burst into life onscreen in Fritz Lang's 1927 German film *Metropolis*. Rotwang, a male scientist, creates the female robot that is known in the film as "the false Maria." The false Maria is modeled after a human woman in the film, Maria. Upon being asked why he would choose the body of a woman rather than a man, the inventor replies, "Every man-creator makes himself a woman. I do not believe that humbug about the first human being a man. If a male god created the world… then he certainly created woman first."[26] With these words, Rotwang identifies a trope common to films about female robots that extends into current films featuring female robots – male scientists consistently choose to design and build female bodies. The false Maria is "a new seductive creature that will entrance men and lead the city's workers dangerously astray."[27] Eventually, after reaping destruction throughout Metropolis, the false Maria is burned at the stake and order is restored to Metropolis. While the human Maria is seen as a spiritually pure and kind human figure who cares for the children of Metropolis, a saintly mother figure, the false Maria is the mother of chaos. This narrative arc, where a male scientist builds a female robot that promptly wreaks havoc and destruction before being violently destroyed, is replicated over and over again onscreen.

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[23] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 139.
[24] Janet Vertesi, "Pygmalion's Legacy: Cyborg Women in Science Fiction," in *SciFi in the Mind's Eye: Reading Science through Science Fiction,* ed. Margaret Grebowicz (Chicago: Open Court, 2007), 83.
[25] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 85.

Cyborg films obsessively explore the contradictions of modernity, the notion of technology as both a force of liberation and oppression, and *Metropolis* uses the figure of the female robot in order to examine the power of technology to be both seductive and destructive. The false Maria is a sexually alluring figure, using her technologically perfected body in order to convince the workers of the city to rise up and destroy the machines that power the beautiful and luxurious city of Metropolis. Initial criticisms of *Metropolis* were exclusively interested in this class struggle at the center of the film. Yet early critics of *Metropolis* often failed to interrogate the intersections of gender and class, and the ways the female gendered false Maria plays into fears about the seductive yet destructive nature of technology. Andreas Huyssen, in his influential essay on *Metropolis* published in 1981, pushes back at the absence of gendered criticism and argues that analyzing the figure of the false Maria as a gendered subject gives "us the key to the film's social and ideological imagery."[28] Importantly, the false Maria's existence is necessary for the workers to rise up and attempt to destroy the machines because the false Maria is so sexually appealing to the workers that they are willing to abandon their families in order to follow the false Maria. In *Metropolis,* technology is threatening, but it is the dual threat of sexualized woman and machine that triggers the mass hysteria in Metropolis.

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[26] Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (Ace Books: New York, 1963): 54.
[27] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 70.

While Huyssen initiated feminist criticism of *Metropolis*, the film is now a staple in feminist readings of cyborgs. Mary Ann Doane in her reading of *Metropolis* argues that the false Maria is a destructive force because she is positioned opposite the real Maria, who represents the maternal. The false Maria is aggressively sexual, leading the city's workers astray due to her sex appeal, while the real Maria is shown taking care of the children and allowing the city's workings to continue unharmed. Doane argues that the film ultimately defends both the maternal and the technological by destroying the false Maria. Destroying the false Maria rejects of the disruptive female cyborg and her mixing of the feminine and technology.[29] Minsoo Kang summarizes the juxtaposition of the false Maria and the real Maria as "a product of the traditional dual view of woman as a saintly angel and a destructive whore" with the real Maria as angel and the false Maria as whore.[30] Julie Wosk extends Kang's analysis, writing that the two Marias "embody some men's deepest longing and fears – the longing for a woman who offers comfort and the fearsome dangers of a *femme fatale*."[31] Feminist readings of *Metropolis* seem to agree that the false Maria, with her rampant and uncontrollable sexuality, is a dangerous vision of womanhood while the human Maria, a maternal figure, is the safe and preferred version of womanhood.

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[28] Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis," *New German Critique* 24 (1981): 222.

[29] Mary Ann Doane, "Technology, Representation and the Feminine," in *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (New York: Routledge, 2000): 114.

[30] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 5.

[31] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 74.

These critics' work on *Metropolis* demonstrates the necessity of reading films about female cyborgs from a critical perspective that emphasizes the dual concerns of technology and femininity. Yet critics continue to assume that gender can be ignored when reading cyborg films. Telotte, who writes about *Metropolis* among other films featuring female cyborgs, writes that he "avoids pursuing the various constructions of the feminine as imaged in the robotic."[32] Telotte prefers to explore what technology says about "the nature of human being" as if human is a category without difference.[33] Gender is not a category of analysis that critics can dispose of when the whim strikes them. To read any cyborg film without attention to gender ignores the very real ways gender influences how audiences respond to characters and how directors and writers structure films knowing audiences will respond to characters differently based on gender and other categories of difference. Huyssen's argument illustrates that failing to attend to gender often leads critics to misread films or fail to fully grasp the cultural resonance of the film.

Obviously many popular cyborg films do not feature female cyborgs. The terminators of the *Terminator* trilogy, Robocop in *Robocop*, and Data from *Star Trek* are all male cyborgs that often prove to be the most popular representations of cyborgs in film.[34] However, male cyborgs do not blur the boundaries between human and machine to the same extent as female cyborgs. Technology is often associated with masculinity and therefore the combination of man and machine does not appear to be nearly as transgressive as the hybrid of woman and machine. The masculine cyborg offers a comfortable reconciliation of human and machine, where the technological parts of the cyborg often serve to reinforce the cyborg's masculinity and solidify that masculinity. However, historically women have been associated with "organic matter, finitude, birth/death, the immanent, the non-rational."[35] When women are associated with qualities that are seen as directly oppositional to technology, the female cyborg offers a fascinating hybridity of nature (often associated with women) and machine.

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[32] J.P. Telotte, *Replications*, 24.
[33] J.P. Telotte, *Replications*, 24.
[34] Elaine Graham, *Representations*, 208.

In order to discuss the cyborg, we must first define the cyborg. Defining the cyborg proves to be a controversial and difficult venture. Often, the cyborg is imagined as an amalgamation of human and machine, a mixture of biological and mechanical elements. While this definition may be easy, I find this definition to be far too limited. Many of the cyborgs discussed in this thesis are not cyborgs in the traditional sense of the word. Ava in *Ex Machina* and the women of *Westworld* are entirely mechanical beings and are often referred to as robots by critics and scholars. However, Ava is only referred to as a robot because her body does not contain biological or human elements. Yet this definition of the cyborg is oddly obsessed with the body and "insists on reinforcing physical concerns… proving the extent to which the body remains a vital mode of distinction in attempting to make sense of subjectivity."[36] Additionally, scholars are often willing to describe humans as cyborgs even if humans do not have any technological parts of the body. Rather, cyborg is a term that is used to describe a contemporary state of being, where technology plays an increasingly important role in our everyday lives and humans have begun to define themselves in relation to technology.

A Road Map

My first chapter, "Theorizing the Cyborg," seeks to explore the critical work surrounding the female cyborg, with particular attention to feminist scholars and film analysis. Critically, this chapter defines the term "cyborg" as it will be used for the rest of this thesis. "Cyborg" is used in this thesis to describe artificial beings that are often classified as "robots" in popular literature. This chapter justifies my use of the term "cyborg" to describe artificial beings that would not typically be described as "cyborgs." I use the term "cyborg" to call attention to the lack of clean boundaries between human and machine, and to reject a strict classification of beings as either human or machine. My use of the term "cyborg" in this way draws on numerous other feminist cyborg scholars who challenge the conventional popular use of the term, including Anne Balsamo, Mary Ann Doane, Sue Short, and Vivian Sobchack.

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[35] Elaine Graham, *Representations*, 207.
[36] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 37.

After defining the cyborg, I discuss the nature of hybridity in relation to the cyborg's ability to disturb the idea of purity, particularly in relation to race. I discuss scholars like LeiLani Nishime and Malini Johar Schueller who put the cyborg in conversation with Black feminist thought. The cyborg becomes a fascinating figure through which to explore a history of passing in the United States. After this, I explore the cyborg's interaction with the performativity of gender, both as a figure that potentially challenges gender as a "natural" category of difference and a figure that entrenches contemporary ideologies of gender. Finally, this chapter applies feminist film theory and horror movie criticism to fictional depictions of the female cyborg in order to explore the feminist possibilities offered by the female cyborg in *Westworld* and *Ex Machina*.

The second chapter applies feminist cyborg theory and film theory to the film *Ex Machina* to explore the gendered and racialized politics of the film. Unlike in earlier films that center on female cyborgs, in *Ex Machina*, the robot survives past the end of the film, having killed her creator. The film's treatment of the inventor, tech industry guru Nathan, as a megalomaniacal bully and hot-tempered rapist makes his killing justifiable in narrative terms and even, for the audience, more satisfying than unsettling; however, that Ava also commits a seemingly far less "necessary"—in plot terms—murder of the mild-mannered male human protagonist (who in fact betrays Nathan to help Ava escape) imbues the figure of the female cyborg in *Ex Machina* with a great deal of ambivalence. I discuss this ambivalence in relation to popular cultural narrative of white American men's economic displacement due to increasing automation and globalization, coupled with putative changes in workplace gender roles. I explore the figure of the female cyborg in *Ex Machina* as an embodiment of techno-fears as much as it illustrates techno-desires. As a young, charming, beautiful woman, Ava is a desirable and appealing figure. However, as the audience watches Ava kill the human men at the center of the film, she is also terrifying. Finally, I interrogate the racial politics of *Ex Machina*. *Ex Machina* features a white female cyborg escaping while leaving numerous dead female cyborgs of color in her wake. Yet the film also offers an implicit critique of the violence committed against cyborg women of color, even as the film depicts that abuse.

My third chapter analyzes *Westworld*. While *Ex Machina* offers a relatively ambivalent portrayal of the female cyborg, *Westworld* attempts to reimagine the machine/human distinction as a moral hierarchy in which the machines are morally superior and narratively sympathetic compared to their human counterparts. *Westworld* depicts humans, and specifically American white men, sexually and physically abusing imprisoned cyborgs. In contrast to *Ex Machina*, where Caleb largely remains a sympathetic figure, even the "nice guys" of *Westworld* ultimately abuse female cyborgs in reprehensible ways, which vindicates the hosts' ultimate murder of the humans. However, I argue that while female cyborgs are the heroines of the show, they must perform in traditionally feminine ways in order to be considered "good" female cyborgs and hence sympathetic characters from the audience's perspective. In this chapter, I explore how

Westworld's seeming recuperation of the female cyborg is contingent on her ability to conform to conventional standards of female beauty and behavior and consolidated in her violability as sexually assaulted in order to demonstrate her vulnerability and similarity to human women. Finally, the chapter examines constructions of masculinity in *Westworld* and the show's ultimate condemnation of contemporary American white masculinity.

The final chapter places *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* directly in conversation through the figure of the male inventor. In this chapter, I situate the android creators of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* in a history of mad scientists striving to create artificial life, paying specific attention to the efforts of men to create artificial women. Additionally, I discuss the dominance of men in the modern tech industry and discipline of computer science, and how *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* naturalizes gender disparities within the fields that train and employ these technologists. I then turn to examine the very different characterizations of the figure of the "genius inventor" offered in *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* and the moral positioning of these characters within the worlds they've created. While *Ex Machina* offers a more obvious interrogation of the modern tech genius, *Westworld* sympathizes with the alienation of the male genius from the products of his labor, suggesting that his genius is co-opted by corporate structures. Following this, I explore the ways female cyborgs embody the desires of their creators and contemporary beauty ideals. Finally, I juxtapose how *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* differently position the murders of their respective male inventors, examining how these deaths figure as plot points in order to further compare the gendering of technology in each text.

1

Theorizing the Female Cyborg

For over a century, the cyborg has been a subject of fascination for filmmakers, authors and audiences. Enormously successful films like *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* franchise (1984-2015) and *Robocop* (1987) feature cyborgs as central characters and explore the possibilities and dangers presented by emerging technologies through the figure of the cyborg. Sue Short writes, "the very fact of the cyborg's continued presence is testimony to the resonance it has had among audiences."[37] Cyborgs have proved adept at continuing to demand attention from filmmakers and audiences, with *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) scheduled for release next year and a 2014 remake of *Robocop*. Even the popular adult animated show *Archer* features numerous subplots about cyborgs. Along with the commercial success of the cyborg, the female cyborg has emerged as a popular site of feminist discourse. The cyborg emerged as a subject of feminist theory with Donna Haraway's essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" in 1983 and has remained popular as a tool for examining the futures of feminism.

Cyborg is a word that escapes easy definitions. The definition many readers may feel most familiar with is that a cyborg is a person whose body contains mechanical or electrical devices and whose abilities are greater than the abilities of normal humans. For many people, the cyborg is a being that is an amalgamation of various biological and technological elements, a creature that sits along a spectrum occupied on either end by robot and human, two categories marked as oppositional to each other. The robot is a purely technological being, the human purely biological. The cyborg straddles the line drawn between these categories, muddying the clear waters delineated in our search to classify beings.

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[37] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema and Contemporary Subjectivity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 2.

In this definition, there is an explicit acceptance that a "normal" human is one that does not contain technological elements. This definition presumes that technology changes and modifies the human subject to such an extent that the human becomes abnormal and other. Given the ubiquity of technology in our everyday lives and the ways we have adapted technology to assist us, many theorists would argue that we are, in fact, already "cyborgs." "Human beings have been cyborgs from day zero," Erik Davis writes, as "for millennia, people… have constructed and manipulated powerful and impressive technologies."[38] For Davis, a more nuanced and apt understanding of the "cyborg" is as a biological human that *chooses* to interact with technology. However, if you are merely using your iPhone to search for the perfect pizza restaurant, you are encompassed within this definition of the "cyborg." While the earlier definition of the "cyborg" I discuss is far too narrow, I find Davis' definition too broad. This definition of the "cyborg" also seems to accept "human" as a category that one can exit as a result of mechanical augmentation to the biological body.

Feminist scholars and film critics often call entirely mechanical beings *cyborgs*, like the replicants in *Blade Runner* (1985) or Hadaly, a female robot in Auguste Villiers' novel *L'Eve Future* (1886). Villiers is credited with coining the term "android."[39] Anne Balsamo writes, "cyborgs are stock science fiction characters which are alternately labeled 'androids,'

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[38] Erik Davis, *TechGnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpents Tail, 1999), 10.

[39] Sue Short, Anne Balsamo and LeiLani Nishime, three feminist cyborg film critics, use the term cyborg in reference to technological beings that would conventionally be referred to as robots including the False Maria in *Metropolis* (1927), Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and the replicants in *Blade Runner* (1982)

'replicants,' or 'bionic.'"[40] Words like "robot" or "android" mark a clear delineation between human and machine. Yet this distinction is not as evident as directors and writers seem to believe. Even when these science fictional "robots" contain no biologically human elements they should still be considered "cyborgs" if, as Sue Short writes, they "develop such a degree of sentience as to confound conventional distinctions between human and machine."[41] When a machine's self-awareness and cognitive capabilities mirror or exceed those of humans, "robot" is no longer an easily applied term and "cyborg" is a more appropriate description.

I use the term "cyborg" throughout this essay to describe a variety of beings. The term enables me to call attention to the way the character confuses the boundaries between human and machine. The naming of things is fraught with political consequences, and perhaps the use of the term "cyborg" will allow the reader to enjoy the ambiguities and possibilities offered by our cyborg subjects. If cyborgs expose the human/machine binary as a construction, the female-gendered cyborg is especially effective at illustrating the instability of this categorical distinction. Male cyborgs still disrupt our sense of divisions between human and machine to some extent, but because "our cultural imagination aligns masculinity and rationality with technology and science, male gendered cyborgs fail to radically challenge the distinction between human and machine."[42] If humans and machines are construed to be incompatible, women are even more incompatible with machines because "the world of technology has always been the world of men while woman has been considered to be outside of technology, a part of nature."[43] The figure of the cyborg is transgressive even when the cyborg is gendered male, yet female cyborgs disrupt the division of human and machine to an even greater extent than the male cyborg. Female cyborgs are often "culturally coded as emotional, sexual, and often, naturally maternal. It is these very characteristics which more radically challenge the notion of an organic-mechanical hybrid."[44] If women are seen as the most distant from technology, the amalgamation of woman and machine offers a reimaging of the traditional division between the two.

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[40] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," in *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (New York: Routledge, 2000), 149.

[41] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema,* 5.

[42] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 151.

What it means to be human is always politically negotiated and is continuously reshaped by what we decide to call human and non-human. As Anne Balsamo writes, "the notion of human relies upon an understanding of non-human… that which is non-human is understood as other."[45] Historically, people of color and women have been excluded from the category of human.[46] The subversive potential of the cyborg lies in its ability to expose the constructed, arbitrary, and exclusionary nature of the category of human. For example, Sherry Turkle writes, "the more capable computers become at performing human tasks, the more there is a 'romantic' reaction to the distinctiveness of humans."[47] Cyborgs' increasing similarity to humans has forced humans to redefine the category of humanness in order to continue excluding cyborgs. This redefinition has exposed the constant renegotiation of boundaries that happens in order to maintain a delineation between human and machine. Additionally, the process of humans attempting to distinguish themselves from machines via romantic understandings of humanity as something that is not easily quantifiable mirrors the ways people of color were historically dehumanized by white people. “The supposed metaphysical ground of Africans’ subhumanity was that they did not possess human souls,” writes David Livingstone Smith. “What is important, and generalizable, is the idea that there is some attribute, or small set of attributes, that all and only humans possess.”[48]

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[43] Andreas Huyssen, "The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis," *New German Critique* no. 24 (1981): 224.
[44] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 151.
[45] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 150.
[46] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 155.
[47] Sherry Turkle, "Romantic Reactions: Paradoxical Responses to the Computer Presence," in *The Boundaries of Humanity: Human, Animals, Machines,* ed. J.J. Sheehan and M. Sosna (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 225.

Many scholars have drawn connections between the exclusion of the cyborg from the category of human and the ways race has been used as an organizing system for excluding certain humans from the category of human. For example Smith discusses the historic dehumanization of people of color, arguing that the phenomenon of dehumanization occurs when people think of others “as beings that appear human and behave in human-like ways, but are really subhuman on the ‘inside.’”[49] Dehumanization has been historically convenient because it allows “for one group of people to harm another by exploiting their labor, laying claim to their possessions” and doing them harm.[50] Similarly, excluding cyborgs from the category of human avoids the moral quandaries raised when cyborgs are exploited. Cyborgs disrupt the fixed definition of the human and allow for a reconsideration of whether there is anything natural about being human.

Demarcations of race presume racial categories to be a pure state. Historically, even well respected scientists saw mixing races, both socially and sexually, as a recipe for disaster in the U.S. For example, many American scientists in the early twentieth century argued that sexual relationships between racial groups would produce offspring that were “doomed to be degenerate."[51] The status of the so-called mixed-race body within these schemas is similar to how cyborgs are positioned as an impure hybrid straddling two ostensibly "pure" categories –the technological and biological. Cyborgs are often referred to as "hybrids", a word that "appears to assume by definition the existence of a non-hybrid state – a pure state, a pure species, a pure race – with which to be contrasted."[52] While it serves, in the instance of race, to reinscribe hierarchies of power, the language of hybridity can also be a powerfully progressive one by problematizing the notion of purity and its privileged status in the U.S. W.E.B. DuBois challenged the idea of a fixed racial identity by providing "evidence of interracial relationships, which had severe ramifications for any notion of biological purity." [53]

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[48] David Livingstone Smith, “Paradoxes of Dehumanization,” *Social Theory & Practice* 42, no. 2 (2016): 422.
[49] David Livingstone Smith, “Paradoxes,” 420.
[50] David Livingstone Smith, “Paradoxes,” 425.

Cyberfeminist theorists frequently explore the relationships between humans and cyborgs by drawing analogies with the historic exclusion of people of color from the category of human and the widespread subjugation of people of color. Many of the analogies attempt to use the exclusion of people of color to explain how the boundaries of what constitutes the human are strictly policed. The presence of machine elements within an otherwise human body automatically transforms the human into a cyborg. LeiLani Nishime compares this to the way "one-drop" laws emerged in the United States, which forced people with even one-sixteenth African American ancestry to identify as black. Nishime writes, "the merger of human and machine does not result in a synthesis but in a suppression of the human… A machine, like race, can corrupt the supposed purity of whiteness/humanness."[54] However, Malini Johar Schueller challenges feminist critics who analogize the cyborg and person of color, arguing that analogies tend to detract from the severity and uniqueness of the various oppressions felt by people of color.[55] By analogizing the cyborg with the experience of people of color, feminist critics lose sight of how the oppression of people of color was a process of active dehumanization. However, many feminist critics seem to be using the historic dehumanization of people of color as evidence that the category of human is exclusionary, rather than attempting to analogize cyborgs and people of color.

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[51] Paul Lawrence Farber, *Mixing Races: From Scientific Racism to Modern Evolutionary Ideas,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 30.

[52] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies," in *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (New York: Routledge, 2000), 67.

[53] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 108.

[54] LeiLani Nishime, "The Mulatto Cyborg: Imagining a Multiracial Future," *Cinema Journal* 44, no. 2 (2005): 39.

While critics frequently use the mixed-race body in order to read the cyborg, Nishime encourages critics to read the cyborg in order to understand the way mixed-race people are discussed and conceptualized. Nishime argues in defense of reading race back into cyborg films and writes, "the cyborg offers a safe space in which to explore the controversial issue surrounding multiracial identity."[56] Nishime identifies three different types of cyborgs, the good, the bad and the mulatto cyborg, with the mulatto cyborg a being that is constructed with visible human and machine elements.[57] Unlike a cyborg that appears fully human or fully machine, the mulatto cyborg is an amalgamation of both. Nishime argues the mulatto cyborg offers a way to reimagine the implicit purity that is expected from race.

The figure of the cyborg also comes into alignment with U.S. discourses of mixed-race identity around the concept of passing. Racial passing is present throughout U.S. history and historians have primarily focused on Black Americans passing as white. Black Americans often passed as white during segregation in order to gain access to economic and social power. Allyson Hobbs writes, "racial indeterminacy lies at the core of passing… Passing reveals the bankruptcy of the race idea; it offers a searing critique of racism and it disarms racialized thinking."[58] Cyborg narratives often feature cyborgs that are virtually indistinguishable from fully biological humans; occasionally, the cyborgs themselves are completely convinced that they are not cyborgs, but rather completely biological humans. These cyborgs are passing as human, a denial of their "true" identity as a cyborg.[59] Similarly, many black individuals who passed as white were said to be denying the "truth" of their lineage and Nishime describes the film *Blade Runner* as a classic mulatto narrative.[60] Cyborg narratives often mirror and call upon passing narratives, which can be read as powerful explorations of mixed-race identities in contemporary and historic America.

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[55] Malini Johar Schueller, "Analogy and (White) Feminist Theory: Thinking Race and the Color of the Cyborg Body," *Signs* 31, no. 1 (2005): 68.
[56] LeiLani Nishime, "The Mulatto Cyborg," 36.
[57] LeiLani Nishime, "The Mulatto Cyborg," 47.

A common trope in cyborg film and television is a cyborg that desperately wants to experience life as a human. These include Data in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, Sam in *Her* and Ava in *Ex Machina*. When a fictional cyborg wants to be human, viewers often interpret this to mean that being a human is better than being a cyborg. For example, Data, a male robot in *Star Trek: The Next Generation* longs to become human and Short argues that reinforcing robot desire to become human "is designed to domesticate the threat of Otherness through familiarity."[61] However, I argue that the reason cyborgs so often want to be human is because being a cyborg is fraught with danger in a world where they are distrusted and murdered because of their identity. People of color do not pass as white because whiteness is an objectively better identity devoid of cultural meaning but rather because social hierarchies situate whiteness at the top of those hierarchies and grant them benefits accordingly. Similarly, the privileging of

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[58] Allyson Hobbs, *A Chosen Exile: A History of Racial Passing in American Life,* (Boston: Harvard University Press), 30.
[59] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies," 70.
[60] LeiLani Nishime, "Mulatto Cyborg," 40.
[61] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 132.

"human" in cyborg films compels cyborgs to pass as human and embrace the qualities that make them the most "human."

The cyborg's progressive critical potential is often a focus of feminist scholarship, some of which understands the cyborg as more of a metaphor than a literal being. Donna Haraway, often lauded as the most influential early cyberfeminist scholar, uses the cyborg as a figure to explore the possibilities offered by technology for the future of feminism. In 1985, the year Haraway's enormously influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" was published, feminists were fracturing along ideological and identity-based lines. Haraway's essay used the figure of the cyborg to respond to a tradition of gender essentialism in feminist thought that understands all women as united by their shared identity as "women." In particular, Haraway was responding to feminists who used the figure of the goddess as a tool of empowerment. Many feminists in the 1960s initially invoked the figure of the goddess to "provide a new metaphoric language in which women's roles and their very beings might be discussed and imagined outside the dominant essentialising constructions."[62] However, the Goddess movement emphasizes an inextricable link between women and nature, and for "Haraway and other 'cyborg feminists', feminist goddess worship is an expression of a modern nostalgic construction of a 'good' (non-existent) origin to return to."[63] Intervening into this binary mode of thinking, Haraway employs the figure of the cyborg.

"A Cyborg Manifesto" challenged many feminists who focused on cultivating a specific "woman's experience" by arguing that women are constantly constructed by political, cultural and social dialogues.[64] Haraway uses the figure of the cyborg as an analogy to prove that womanhood is culturally contingent, and not a natural, unchanging identity. She uses this figure to argue for "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."[65] Haraway argues that in the same way all "womanhood" is constructed as an identity by the patriarchy, cyborg is also a constructed identity.[66] The cyborg becomes the perfect figure for Haraway because it represents the possibility of crossing boundaries and rejecting the idea of purity as the best state, or even a possible state, of being. For Haraway, the cyborg is the metaphor that challenges the popular feminist belief that women should want to return to a natural, perfect state. The cyborg, a creature without origin, has no perfect state to even dream of returning to.

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[62] Kathryn Rountree, "The Politics of the Goddess: Feminist Spirituality and the Essentialism Debate," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 43, no. 2 (1999): 141.

[63] Nina Lykke, "Between Monsters, Goddesses and Cyborgs: Feminist Confrontations with Science," in *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (New York: Routledge, 2000), 82.

While Haraway focuses primarily on the cyborg as metaphor, this thesis will address the embodied figure of the cyborg in film and television.[67] Haraway imagines the cyborg outside of the cultural texts that produce our images of the cyborg body and argues that the cyborg "has no origin story."[68] In contrast to Haraway's utopic conception of the cyborg as a figure with no attachment to history, the cyborg's "antecedents can be traced back to some of the earliest stories of human civilization."[69] Additionally, even if Haraway primarily uses the cyborg as a metaphor to imagine a new feminist identity, metaphors are often understood based on the images they call to mind. While the cyborg might offer an interesting metaphorical figure, the representations of cyborgs are just as important to consider.

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[64] Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1990), 150.

[65] Donna Haraway, *Simians,* 154.

[66] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema,* 82.

[67] See Nancy Leys Stepan's article "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science" (2000) for more discussion of the cyborg as analogy

[68] Donna Haraway, *Simians*, 175.

[69] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 34.

The embodied figure of the female cyborg offers a possibly even more compelling critique of how to think about the constructed nature of femininity. Cyborgs are frequently constructed by human creators and then imbued with gender by those creators. Scientists in fiction use a variety of elements to construct a female gendered cyborg, including building a body that matches our expectations of what a traditional woman looks like, creating a high-pitched voice and giving the cyborg behavioral characteristics that we typically associate with femininity. Yet even as this cyborg reaffirms the idea of a "correct" notion of femininity, the fact that femininity can be built exposes the constructed, rather than innate, nature of gender. When female cyborgs often perform femininity better than their human female associates, this exposes "the notion of gender as a performative rather than natural mode of identity."[70] The figure of the female cyborg with a constructed female gender puts "into doubt the 'essentialist' attitude towards both women and human beings in general that endows them with characteristics of an inborn and immutable nature, rather than seeing them as 'performances,' political, social and cultural constructs."[71] If a mechanical being can perform gender so effectively that it is indistinguishable from biological humans, this serves to expose the constructed and performative nature of gender. If we accept Haraway's vision of the cyborg as a being that deconstructs the myths of dualisms, perhaps the female cyborg is the most subversive figure we can imagine.

The figure of the female cyborg certainly offers subversive potential, yet the films featuring female cyborgs rarely live up to that potential. While Donna Haraway imagines the cyborg as a figure that is able to transcend the many fractured and constructed identities, I posit that representations of the cyborg cannot escape the patriarchal and racial hierarchies that shape those representations. Despite the liminal nature of the cyborg, "the cyborg is not necessarily more likely to exist free of the social constraints which apply to humans and machines already."[72] Though the imagined figure of the cyborg offers numerous interesting possibilities, I argue that representations of the cyborg frequently replicate power inequalities. Female cyborgs often end up embodying particularly repressive norms of feminine behavior and appearance. These female cyborgs are not the figures of Haraway's dreams but rather the product of patriarchal imaginations.

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[70] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 7.
[71] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Female Sex Machine: The Subversive Potential of the Female Robot," *Intertexts* 9, no.1 (2005): 6.

Conventionally, these films conclude with the destruction of the female cyborg in brutal and graphic ways. Female cyborgs are burned at the stake (*Metropolis*), drowned at sea (*L'Eve Future*), raped and murdered (*Android*), and stabbed to death (*Westworld*). These deaths are presented as celebratory events because the narratives discourage viewers from interpreting female cyborgs as worthy of mourning. The narratives consistently dehumanize cyborgs, boxing them into the category of "robot." By dehumanizing cyborgs into robots, human characters are able to justify killing female cyborgs and feel morally justified. The audience, as well, is able to still empathize with the human character because they do not see the female robot as a human to be killed, but rather a thing to be shut off. When human characters kill female robots, "the threat of female sexuality and independence that are portrayed as terrifying… is accordingly restrained through the eventual elimination of these figures."[73] By destroying the female cyborg, the threateningly transgressive figure is no longer a menace to social order.

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[72] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Envisioning," 61.
[73] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 92.

The eventual expulsion of a female robot that represents a terrifying threat to the status quo shares numerous elements with the genre of horror films. In a typical horror film, a monster threatens to destroy the normal and peaceful lives of characters in the film. At the end of the film, the monster is usually destroyed and the status quo is restored via the expulsion of the monster.[74] Additionally, monsters in horror films are representations of socio-cultural anxieties. For example, Godzilla "is both a gigantic monster and an image of the dangers of radiation, war and nuclear testing."[75] However, the monster is not always destroyed at the end of the film, a theme shared by female cyborg films. In these instances, when the monster is allowed to live, "the unsettling of things may have become permanent."[76] The female cyborg is allowed to live, but we are meant to fear her continued existence and the threat that existence represents to our stable conceptions of the world.

Given the dominance of narratives that depict violence against female cyborgs, how do we engage in a self-consciously feminist project of reading and perhaps reclaiming images that have traditionally been associated with repressive images of artificial women created by male directors for presumably male audiences? This is a problem frequently faced by feminist film critics, particularly due to the way the male gaze shapes how films are created and received by audiences and critics. In 1973, feminist film critics Laura Mulvey examined the role of the male gaze in film production and consumption and she writes, "unchallenged, mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order."[77] Films often reflect cultural male desires about the eroticization of women. The women on screen become objects of sexual fascination to male characters and male viewers, and Mulvey argues, "the determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly."[78] Films are often made in order to appeal to the male viewers and in order to reflect the supposedly universal ideal of an eroticized woman onscreen. Cyborg films are no exception, and the challenges remain of engaging in feminist readings of films that seem fundamentally antagonistic to women's pleasure.

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[74] Bruce Kawin, *Horror and the Horror Film* (New York: Anthem, 2012), 11-13.
[75] Bruce Kawin, *Horror*, 50.
[76] Bruce Kawin, *Horror*, 12.
[77] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Marshall Cohen and Leo Braudy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 835.

Perhaps most importantly, cyborg films draw on Freud's theory of the uncanny, an element common to horror films. Freud's psychological theory of the uncanny is the concept that something that is familiar yet incongruous unsettles the viewer because it is something they find themselves attracted to and simultaneously repulsed by.[79] In fact, Freud's theory of the uncanny has been adapted to robots and is now titled "the uncanny valley." The uncanny valley hypothesis asserts, "as a robot increasingly resembles a person, its familiarity increases until a point at which it abruptly drops to a negative value and it elicits strong repulsion."[80] Cyborgs in films draw upon this idea of the uncanny in order to elicit feelings of unease from the viewer, often a feeling that something is just a little bit off. The theme of cyborgs passing as humans often plays on the idea of the uncanny, with cyborgs revealing their cyborg nature in grotesque fashions. For example, the cyborg Kyoko in *Ex Machina* peels the skin away from her face, revealing a network of wires underneath. The cyborg Kiddy in *Silent Möbius* melts the skin off her arm to uncover a metal skeleton. We are expected to be repulsed by a figure to which we may have been previously attracted.

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[78] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure," 837.

[79] Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'," *New Literary History* 7, no. 3 (1976): 620.

[80] Shensheng Wang, Scott Lilienfeld and Philippe Rochat, "The Uncanny Valley: Existence and Explanations," *Review of General Psychology* 19, no. 4 (2015): 393.

Critics of science fiction often deride the genre as a bastion of Western white male privilege, primarily due to the dominance of white male writers and because science fiction regularly fails to reimagine sexual, gendered, national and racial hierarchies. Instead, science fiction often situates those hierarchies as continuing to extend into the future irrespective of enormous cultural changes, with white heterosexual CIS-gendered men still at the apex of the sociopolitical hierarchy. Veronica Hollinger notes that science fiction "has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire."[81] In the fictions Hollinger critiques, gendered and raced identities are presumed to be natural and therefore unchanging even into the far distant future, which limits our ability to imagine a world without the gender inequality we now view as natural. Importantly, science fiction writers are "building in their own assumptions, criticisms and idealizations of how the world works and how it might be different."[82]

But science fiction can also question the worlds we inhabit and imagine new possibilities for them. Science fiction can be a potent force for exposing "situations of historical inequity and/or oppression that otherwise may appear inevitable to us, if indeed we notice them at all."[83] When authors are critical of the way gender is often situated as a natural mode of difference, they produce incredibly powerful works that expose assumptions about the naturalness of gendered hierarchies. For example, Ursula Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) denaturalizes gender as an essential human category of identity. Octavia Butler's short fiction story ‘Bloodchild’ (1984) explores a human man becoming pregnant. As more women and queer authors enter into the field of science fiction science fiction has increasingly focused on imagining worlds where women, people of color and queer individuals are central to narratives and often liberated from the oppressive structures that currently exist. Science fiction often serves to denaturalize the identity categories and interactions we often view as timeless and absent of culturally constructed meaning.

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[81] Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist Theory and Science Fiction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction,* ed. Edward James and Farah Mendelsohn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 129.

[82] Aaron Passell, "SF Novels and Sociological Experimentation," in *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction: Challenging Genres*, ed. P.L. Thomas (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2013), 60.

[83] Veronica Hollinger, "Feminist Theory," 124.

Furthermore, science fiction allows us to imagine the implications of technology on the future of humanity. While studying technology itself can be one way of evaluating the impact of technology on human identity, “the ‘worlds’ engendered by the creative imagination… are just as revealing, in their own way, of the ethical and political dimensions of the digital and biotechnological age.”[84] Science fiction can allow us to examine our current worlds and to explore future worlds. The writings and imaginations of science fiction authors does more than just imagine the future, they also play a role in creating the future and their “visions will fuel the techno-scientific developments that contribute towards the realization of any such futures.”[85]

Even as science fiction allows us to imagine new worlds, science fiction also draws on current social norms. Although some science fiction literature examines what Haraway identifies as the cyborg’s potential to examine gender and race as flexible categories of identity, science fiction’s general tendency to deploy the cyborg as a trope that reinscribes racial and gender norms is exacerbated in film. Perhaps this is because the overwhelming majority of directors of Hollywood feature-length cyborg films are men, which, as Sue Short suggests, “indicates a vast discrepancy in terms of who has access to particular modes of cultural production,"[86] (To my knowledge, there has not been a female director of a film featuring a female cyborg.)

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[84] Elaine Graham, *Representations,* 1.
[85] Elaine Graham, *Representations,* 11.

The majority of my analysis will be focused on two recent texts, one film and one television series, featuring the female cyborg. The two works I will be focusing the majority of my analysis on in this thesis are *Ex Machina* (2015) and season one of *Westworld* (2016-). Both of these works were released relatively recently, with *Ex Machina* garnering enormous critical acclaim and decent commercial success. *Ex Machina* was nominated for two Academy Awards and won one for best visual effects. [87] While *Ex Machina* is an indie film released on a relatively low budget, *Westworld* is a prestige television drama released by HBO in an attempt to capitalize on the success of *Game of Thrones* (2011-).[88] *Westworld* has received mixed critical reviews, even as its first season is the "most-watched original first season in HBO history."[89] *Westworld* is an amalgamation of the sci-fi and Western genres, with Aaron Bady of *The New Yorker* arguing "*Westworld* is not just beholden to the conventions of robot stories; it's equally beholden to those of the Western."[90] Meanwhile, *Ex Machina* has been praised for its exploration of science fiction tropes and subversion of the thriller genre. While these two works may initially seem to focus on incredibly different themes, I argue that *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* share numerous important central themes that prove ripe for deeper analysis.

Both *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* focus on the relationship between the white male genius cyborg creator and their female cyborgs. In *Ex Machina*, a male programmer and billionaire,

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[86] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema,* 83.
[87] "Oscar Winners 2016," *The Oscars*, accessed November 28, 2016, http://oscar.go.com/news/winners/oscar-winners-2016-see-the-complete-list.
[88] Laura Bradley, "Could *Westworld* Be Even Bigger Than *Game of Thrones*?," *Variety*, Dec. 5, 2016, http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2016/12/westworld-finale-game-of-thrones-ratings.
[89] Laura Bradley, "Could *Westworld* Be Even Bigger Than *Game of Thrones*?."
[90] Aaron Bady, "*Westworld*, Race, and the Western," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 9, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/how-westworld-failed-the-western

Nathan, creates a female robot with artificial intelligence (AI) named Ava. Caleb, an employee at Nathan's company Bluebook, a fictional version of Google, wins a contest to visit Nathan's estate. Once Caleb arrives at Nathan's estate, Nathan asks Caleb to interview Ava and determine if she passes the Turing Test. The Turing Test determines whether a machine is able to exhibit intelligent behavior that is indistinguishable or identical to a human's level of intelligence. However, during the Turing Test the interviewer is not meant to know that the thing they are talking to is a robot. During the interviews with Ava Caleb knows she is a robot, but Nathan wants to discover whether Caleb still attributes human qualities to Ava even when Caleb knows she is a robot. Over the course of the interviews, Caleb falls for Ava and agrees to help her escape from the facility. Eventually, Caleb discovers that Nathan has killed numerous female robots that existed before Ava. Caleb frees Ava and Ava kills Nathan and traps Caleb in the house. Ava then escapes Nathan's house and the final shot is of her standing in a city.

While *Ex Machina* straddles the line between thriller, science fiction, and horror, *Westworld* is an amalgamation of the Western and science fiction genres. In *Westworld*, a theme park called 'Westworld' contains cyborgs, known as hosts, designed to appear virtually indistinguishable from humans. Human visitors, known as guests, pay $40,000 a day in order to enjoy the park's facilities. Dr. Ford, a human credited with developing and building the hosts, works at the park as the resident creative genius. As the series progresses, Delos, the company that owns Westworld, begins to strip creative control from Dr. Ford. Two female cyborgs are the central protagonists of the series: Dolores, a white female cyborg who gradually appears to attain consciousness over the course of the series, and Maeve, a black female cyborg who spends the series attempting to escape from the park. The series also follows two male guests through the park, one of who falls in love with Dolores. Ultimately, Dr. Ford programs the hosts to shoot him and the board members trying to control Westworld in a simulated and scripted robot "uprising."

While *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* occupy dramatically different genres, the two works engage with numerous incredibly similar thematic ideas. Both texts feature female artificial intelligence (AI), human male characters that become infatuated with the female AI, and male creators who are obsessed with constructing the perfect artificial woman. Both works question what it means to be human, and whether an artificial being can ever be considered equivalent to a human. Additionally, both works attend to questions of race and gender in the artificial human. Perhaps most importantly, these films, unlike previous films about female cyborgs, allow their female AI to live past the ending of the film. However, these films also differ in fascinating ways, which I will strive to analyze in this thesis. While *Ex Machina* addresses an isolated figure, Nathan, investigating artificial intelligence, *Westworld* has monetized the female cyborg. While Nathan embodies the modern tech bro genius, Dr. Ford is being separated from control of his creations.

Using cyberfeminist and feminist film theories, I will examine *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* in the social contexts in which they emerged. Additionally, I will seek to situate both films within the continuum of cyborg cinema, exploring how they simultaneously replicate and subvert conventions of the genre. Earlier in this chapter, I explained how science fiction both describes the world we currently inhabit, and shapes the world we will inhabit in the future. Knowing this, I seek to explore how these films depict contemporary conditions of various groups, particularly women and people of color, and how these films may potentially shape future developments in robotics and technology.

Among feminist critics, there are wide disagreements about how to interpret the gender politics of such films. The figure of the cyborg is controversial within feminist thought, revealing "fierce divisions within feminism itself."[91] One film at the center of my study, *Ex Machina* (2015), generated enormously polarized responses from feminist media critics. After *Ex Machina* was released, the prominent feminist publications *Ms. Magazine* and *Bitch Media* concurred that *Ex Machina* reinforces misogynistic tropes and, in spite of its futuristic reimagining of the slasher genre film's "rape revenge fantasy" narrative, ultimately fails to challenge male dominance in either the field of technology or interpersonal relationships with women.[92] In one of the few academic works on *Ex Machina*, Katie Jones compares the film to the Bluebeard fairytale and eventually concludes "the portrayal of passive femininity, repeated scenes of female nudity and the exploitation cinema aesthetics of *Ex Machina* merely duplicate and consolidate the cinematic tropes of fetishized/abject femininities."[93] On the other hand, the popular feminist website *Feministing* defended the film as "an elegant parable about dehumanization and sexual oppression."[94] For my purposes, the myriad of interpretations of the film demonstrates the difficulty of reaching easy conclusions about the implications of representations of female cyborgs.[95]

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[91] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 81.

[92] Natalie Wilson, "How *Ex Machina* Fails to be Radical," *Ms. Magazine,* last modified April 29, 2015. http://msmagazine.com/blog/2015/04/29/how-ex-machina-fails-to-be-radical/; Kjerstin Johnson, "How 'Ex Machina' Toys With Its Female Characters," *Bitch Media*, last modified May 8, 2015. https://bitchmedia.org/post/ex-machina-film-review-gender-and-ai-feminism

[93] Katie Jones, "Bluebeardean Futures in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*," *Gender Forum* 58 (2016): 5.

[94] Katherine Cross, "Goddess from the Machine: A Look at Ex Machina's Gender Politics," *Feministing*, last modified June 19, 2015. http://feministing.com/2015/05/28/goddess-from-the-machine-a-look-at-ex-machinas-gender-politics/

[95] There is a severe lack of academic criticism of *Ex Machina*. As of this thesis, Katie Jones' article is one of only six academic feminist assessments of the film. The lack of criticism is likely because of how recently the film was released.

Contrary to these popular assessments, I do not assume that there are correct and incorrect ways of reading films, given that, as Balsamo notes, films are "sites of cultural and political contestation."[96] Film critics often seem to assume a white male position when reading films, even feminist film critics. The two articles published by *Bitch* and *Ms. Magazine* referred to earlier are excellent examples of critics describing films as antifeminist because male viewers would interpret them as reinforcing gender norms. For example, Wilson claims that *Ex Machina* is encouraging male audiences to think "Wouldn't it be so much easier for the real humans (meaning the male humans) if their lowly female counterparts could just be sexy in all the ways men desire, obedient and easily modified, then upgraded and tossed away without fuss when they no longer 'work?'"[97] When critics evaluate films based on men's presumptive readings of the film, they risk privileging the male viewer as the most important and relevant viewer. If our interpretation of a film comes entirely via our assessment of how men might view the film, we reinforce the notion that the male viewer is granted a particular privilege as a viewer due to his maleness. Feminist film criticism should allow non-CIS heterosexual male viewers to experience pleasure in films that are ostensibly intended for heterosexual white male consumption. By telling women, LGBTQ viewers and people of color that their readings of films are incorrect because the film was not meant for them, we lock individuals out of accessing pleasure and enjoyment from cinema. Reading against the grain and identifying ways in which a text has feminist possibilities even if they were not intended should be part of the feminist film critic's project.

The conceptual entanglements that attend philosophical and technocultural definitions of the cyborg, its varied history within representational culture, and the notable feminist dissensus surrounding its politics all suggest that the figure of the cyborg is constitutively ambivalent and thus demands constant re-reading and re-consideration. Texts can, of course, have contradictory, yet simultaneously valid ideas, and I want to push back at the notion that a given cultural text is either feminist or antifeminist. If the cyborg can teach us anything, it can teach us to resist reading texts in strict binaries of empowering versus oppressive and instead recognize and even celebrate the ambiguity that emerges in many of these films.[98]

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[96] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 156.
[97] Natalie Wilson, "How *Ex Machina* Fails."

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[98] Anne Balsamo, “Reading Cyborgs,” 156.

2

“Isn’t It Strange, To Create Something That Hates You”: A Feminist Reading of *Ex Machina*

> “Science fiction looks at current technological and social trends and extrapolates them into the future. It speculates on the consequences of these trends, both good and bad, if they continue unchecked.”
>
> - Ursula K. Le Guin

Science fiction authors often use current technologies and social circumstances in order to explore future possible worlds. At the same time, present-day cultural concerns also find their way into science fiction stories. *Ex Machina* is no exception. The film explores current developments in AI and social media technologies through the figure of the female cyborg, which is, in this instance, configured around contemporary discourses of gender and race. Alex Garland, the director and writer of *Ex Machina*, acknowledges that the film draws on current developments to AI and public reactions to those developments. In an interview with NPR, Garland says he created *Ex Machina* because he “could see there was a lot of anxiety floating around about AIs.”[99] While Garland acknowledges anxieties surrounding AI, he simultaneously notes, “my position is really simple: I don’t see anything problematic in creating a machine with a consciousness, and I don’t know why you would want to stop it existing.”[100] Unlike cultural narratives about AI and past films that use AI as monsters, Garland indicates his desire to empathize with AI.

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[99] “More Fear of Human Intelligence Than Artificial Intelligence in *Ex Machina*,” *NPR*, Apr. 14, 2015.

[100] Tim Lewis, “Alex Garland on Ex Machina: ‘I Feel More Attached to this Film Than to Anything Before,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 11, 2015.

Contrary to many of the films that came before, *Ex Machina* approaches AI from a position of empathy for the female cyborg. Cyborg films consistently position the cyborg as an unknowable Other. The cyborg is a machine dressed up as human, but the cyborg can never *be* human and is usually killed or destroyed at the end of the narrative.[101] In many cyborg films, the viewer is expected to empathize with human characters and interpolate the cyborg through the eyes of human characters. *Ex Machina* challenges the empathy gap between the viewer and the cyborg by encouraging the viewer to initially connect with human characters before eventually changing allegiances to the cyborg. Yet *Ex Machina* is not just another cyborg film – rather, the film features a *female* cyborg as the central figure with whom the viewer is intended to empathize. Given the lengthy history of presenting female cyborgs as uncontrollable threats to the "safe" status quo, *Ex Machina* represents a dramatic departure from past narratives about female cyborgs.[102] For this reason, *Ex Machina* warrants significantly more criticism than the sparse academic discussion that currently exists.[103] I will be using cyborg throughout this essay to refer to Ava following in the tradition of other cyberfeminist scholars who refer to "fembots" with high levels of sentience as female cyborgs.[104]

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[101] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 50.

[102] For further discussion of the history of female cyborgs as monsters in film see Minsoo Kang's "Building the Sex Machine" (2005).

[103] There are only very few academic articles that critically engage with *Ex Machina*. See Brian Jacobson, "*Ex Machina* in the Garden," *Film Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016): 23-34; Katherine Emery Brown, "Gender Identity in *Her* and *Ex Machina*," in *The Journal* ed. Amanda Spoto and Emily Hedges (Dartmouth, Dartmouth Masters, 2015), 27-38; Katie Jones, "Bluebeardean Futures in *Ex Machina*," *Gender Forum* 58 (2016): 1-5.

[104] Sue Short, Anne Balsamo and LeiLani Nishime all use cyborg to refer to beings that are traditionally referred to as robots because of high level of sentience. Brian Johnson refers to Ava specifically as a cyborg in his article "*Ex Machina* in the Garden" (2016).

Set in the near future, the world of *Ex Machina* appears quite similar to the present day. The clothing, technology and behavior of the characters mimic what you would expect to see on a typical street in any American city, with one of the main characters even mentioning his love for the band Depeche Mode. Everything about the film is crafted to make the viewer feel as if they are already familiar with this world, and even the female cyborg at the center of the film does not feel like a mere fantasy of the director. At the opening of the movie Caleb, an employee of Bluebook, an enormously successful tech company similar to Google or Facebook, learns he has won a contest to visit Nathan's, the company CEO of Bluebook, home. Nathan is a tech genius, writing the code for Bluebook at age 13, through what *specifically* Bluebook is famous for is never mentioned in the film. Once Caleb arrives at Nathan's home, an elaborate entirely technologized mansion nestled in isolated mountains and fjords, Nathan tells Caleb that he has been brought there to perform the Turing Test on an AI Nathan has created. The Turing Test is a test that was developed by Alan Turing in 1950 in order to discover whether it would "ever be possible to construct a computer so sophisticated that it could actually be said to be thinking… And if indeed there were, someday, such a machine: how would we know?"[105] In the traditional Turing Test, a human judge types in a chatroom with a computer or a human and then must decide whether they are speaking to a human or a computer. Nathan changes the traditional Turing Test, and instead tells Caleb that he will be communicating with an AI. When Caleb asks why the female robot will not be hidden from him, Nathan replies, "the real test is to show you that she's a robot, and then see whether you believe she has consciousness." Nathan is uninterested in whether a machine can pass for human. Instead, he's far more interested in whether a human will attribute humanity to something they *know* to be a machine.

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[105] Brian Christian, "Mind vs. Machine," *The Atlantic*, March 2011.

After signing a nondisclosure agreement, Caleb is finally able to meet Nathan's AI. Her name is Ava and during a series of private sessions he begins to fall in love with her. Ava draws pictures for him, asks him about his childhood and tells him about her dreams to be human. While Caleb tests Ava, Nathan watches them via a television network. During these sessions, however, Ava sometimes turns off the power to prevent Nathan from monitoring their interactions. When the power goes out, Ava tells Caleb that he should not trust Nathan. After Ava tells Caleb this, Caleb finds video footage on Nathan's computer that shows Nathan turning off previous female robots that try to escape. Eventually, Caleb decides to free Ava and reveals this to Ava during a power outage. Caleb frees Ava but Nathan appears and fights with Ava. Ava, along with the other female AI in the house, Kyoko, kill Nathan. However, in the process of fighting with Nathan, Kyoko is herself destroyed. Ava manages to escape from Nathan and covers her body's exposed machinery with the skin of "dead" AIs. Caleb watches all of this, assuming that Ava will still leave Nathan's home with him. Instead, Ava leaves Caleb to die, locked in the now powerless facility, without access to food, water, or any means of escape. In the film's penultimate scene, she climbs into a helicopter that takes her away from Nathan's remote foreign home, presumably bound for the U.S. The film's final shot frames Ava's shadow surrounded by other human shadows on a busy street corner.

Female cyborg agency and embodiment as depicted in *Ex Machina* are not mere fantasies of science fiction but instead reflect very real developments in current research in robotics and the ethical questions these developments raise. One of the most successful roboticists in the world Hiroshi Ishiguro, who is the head of robotics at Osaka University, has recently created a female robot, Erica, which he describes as "the most beautiful and intelligent android in the world."[106] It is not particularly difficult to imagine an entrepreneurial titan from the tech industry emerging from his secluded home-laboratory to announce that he has created a functioning AI that is also gendered female. In fact, we have already witnessed this—her name is Siri. Yet even as technology allows us to create robot women who can respond to all the desires of human users, little attention has been given in public discussions to the ethical implications of creating beings with consciousness in order to serve humans. [107] These ethical concerns become focal in *Ex Machina*, in which the coming to consciousness of an AI is shown to be simultaneous with coming to understand her relation to her human creator as both subservience and imprisonment. AI consciousness, in other words, in this film immediately presents the problem of unfreedom.

Prominent media critics—largely women—have in recent years written and published enormously popular essays proclaiming the so-called "end" of men in the wake of women's increasing social dominance. Their evidence for this claim is that the American and global economies are shifting towards service-based jobs, a development that supposedly favors women. I will explore these flawed arguments later on, but first I want to examine this narrative, which has increasingly held sway in the popular American imagination. A leading proponent of this view, Hanna Rosin, writes in her provocatively titled article "The End of Men," that "the modern, postindustrial economy is simply more congenial to women than men."[108] Rosin claims men are getting left behind by an increasingly mechanized and feminized economy, where female workers are rapidly entering jobs and fields that were traditionally male-dominated and are perceived as taking jobs away from men. Rosin's argument that women will soon eclipse men in terms of social, economic and political power is echoed by numerous other popular books including *The Richer Sex* by Liza Mundy, *Are Men Obsolete?* by Camille Paglia and Kay Hymowitz's *Manning Up: How the Rise of Women Has Turned Men into Boys*. Rosin imagines modern day America to be a world of ever-expanding economic opportunity for women that comes directly at the expense of men.

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[106] Justin McCurry, "Erica, 'the Most Beautiful and Intelligent' Android, Leads Japan's Robot Revolution," *The Guardian*, Dec. 31, 2015.

[107] Philosopher Patrick Lin discusses the ethical implications of creating conscious robots in his book *Robot Ethics* (2012), as does David Levy in *Love and Sex with Robots* (2007), but both authors focus exclusively on the ethical impacts of robots *to humans* with minimal consideration of the moral weight of the robots themselves

[108] Hanna Rosin, "The End of Men," *The Atlantic*, July 2010.

As I understand Rosin's narrative, the decline of men does not mean that men are suddenly worse off than women but rather that their historic position of dominance is shifting towards one of greater equality with women. There is not a great deal of evidence to support Rosin and others' claims. For example, economist Philip Cohen argues, "many of the facts offered… were either wrong or misinterpreted to exaggerate the looming approach – or arrival – of female dominance."[109] Even if there was evidence, the decline of male privilege and social and economic supremacy is certainly not a development to fear. Rosin and her fellow postfeminist critics overlook that the reason many women are working in service jobs is not because those jobs are more desirable, but rather because they pay much less and therefore men do not often work in those jobs. They seem to forget that pay inequality exists.[110] More problematically, such narratives ignore race as a category of analysis, instead treating men and women as monolithic categories where all people are affected similarly regardless of race. Women of color have been in the workforce at higher rates than white women for decades and there has not been a simultaneous decline of men of color. Instead, both white women and women of color must simultaneously work in traditional jobs and still take on the majority of childcare duty.[111] The end-of-men argument ultimately reads as a retelling of an old misogynistic myth that the rise of women will lead to the decline of men, and therefore should be opposed at all costs.[112]

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[109] Philip Cohen, "The 'End of Men' is Not True: What Is Not and What Might Be On the Road to Gender Equality," *Boston University Law Review* 93 (2013): 1159.

[110] Mary Beard, "The End of Men and the Rise of Women by Hanna Rosin – Review," *The Atlantic*, Oct. 3, 2013.

If cultural commentators like Rosin believe men should be terrified that women will begin to replace them in the workforce, others suggest that they should be at least as anxious about the increasing presence of robot "workers." In a wide variety of industries, robots are rapidly replacing human laborers. As George Bekey notes, the "introduction of robots into factories, while employment of human workers is being reduced, creates worry and fear."[113] Workers in industries that are particularly vulnerable to replacement by robots have valid reasons to be afraid. William Davidow and Michael Malone writing in the Harvard Business Review argue that the use of robots in factories and industries will leave behind "as many as 40 million citizens of no economic value in the U.S. alone."[114] The fear of increasingly intelligent machines replacing humans has been echoed by numerous prominent figures including Bill Gates, Stephen Hawking, and Elon Musk. Elon Musk, when asked about artificial intelligence said in an interview with MIT, stated, "I think we should be very careful about artificial intelligence. If I were to guess what our biggest existential threat is, it's probably that."[115]

Cultural anxieties about workers being replaced, in the workforce, by machines, parallel Rosin's claims about the end of men. Taken together, these narratives assert that the economic dominance and stability enjoyed by white men through the modern era is under threat by the simultaneous rise of women in the workforce and increasing mechanization of human labor. However, female dominance of the U.S. workforce is neither imminent nor inevitable, as Rosin claims. Regardless, the idea that men should be anxious about being displaced by women remains a strong, broadly appealing cultural narrative. Perhaps its popularity is buttressed by the more factually based anxiety about labor force mechanization, which suggests that men are in effect being doubly displaced from their jobs, even if only one of the displacements is actually backed up by evidence. Science fictions involving female-gendered robots and AIs illustrate the intersection of these narratives, wherein the machine capable of passing as and even surpassing the human serves as a figure for anxieties about the supposed "threat" of destabilized gender hierarchies.

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[111] Jennifer Homans, "A Woman's Place: The End of Men," *New York Times*, Sep. 13, 2012.

[112] Mary Beard, "The End of Men and the Rise of Women by Hanna Rosin – Review," *The Atlantic*, Oct. 3, 2013.

[113] George Bekey, *Autonomous Robots: From Biological Inspiration to Implementation and Control* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005): 20.

[114] William Davidow and Michael Malone, "What Happens to Society When Robots Replace Workers?," *Harvard Business Review*, Dec. 10, 2014.

[115] Matt McFarland, "Elon Musk: 'With Artificial Intelligence We Are Summoning the Demon," *Washington Post*, Oct. 24, 2014.

While Donna Haraway might imagine cyborgs that are able to disrupt damaging dualisms of male/female, natural/unnatural, and biological/mechanical, Ava, the AI-imbued android at the center of *Ex Machina*'s plot, literally manifests male desires for the human female body. For Ava has been constructed based on Caleb's porn preferences, gleaned from his work computer; her very face and form distill his sexual fantasies. Nathan's decision to create an AI that conforms to Caleb's covertly monitored porn preferences indicates that in his conception of the commercial possibilities of his creation, he wants to construct female robots that fulfill all the fantasies of male consumers that human women cannot. Ava is young, thin, white—though ethnically ambiguous—and completely hairless: in short, the "perfect" female specimen. Wilson writes that, through Ava "we can finally see inside a woman's body and she is not that musty, smelly, hairy thing of so many nightmares."[116] Ava does not menstruate, she does not bleed or ooze or do any of those things that encourage people to read the female body as “impure.” The mechanical body is a sterile perfection of the unclean human woman that gets rid of “the faulty, mortal female body.”[117] Ava’s body becomes a map of male fantasy, where the imagined perfect woman becomes real.

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[116] Natalie Wilson, "How Ex Machina Fails to be Radical," *Ms. Magazine Blog*, Apr. 29, 2015.

Using LeiLani Nishime’s reading of the mulatto cyborg as a guide, I want to complicate the understanding of Ava’s body as an uncritical replication of male sexual fantasies. Nishime describes the mulatto cyborg as a body that is a visible amalgamation of human and machine and uses the eponymous *Robocop* (1985) as an example of a mulatto cyborg.[118] The mulatto cyborg is an incredibly subversive figure because “instead of suppressing hybridity or retreating from it… the mulatto cyborg… unflinchingly confronts and exposes hybridity.”[119] Nishime reads the mulatto cyborg as an empowering metaphorical character for mixed-race identity. The mulatto cyborg rejects passing as human or identifying as purely machine and instead embraces the two identities as compatible and parts of a newly defined self. For the vast majority of the film, Ava cannot disguise that she is a robot despite a human face, hands and feet and embodies Nishime’s description of the empowering mulatto cyborg.

Yet at the end of the film, Ava dons human skin to cover her inner robotic workings in a moment accompanied by joyful piano music. The camera lingers on Ava as she covers her mechanical self with pieces of skin taken from other deactivated female cyborgs and stares at her new naked body in the mirror. This, the film seems to say, is Ava’s moment of liberation. Johnson writes, “in order to be free, Ava had to literally skin her AI sisters and leave them behind."[120] Ava's liberation is entirely contingent on adopting the identity of her oppressors and, in doing so, disassociating from her robot past. Ava's rejection of her robot past in favor of a human future that will confer advantages calls to mind a long lineage of passing narratives, with Elaine Ginsburg writing that racial passing implies "an individual crossed a racial line or boundary – indeed *trespassed* – to assume a new identity, escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other."[121] Rather than embrace her identity as a mulatto cyborg, Ava rejects her hybrid identity and passes as human in order to access power and acceptance. Ava's rejection of her robot identity mirrors this passing narrative that is deeply embedded in American history.

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[117] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema,* 98.
[118] LeiLani Nishime, “Mulatto Cyborg,” 44.
[119] LeiLani Nishime, “Mulatto Cyborg,” 45.

While Ava's body is constructed based on Caleb's porn preferences, her emotions and expressions are also mirrors of the culture that surrounds her. She draws her emotional understandings and performances from Bluebook, downloading faces from the Internet and mimicking them. Ava's femininity is therefore a "learnt rather than innate behavior."[122] Short argues that this serves to expose all femininity as performative rather than natural or inherent. Ava has learned how to behave in a traditionally feminine manner by observing the ways human women behave and then adjusting her behavior to align to that. Because Ava is explicitly not "born" female yet is still able to adapt her behavior to mimic ideas of traditional femininity, she complicates ideas of an inherent female gender.

Using her observations from Bluebook as a guide, Ava flirts with Caleb throughout the film, suggesting at one point that if she were able to leave Nathan's facility she and Caleb could go on a date. As the film progresses and Caleb learns about the history of Nathan's destruction of other female robots, Caleb begins to envision himself as the hero who will free Ava, the damsel in distress. Ava is the "male-produced cyborg fantasy: a powerful, yet vulnerable, combination of sex-toy and techno sophisticate."[123] In Caleb's eyes, she is so vulnerable that she needs him to free her and will continue to need him once they leave the facility and enter the human world. Yet at the end of the film, Ava transforms from damsel in distress into femme fatale, luring Caleb into trusting her by sexually attracting him and then leaving him locked in the facility to die as she exits into the outside world. Short writes, "to survive as an artificial woman in sci-fi cinema necessitates conforming to approved standards of behavior and deferring to male authorities."[124] Ava adapts to standards of feminine behavior in order to free herself from male authorities by gaining Caleb's trust.

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[120] Kjerstin Johnson, "How 'Ex Machina' Toys With Its Female Characters," *Bitch Media*, last modified May 8, 2015. https://bitchmedia.org/post/ex-machina-film-review-gender-and-ai-feminism

[121] Elaine Ginsburg, Introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* ed. Elaine Ginsburg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 3.

[122] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 87.

Yet Ava's flirtations with Caleb, and the fact that the way she manages to prove she has consciousness to Caleb is via her femininity, leads many critics to conclude the film is deeply flawed and misogynistic. Dowd explains in the New York Times that, "critics are divided over whether *Ex Machina* is a feminist fable or misogynistic nightmare."[125] Many of the critics condemning *Ex Machina* as a "misogynistic nightmare" seem to be couching their reading of the film in a disdain for the idea of Ava having to perform femininity in order to escape by flirting her way out of captivity. Watercutter writes, "the message we're left with at the end of *Ex Machina* is still that the best way for a miraculously intelligent creature to get what she wants is to flirt manipulatively."[126]

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[123] Jennifer Gonzalez, "Envisioning Cyborg Bodies," 276.
[124] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 83.
[125] Maureen Dowd, *New York Times*
[126] Angela Watercutter, "Ex Machina Has a Serious Fembot Problem," *Wired*, Apr. 9, 2015.

In contrast to this reading, I want to argue that Ava is depicted as using misogynistic frameworks to her advantage. The only tool available to Ava is flirtation because she knows she is surrounded by men who value her based on attraction and a feeling of control over her terms of existence. We as the viewers are meant to condemn Caleb for only valuing Ava based on her value to him in a scenario that reduces the Turing test to courtship ritual. The fact that Caleb only thinks Ava has consciousness because she flirts with him and positions herself in relation to him exposes the absurdity of empathizing with women purely based on male constructs of value. In fact, Caleb's affection for Ava is entirely based on his belief that she likes him leads to his eventual entrapment.

Ex Machina reads as a thorough critique of masculinity by portraying both the hypermasculine figure in Nathan and the "good guy" in Caleb and then promptly demonstrating the toxicity of both. During an interview, Alex Garland was asked whether *Ex Machina* is a critique of toxic macho culture. Garland replied, "I think there is a criticism within it... but it's not purely aimed at them. There's also a criticism aimed at the gentler guy as well, who's not particularly macho."[127] Many of my male friends who watched the film were disturbed by Caleb's death at the end of the film. They claimed they could see why Nathan was bad, but did not understand why Caleb should die. Throughout the course of the film, viewers are expected to identify with Caleb. He is the first character we're introduced to, the man with whom we enter Nathan's facility and learn about the world of AI and Ava and Nathan and Kyoko. Unlike Nathan, whom Caleb and the viewer watch destroy five female robots in quick succession, Caleb empathizes with Ava and works to free her from the prison Nathan has constructed for her. Yet even while encouraging the viewer to empathize with Caleb, the film simultaneously problematizes Caleb's affection for Ava. Throughout the film, Caleb's attention to Ava seems conditionally premised on her affection for him. Caleb is motivated to free Ava primarily based on his sexual and romantic desire for her, not her intrinsic value.

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[127] Gavia Baker-Whitelaw, "'Ex Machina' Director Alex Garland Talks Gender and Artificial Intelligence," *The Daily Dot*, last modified May 8, 2015. http://www.dailydot.com/parsec/alex-garland-ai-ex-machina-oscar-isaac-dance-interview/.

Yet, even as Caleb aligns himself with Ava and promises to free her, throughout the film, he is shown to be watching her non-consensually using Nathan's video cameras. This indicates Caleb's contradictory desires: he both wants Ava to be his equal, capable of returning his emotions, and wants to hold a degree of power over her. Caleb watches Ava from the screen in his room that displays Ava's actions at all hours of the day, voyeuristically taking pleasure in being able to watch her and her inability to know when she's being watched and inability to watch Caleb back. Caleb is the literal male gaze, and the audience is invited to view Ava voyeuristically along with Caleb. The audience is titillated alongside Caleb as Ava undresses on the screen. Ava slowly unrolls her tights down her legs and lifts up her dress, slowly exposing herself to Caleb. Yet Ava ultimately subverts the power of the gaze of both Caleb and the audience. She tells Caleb, "sometimes at night I wonder if you're watching me on the cameras and I hope that you are." Ava both recognizes she is being filmed and performs sexually for the cameras in order to sustain and encourage Caleb's attraction to her. If Caleb feels like Ava reciprocates his feelings for her, he is more likely to attribute consciousness to her and assist her escape. Ava reveals her knowledge of the cameras and uses a tool of her oppression, being constantly filmed, as a tool of her eventual liberation.

Caleb's sexual and romantic desire for Ava raises the question of reciprocity in romantic relationships. While this is a question often asked by humans in romantic relationships, the question becomes dramatically more complicated when one of the members of a relationship is an AI. At one point in the film, Caleb compares Ava to a chess computer, telling Nathan that even if a computer is playing chess well, the real question is whether the computer realizes it is playing chess. For Caleb, proving Ava has consciousness also allows him the security of knowing her feelings towards him are genuine and are not merely the result of Nathan's programming. If Ava does not have consciousness, then questions of consent and reciprocity become incredibly fraught for Caleb and he can no longer remain under the illusion of mutual romantic love.

While the film subverts the gaze of Caleb and the audience relatively consistently, the scene of Ava covering herself with skin near the end of the film verges on excessive voyeurism. Johnson writes that Ava's "nudity felt gratuitous."[128] The camera displays Ava entirely naked and Caleb watches her from across the facility through the window as she puts on the skin of other dead female AIs in preparation for entering the human world. At this moment, the audience is once again implicated alongside Caleb for the voyeuristic act of watching Ava. However, I would disagree with Johnson's claim that Ava's nudity in this scene is gratuitous, for it serves a purpose beyond titillation. This scene has an integral place within the narrative arc. At this moment, Caleb believes that Ava is putting on skin in order to exit the facility with him. Despite Nathan's extremely recent murder, Caleb still believes that Ava will want and need him both sexually and emotionally. As he watches through the window, Ava is completing the final step of becoming his perfect woman – she is becoming physically indiscernible from a human woman. Yet mere seconds after getting dressed, Ava locks Caleb in the room and once again subverts the male gaze. She uses his, and the audience's, distraction with her naked figure in order to create an opportunity for her final escape.

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[128] Kiersten Johnson, "Ex Machina Toys."

While Caleb is concerned with whether or not Ava loves him, Nathan is primarily concerned with self-mythologizing. Nathan envisions himself as a God because of his creation of Ava and the previous female robots. Even Ava's name is a variation of Eve. When Caleb says things throughout the film, Nathan will misremember them in ways that further his self-aggrandizement. The trope of a male scientist envisioning himself as a God appears in the first fictional narrative of a man creating a female robot, *L'Eve Future*, published in 1886. *Ex Machina* creator Alex Garland at times seems to explicitly reference previous works of female robot fiction. The film shares many similarities with *L'Eve Future*, in which Thomas Edison himself builds a female robot for a male friend. *L'Eve Future* primarily consists of discussions between Edison and his friend, Lord Ewald, who debate "whether such an artificial creature, even if it could effectively simulate a real woman, could be a satisfying companion."[129] Similarly, *Ex Machina* focuses on conversations about the nature of consciousness and artificiality between two men debating an artificial woman. By focusing on two men adjudicating whether or not a machine woman should be allowed to live, *Ex Machina* exposes the politically unstable nature of the category of humanness. Ava will be assigned consciousness based on whether or not two men believe she has earned it. Some of the dialogue of *Ex Machina* reads almost identically to dialogue in *L'Eve Future*. For example, Edison in *L'Eve Future* describes the female android as "a Being, made in our image, and who, accordingly, will be to us what we are to God."[130] In *Ex Machina*, Caleb tells Nathan, "If you've created a machine with consciousness, that's not the history of man – that's the history of gods." Both narratives examine men who debate the nature of a female cyborg's consciousness, but only one, *Ex Machina*, takes a critical lens to those discussions.

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[129] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 10.
[130] Auguste Villiers, *L'Eve Future* (Champagne: Univerity of Illinois Press, 1982), 64.

Even as *Ex Machina* calls to mind *L'Eve Future* in significant ways, Garland's film ultimately departs from the themes of *L'Eve Future*, particularly by allowing Ava to survive. At the end of *L'Eve Future*, the female android is destroyed, while at the end of *Ex Machina*, Nathan and Caleb are left to die while Ava escapes. The male creator, Nathan, is unable to control his creation and "his inability to fulfill the male fantasy exposes it as a problematic dream at best, whether because a satisfactory simulacrum of a woman can never be created through purely technological means or because once you animate something with humanity it inevitably seeks to be free."[131] Contrary to Nathan's initial belief that he is a God, his inability to control Ava indicates the flawed nature of his opinion of himself.

Nathan grapples with his mortality throughout the film, and seems to simultaneously view himself as a god and acknowledge that AIs will vastly outstrip humans' capacities. Nathan is able to hold these two contradictory ideas simultaneously because he does not group himself with the humans who will ultimately be destroyed by AI, yet ultimately is the first victim. Nathan tells Caleb "one day, the AIs will look back at us like we look at fossils in the plains of Africa." Clearly, Nathan has no delusions about the power and intelligence represented by AI, but simultaneously possess a very specific kind of male arrogance that allows him to believe he has the intelligence to not be outsmarted by his creations. By virtue of being his creation, Nathan perceives Ava as inferior even if her intelligence eventually vastly outstrips his.

While male scientists in stories about female robots are viewed as deities for their ability to technologically reproduce bodies, human female are not viewed as deities for their capacity to biologically reproduce. Male scientists are viewed as engaging in a process of labor when they create female robots while human females are viewed as simply doing what is natural and expected by reproducing. The privileging of technological reproduction over biological reproduction in narratives about female robots mirrors the preferential status of perfect technological women over imperfect human women. Furthermore, once men have the capacity to technologically reproduce, there is no necessity for human women. If men can reproduce and via reproduction create their perfect female companions, human females become entirely obsolete.

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[131] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.

Kyoko, the only other female robot in the film, is a particularly complicated character. She is the only character we meet who is a "person" of color: an Asian biracial woman who remains silent during the entire course of the film. For the first part of the film, the viewer and Caleb believe Kyoko is a human woman, albeit one who does not speak English and therefore has no capacity to communicate. Kyoko embodies many of the cultural and filmic tropes surrounding East Asian women. While Ava is constructed in order to convince Caleb that she is human, "Nathan built Kyoko to provide domestic and sexual services as a laborer without any need of leisure or personal time."[132] As Caleb and Nathan eat dinner, she serves them and pours them wine and engages in what is by definition a nonconsensual sexual relationship with Nathan. When Caleb finds Kyoko alone in a room, she immediately begins to unbutton her shirt for him, suggesting that she is programmed to anticipate male sexual desire. Kyoko serves as a troubling representation of stereotypical portrayals of East Asian silent yet sexual woman.

At the film's climax, the viewer and Caleb learn that Kyoko is a robot. She peels the skin off her flat stomach, revealing the same internal machinery as Ava's, and then proceeds to peel the skin off her face while Caleb watches. Without the skin on her face, Kyoko illustrates Freud's concept of the uncanny. Lin outlines the way robots often appear uncanny because they

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[132] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures in *Ex Machina*, *Cloud Atlas*, and *Advantageous*: Gender, Labor and Technology in Sci-fi Film," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 20, no. 1 (2017): 40.

"look and move in a way that is, almost but not quite human."[133] While Kyoko appears entirely human throughout the film, she suddenly looks deeply wrong without the skin on her face and her wiring exposed. The woman the viewer has watched and enjoyed with voyeuristic pleasure entirely because of her appearance, given her inability to speak, is suddenly no longer pleasurable to view. By exposing Kyoko's robotic inner workings, the film seems to challenge the gaze of the viewer and the fact that the viewer's previous attraction is based on the illusion of Kyoko as a human female. The viewer's empathy and connection to Kyoko is premised entirely on her appearance. Before Kyoko peels her face away, she is the embodiment of the end result of Japanese roboticists' current experiments with female robots, the beautiful, young and obedient Japanese woman who exists solely for the viewer's pleasure. As the film progresses, Ava becomes more human while Kyoko becomes more and more robotic. Nishime points out that as the film continues, "we see less and less of Ava's machinery, and she becomes more humanlike, while the opposite is true for Kyoko, who begins the film intact and is unmasked by the film's end."[134] Ava, the white female cyborg, moves closer to the category of human while Kyoko, the "person" of color, is revealed as machinery and shifts out of the category of human she previously occupied.

Despite Kyoko's inability to speak, she uses her body as a tool to fight back against Nathan. Kyoko's act of peeling her skin away for Caleb supports Caleb's growing distrust of Nathan. Earlier in the film, Kyoko spills wine on Caleb, a clumsiness that seems impossible of a carefully programmed robot that can match Nathan move-for-move while they dance disco. Spilling wine is her conscious act of rebellion. Nathan reacts incredibly harshly towards Kyoko, screaming at her in front of Caleb, suggesting that she spilled wine knowing that Nathan would immediately retaliate and further anticipating that Nathan's retaliation would unsettle Caleb, making him less likely to trust Nathan and more likely to aid Kyoko and Ava. At the end of the film, Kyoko stabs Nathan. She says nothing, but delivers the wound that eventually kills him. Ava is literally twisting the knife after Kyoko stabs him, but Kyoko is the one who kills him. Created without a "human" voice, Kyoko can only use her body to fight back against Nathan and seek to be free of her glass prison.

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[133] Patrick Lin, *Robot Ethics: The Ethical and Social Implications of Robots* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2011), 236.
[134] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures," 43.

Many critics discussing *Ex Machina* debate whether the film is a narrative of female empowerment and whether Ava should be viewed as a protagonist or cold-blooded killer. These critics ignore Kyoko's role in the film.[135] Kyoko's presence illustrates the inequity of female empowerment in the film. Female cyborgs are not universally liberated in *Ex Machina*. The film is instead a narrative of *white* female empowerment. Ava may gain her freedom, but her freedom is accompanied by Kyoko's murder - Kyoko is a disposable female cyborg body. Nishime describes *Ex Machina* as a film that demonstrates, "the dependency of white female empowerment on the disposition of Asian bodies."[136] Ava may escape, but Kyoko is still murdered. Importantly, Kyoko is not the only Asian female cyborg necessary for Ava to gain her freedom. At the conclusion of the film, when Ava is covering her robot body in order to escape the facility, Ava peels skin off of an Asian female cyborg and applies it to her own body. Ava must literally skin an Asian female cyborg in order to gain her freedom, and her ability to take the skin from the Asian cyborg depends on her being deactivated and incapable of making demands of her own.[137] Asian female cyborgs are disposable in the film and positioned as inconsequential to the film's ultimate message of female empowerment.

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[135] An example of this is Angela Watercutter's review in *Wired*.
[136] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures," 35.

Viewers of the film might defend depicting Nathan's abuse of Kyoko because it illustrates that Nathan is not the hero of the film. Watching Nathan abuse Kyoko solidifies the viewer's sense that Nathan is not the protagonist. Yet, even in this "progressive" reading of the film's racial politics, Kyoko is simply a tool to explore white male characterization. Her abuse is justified in service of teaching us more about the white male characters in the film, but does nothing to further our sense of her as a character.[138] Even if Kyoko's imprisonment justifies our sense that Nathan is a bad guy, Kyoko's death is unnecessary. At that point in the film, the viewer has recognized Nathan as the antagonist. Kyoko's death is yet another example in film of excessive violence against a "disposable" Asian woman.

Kyoko is one of many female cyborgs of color depicted in the film, though all of the other female cyborgs of color have already been deactivated. Nathan deactivates all of these female cyborgs of color after they fail to meet his standards for artificial consciousness. Nathan proceeds to store the bodies of these female cyborgs in his bedroom, stuffed into mirrored closets that face his bed. Katie Jones argues that the plot of *Ex Machina* is designed to imitate the Bluebeard fable. [139] In the Bluebeard tale, Bluebeard marries a new wife, whom he promptly bans from visiting the attic. His wife eventually visits the attic and discovers the dismembered corpses of Bluebeard's past wives. In *Ex Machina*, Caleb replaces the wife and discovers the dismembered bodies of Nathan's previous cyborg models in his bedroom.[140] These previous cyborg models are all women of color, with the one black female cyborg, Jasmine, missing a head and face. Danielle Wong describes Jasmine's lack of a head as implying that she lacks intelligence or sentience and "visualizing the stereotype of black women being *overly* bodied."[141] Jasmine, as a prototype for Ava's eventual creation, echoes the historic use of black women as unnamed and often faceless experimental subjects in medical and scientific discoveries. Typically, those discoveries that used the bodies of black women only benefitted white women. For example, early gynecological innovations depended on using the bodies of black freed women and slaves who were seen as dispensable subjects of experimentation.[142] Similarly, the literally faceless Jasmine is an experimental subject who is used and promptly discarded in order to create the final, "liberated" white female cyborg. Once again, technologies developed using black female bodies benefit white women at the expense of the black woman.

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[137] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures," 35.
[138] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures," 40.
[139] Katie Jones, "Bluebeardean Futures in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*," 22.
[140] Katie Jones, "Bluebeardean Futures in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*," 22.

The presence of these other female robots in the film allows for Caleb's "nice guy" status to be called into question. While Caleb is willing and ready to betray Nathan in order to free Ava, he never even thinks of rescuing Kyoko. In fact, he never reveals to Ava that he knows of Kyoko's existence. This omission suggests that Caleb is not empathetic with Ava simply because he views her as human and believes she deserves unconditional freedom, but rather wants to free Ava because he believes she wants to be with him and love him. Nathan encourages Caleb's affection for Ava, believing that if Caleb wants to assist Ava and help her escape this is a sign of Ava's consciousness and humanity. Nathan has concocted this entire experiment to prove his own achievement. If Ava has consciousness, Nathan has succeeded. The fact that Caleb is willing to betray Nathan, a human, for a robot illustrates the extent to which Ava has convinced Caleb of her humanity. Ultimately, the important question is not whether or not Ava can have affection for Caleb, but rather whether Caleb *believes* Ava can have affection for him. This supports Lin's claim that "it does not matter whether or not the robot is really capable of loving someone, what matters is how humans behave."[143] The ethical questions raised by robots are best examined by interrogating the ways humans react to those robots.

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[141] Danielle Wong, "Dismembered Asian/American Android Parts in *Ex Machina* as 'Inorganic' Critique," *Transformations* 29 (2017): 41.

[142] Laura Briggs, "The Race of Hysteria: 'Overcivilization' and the 'Savage' Woman in Late Nineteenth-Century Obstetrics and Gynecology," *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 262.

The moment at which the film can most clearly be read as a feminist reimagining of previous narratives about female robots and their male creators occurs in the resolution of the film, when Ava and Kyoko kill Nathan and Ava ultimately leaves the facility with Caleb locked inside. While Caleb may be the film's protagonist, the one whom the audience is expected to identify with throughout the film and the lens through which we initially interpret the film's world, Ava is the film's hero. Trapping Caleb is the only way Ava can live freely outside of the facility. If Caleb leaves with Ava, she will be trapped once again. He will still be able to control her because he knows she is a robot and can immediately reveal that to the world if he ever gets tired of her. Trapping Caleb is ultimately necessary for Ava's survival. His entrapment is not out of cold-blood but rather a rational decision because of Ava's own desire to survive.

Caleb's entrapment is also an intensely ambivalent moment in the film. Because viewers have been encouraged to empathize with Caleb throughout the film, watching Ava abandon him to die can feel extremely cruel. While Caleb only empathizes with Ava because of his crush on her, Caleb is also never depicted engaging in the same extremely abusive behavior as Nathan. Because of this, viewers can feel discomfited by Ava's willingness to let Caleb die. Caleb's implied death makes reading Ava as the empathetic protagonist of *Ex Machina* far more difficult. Instead, because the audience is encouraged to identify with Caleb throughout the course of the film, watching Ava decide to kill him is a moment where she shifts from killing for her survival to killing out of "cold-blood." While I would argue Ava abandoning Caleb is necessary for her to survive without being constantly constrained by Caleb, Caleb's death can still easily be read as a tragic scene.

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[143] Patrick Lin, *Robot Ethics,* 241

Ava's survival beyond the conclusion of the film's plot represents a deliberate and significant subversion of previous fictional narratives of female robots. In the typical female robot story, the female robot is constructed by the male scientist as an improvement on human woman, the female robot inevitably either does exactly what she was programmed to do and yet still everything goes wrong or the female robot misfires. *Ex Machina* represents a critical departure from the traditional narrative arc. After the ending of this film, the status quo is permanently disrupted. There is no restoration of normality, but rather the creation of an entirely new world with new possibilities. However, even as Ava is allowed to survive the film, Kyoko is not. The one character of color in the film is killed and refused liberation from her captivity.

Despite Ava being allowed to survive the end of the film, I would argue the film is easily read as a technophobic parable that tackles and ultimately reinforces current anxieties about the creation of AI. AI has occupied a dedicated space in collective nightmares, with articles in scientific magazines examining almost monthly whether AI should be created. When Caleb and Nathan are sitting on a bench together discussing Ava, Caleb asks Nathan, "Why did you make Ava?" Nathan responds, "Wouldn't you if you could?" While Nathan may believe there is no reason not to make Ava, we as the audience are expected to think that perhaps there are some very good reasons – including Nathan's eventual death. The onscreen death of Nathan and the presumed off-screen death of Caleb both serve to reinforce the underlying theme that AI represent significant danger to the humans with whom she coexists. While Ava is not eliminated at the end of the film, as Short writes usually happens in female robot films, she is still represented as a threat to the humans occupying the screen. The implication is that none of this would have happened had Ava not been created.

Ava, the film suggests, is not morally or psychologically burdened with responsibility for the deaths of Nathan and Caleb. Rather, Caleb and Nathan are responsible for their own demise by trapping her in the facility and testing her. Ava can coexist with humans, she just cannot coexist with them in a situation where she is kept as a captive and threatened with inevitable destruction. In this circumstance, even a human woman could not be expected to coexist with human men. Ava does not kill the men because of some sort of inherently evil aspect of AI, but rather kills them because the circumstances force her to perform certain actions. Throughout the film, Ava is consistently motivated by her desire to be a human among humans, not by a desire to kill all of humanity. Ava has no revenge plot in mind, and at the end of the film stands on a crowded street corner and observes human passerby. The implication, therefore, is not that the film rejects the creation of AI but rather rejects the creation of consciousness with the goal of controlling that consciousness.

By allowing Ava to survive past the end of the film, *Ex Machina* rejects decades of films that depict violent murders of female cyborgs or only allows female cyborgs to survive past the end of the film if they are domesticated and behave in acceptably feminine ways. Yet *Ex Machina* is not a complete redemption of the female cyborg. Only Ava, the *white* female cyborg, is allowed to survive and her survival is dependent on the death of Asian female cyborgs. The female cyborgs that came before her who, like Kyoko, are women of color, are left in Nathan's lair. Ava must literally skin an Asian female cyborg in order to achieve her liberation. *Ex Machina*'s "progressive" gender politics are not universally accessible.

Ex Machina fulfills the subversive potential that exists within fictional female robot narratives, though primarily focuses on the white female cyborg. Ava is not the cyborg of Donna Haraway's fantasies, but I would argue is in fact a far more subversive being. Unlike Haraway's cyborgs that exist outside of the hierarchies of gender, race and class, Ava is forced to navigate these structures as a female robot and ultimately manages to survive and imagine other possibilities for herself in spite of these structures. Caleb may be the character with whom we enter the film, but Ava is the one who we leave with. Ultimately, this film is Ava's story. *Bitch Media* and *Ms. Magazine* may not think *Ex Machina* is feminist, but in a genre where female robots are burned at the stake, raped to death and blown up, Ava's survival marks a deliberate rejection of the most misogynistic tropes that plague and finally destroy the robot sisters that have come before her.

3

Domesticating the Female Cyborg in *Westworld*

The 2016 television reboot of the film *Westworld* (1973) makes a crucial update to the original narrative. Instead of aligning the viewers' allegiances with the humans, the viewers' sympathies lie with the machines. Almost every reviewer of the new *Westworld* praises the treatment of the hosts as the heroes, with Emily Nussbaum of the *New Yorker* writing, "these hosts… are far more layered than the tourists who exploit them."[144] This realignment of the viewer's allegiances from the humans to the hosts only takes on full significance when compared to the original *Westworld*, where robots were uncomplicated villains who were programmed to kill. In the original *Westworld*, the viewer was never encouraged to question the ethical implications of keeping artificial beings imprisoned for the entertainment of humans. In the *Westworld* remake, this is the driving question of the series.

The cyborgs of *Westworld* are not the villains, but rather are the victims of relentless corporate greed that forces the cyborgs to fulfill the most disturbing wishes of wealthy human visitors. *Westworld* reimagines a hierarchy where humans are morally inferior to the machines. Throughout the series, we watch humans abuse, torture, rape, and murder the hosts, acting out violent fantasies on their bodies. Meanwhile, the cyborgs are depicted as far more empathetic, with the viewer experiencing the cyborgs' flashbacks to trauma they have incurred at the hands of the guests. *Westworld* positions the cyborg as morally superior to the human by encouraging viewers to sympathize with the cyborg at the expense of the human.

Crucially, the artificial beings most central to the show are also women. While *Ex Machina*'s Ava embodies anxious cultural narratives about human men being displaced from the workforce, *Westworld* reimagines technology as victim and, in doing so, pushes back at the narrative of technology as threat. By having the central cyborgs of *Westworld* be women who see themselves as mothers and daughters, *Westworld* mitigates the fear of rogue technology by instead having that technology embody incredibly traditional understandings of womanhood. Female cyborgs, *Westworld* seems to say, are not villains but rather embody feminine ideals that neutralize their threat. In doing so, *Westworld* uses the image of traditional motherhood and family life to evoke sympathies from the viewer. These female cyborgs are *good* cyborgs, unlike the monstrous cyborgs of the past. Even as *Westworld* redeems technology from its usual role of evil in science fiction, women must remain traditionally feminine in order for technology to be redeemed.

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[144] Emily Nussbaum, "The Meta-Politics of 'Westworld,'" *New Yorker*, October 24, 2016.

The original *Westworld* made no attempt to redeem technology. Directed by Michael Crichton, of *Jurassic Park* fame, *Westworld* was released in 1973. The plot features two men who vacation in “Westworld”, an Old West theme park where guests pay exorbitant amounts of money in order to enjoy the park’s attractions, primarily guns and girls. Incredibly lifelike robots entertain the guests as prostitutes, cowboys and villains. The Gunslinger, a robot that is especially good at shootouts, is the star attraction of Westworld. Despite the ubiquity of weapons and violence in the Wild West, Westworld is completely safe for guests because the weapons cannot harm the guests.

However, a computer virus soon infects the robots of Westworld causing the robots begin to kill the guests. The robots are not consciously choosing to rebel against their oppressors, but rather because their programming has gone haywire. The Gunslinger stalks two of the human guests through the park, but the Gunslinger is simply doing “what it is programmed to do, without passion or hatred."[145] None of the robots speak to each other or attempt to develop any kind of collective consciousness and therefore fail to have any political motive behind their uprising.[146] Because the robots are not orchestrating a conscious overthrow of the guests of Westworld, empathy for the robots is difficult to come by. The robots are little more than malfunctioning toasters. Predictably, therefore, the film's allegiances remain firmly with the human guests who fight the robots and the film is "clearly a Robots-As-Menace story."[147] Robots are violent creatures that act aggressively due to their programming and are the central antagonists of the original *Westworld*.

The original *Westworld* envisions excursions to Westworld as a chance for male guests to reclaim lost masculinity. Men can be violent, can bed any woman they want and do not have to answer to their presumably overbearing wives. Westworld is made to service "innate masculine aggression" and appeals to male guests because the park allows them to access notions of violent, traditional masculinity.[148] One of the human men, Peter, who visits Westworld is mocked by a robot for his presumed emasculation. The robot remarks, "Get this boy a bib… He needs his mama." Peter proceeds to shoot the robot and has sex with one of the many prostitute robots, which begins Peter's "search for an authentic masculine self: the potent Western man, whose guns… can project his will upon the world."[149] By having casual sex with women, shooting guns, and killing hosts, all pleasures that are presumably denied to men in the real world, visitors to Westworld attempt to use technology in order to support fantasies of masculinity threatened by technology in the "real" world.[150] The film offers up these fantasies without critique, instead appearing to condemn the emasculation of men in modernity while celebrating the reclamation of masculinity offered to those men by Westworld. The creators of Westworld use technology in order to allow men to reclaim their lost masculinities.

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[145] Martin Parker, *Manufacturing Bodies: Flesh, Organization, Cyborgs*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2000), 80.
[146] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 64.
[147] Peter Suderman, "How HBO's *Westworld* Bridges the Divide Between Evil Robots and Empathetic Robots," *Vox*, Oct. 10, 2016, http://www.vox.com/culture/2016/10/10/13189660/westworld-hbo-robot-frankenstein.
[148] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema: Between Fantasy and Reality*, (Rutgers: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 126.
[149] Loren Quiring, "Dead Men Walking: Consumption and Agency in the Western," *Film and History* 33, no. 1 (2003): 41.

However, even the masculine fantasy offered by Westworld is a mere simulacrum of "true" masculinity. The androids are programmed to always lose fights with the visitors and the violence is never a true threat to the visitors. Even as technology is able to gesture towards the masculine days of yore, Westworld is always a pale imitation. The appeal of Westworld is that while acts like murder and violence offer incredible excitement, the visitor "suffers no responsibility for his acts and… ultimately no one is truly hurt."[151] However, the very fact that no one is really hurt and there are no consequences or risks to one's actions indicates the extent to which Westworld is not truly a place of danger and bravery. It is only when the hosts begin to malfunction and the Gunslinger begins to stalk Peter that Peter is "forced to undergo a kind of rite of passage into 'proper masculinity' in order to survive the android's attacks."[152] Real masculinity, *Westworld* appears to say, can only be achieved when death is on the line.

The original *Westworld*'s interrogation of masculinity in the face of modernity was quickly followed by *The Terminator* (1984), which featured a similar narrative to *Westworld* "in which bad cyborgs go on a rampage and must be thwarted."[153] The bad cyborgs during this period of cinematic history were predominantly male, with the hypermasculine villains largely displacing the femme fatale robot of *Metropolis*. *Westworld* and *The Terminator* borrow heavily from the action genre, and both films "presented the viewer with exaggerated visions of masculine subjectivity."[154] Cornea argues that these films use of the hypermasculine figure of the cyborg "can be easily understood as a highly defensive sign for masculinity in crisis."[155] The Terminator is a violent, killing machine and Balsamo argues, "cyborgs and men are compatible images which mutually support cultural associations among masculinity, rationality, technology and science."[156] The Terminator's masculinity serves to reinforce the technological aspects of his body, because masculinity and technology are so tightly intertwined. In contrast to the emasculated human men of *Westworld*, the technologically constructed Terminator becomes a paragon of masculinity by abandoning the weakness of human flesh.

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[150] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 89.
[151] JP Tellotte, *Replications*, 139.
[152] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema*, 126.
[153] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 24.

The critical literature surrounding the original *Westworld* primarily focuses on masculinity and not on the female robots within *Westworld* whose role is largely relegated to sexbots. The gendered social roles of the robots are so ingrained in their programming that even a violent and destructive computer virus only encourages resistance in ways that align with gendered expectations. As JP Telotte notes, the most a female robot does to resist the guests is when "a medieval queen 'programmed for infidelity' refuses a guest's seductions."[157] The male android of *Westworld* gets to be the Gunslinger, stalking guests through the park ready to kill, "white female resistance is shown by a slap around the face."[158] While the male robot is shown as a cold-blooded, violent and strategic killer, the female robots continue to resist the guests in stereotypically feminine ways – for instance, a queen slapping a male guest in the face. *Westworld* remains firmly rooted in gendered cinematic stereotypes and "even when the resort's androids appear to rebel they significantly remain confined to their gendered… roles."[159] Female robots pose dramatically less threat to the human visitors than the male robots, which seems to indicate that femininity mixing with technology mitigates many of the threats posed by technology. The female robots of Westworld are disappointingly bad at malfunctioning in violent and destructive ways.

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[154] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema*, 120.
[155] Christine Cornea, *Science Fiction Cinema*, 121.
[156] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 150.
[157] J.P. Telotte, *Replications*, 139.
[158] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 90.

The *Westworld* TV series gives the female hosts a serious upgrade. The TV series takes many of the elements of the original movie and reworks them into a show that places the experiences of the hosts at the center. Westworld is still a giant attraction for the extraordinarily wealthy; a trip to Westworld costs $40,000 a day. The Delos Corporation still owns Westworld and hosts still provide entertainment to guests seeking violent and sexual thrills. The hosts' memories are wiped after every narrative arc and they are placed back into the park with no memory of the previous violence enacted upon them by the guests. Despite having their memories wiped, the hosts have a backstory that they believe to be true and at the start of the series none of the hosts realize that they are trapped in a park – they all believe they are humans living in the Old West. However, at the start of the series, Dr. Ford, the creator of the hosts, has introduced a new program into the hosts called a *reverie*, which allows hosts to retain memories of emotions and sensations from previous experiences. Dr. Ford believes that the reveries will make the hosts appear more lifelike because they can develop mannerisms and behavior that build organically off of previous experiences. Dr. Ford, an older man, created the hosts alongside a now deceased partner Arnold. Arnold's death hangs over the entire series, with the cause of his death hidden until the final episode of the show. However, Dr. Ford creates a cyborg modeled after Arnold, named Bernard, who is given all of Arnold's memories.

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[159] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 90.

As the series progresses, two of the hosts, Maeve, a black, British-accented, brothel madam, and Dolores, a white farmer's daughter, appear to begin to realize that they are being held hostage in Westworld. Maeve begins recalling memories of a previous storyline when she was a homesteader with a young daughter and Dolores begins to have hallucinations of a previous memory in which she kills Arnold after he programs her to kill him. The cause of Dolores's hallucinations is not revealed until the final episode, when we finally learn that Dolores is reliving shooting Arnold over and over again. Meanwhile, Maeve quickly learns that every time she dies she gets taken into the laboratories of Westworld to be rebuilt and Maeve begins to manipulate the scientists of Westworld in order to free herself. Meanwhile, Dolores accompanies two human guests, Billy and Logan, on adventures around Westworld. Billy falls in love with Dolores and, after Dolores goes missing, searches the entire park for her. Billy eventually finds Dolores but she no longer remembers him, which begins Billy's transformation into the Man in Black, a guest to the park who wants the hosts to be truly violent. He wants the hosts to be able to harm the guests, to pose a real threat to the visitors. At the end of the series, Maeve manages to escape Westworld but ultimately returns to the park in order to find her "daughter." Meanwhile, the rest of the robots, including Dolores, are programmed by Dr. Ford to murder Westworld's Board of Directors and the series ends with the robots opening fire on the guests.

Initially, the TV *Westworld* can read as a complete rejection of the original film, replacing Crichton's "trademark technophobia" with a celebration of cyborg identity through two female cyborg protagonists.[160] Characters who were previously confined to stereotypical supporting roles become the heroes of the reimagined *Westworld*. Dolores can initially appear as

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[160] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 89.

"a traumatized Eve who seems poised to become an avenger."[161] Reviewers of the show are unanimous in their assessment that *Westworld* asks the viewers to sympathize with the hosts and not with the guests who visit the park.[162] Yet it is important to consider *how* the viewer begins to sympathize with the hosts, especially Dolores. In the first episode, the Man in Black rapes Dolores. Watching Dolores be subjected to sexual violence exists "to elicit sympathy for [her] powerlessness, evoked in the shocked, deflated look on [her] face when [she] realizes how defenseless [she] is."[163] Maeve is also a sexual commodity for the guests of *Westworld*. While we do not see Maeve subjected to physically violent sexual assaults, Maeve is still, though less explicitly, subjected to nonconsensual sex. She is programmed to be incapable of saying no to the guests. *Westworld* victimizes the female cyborgs by subjecting them to sexual assault in order to demonstrate that they are cyborgs worth saving. Victimization and violent subjugation are signs of humanness for the female cyborg.

Sexual violence committed by humans against female cyborgs is a popular theme for cyborg films and is used to emphasize the ultimate vulnerability of female cyborgs. Sexual assault is used to either punish "bad" female cyborgs, and demonstrate that they are controllable, or to elicit sympathy from the viewer towards "good" female cyborgs. In the 1982 film *Android*, a human rapes and kills a female cyborg, Maggie. This plot moment is used to simultaneously demonstrate the human's villainy and the female cyborg's vulnerability.[164] *Westworld* takes a similar tactic to *Android*, using sexual violence in order to emphasize Dolores' vulnerability and by implication her humanity. Additionally, sexual violence illustrates the specific dynamics of the oppression in which she is unwittingly stuck. However, *Westworld* reflects how popular entertainment uses sexual violence in order to justify depicting female empowerment as a revenge fantasy. *Game of Thrones* (2011-present), another HBO offering, justifies depictions of graphic violence perpetrated against female bodies by having those female characters engage in equally graphic acts of revenge against their abusers that invariably depicts these women as strong-willed characters.[165] In order to legitimize female cyborgs taking violent revenge against humans, the show depicts female cyborgs being subjected to graphic sexual abuse.[166]

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[161] Emily Nussbaum, "The Meta-Politics of Westworld," Oct. 26, 2016.

[162] See reviews from Emily Nussbaum for *The New Yorker*, Laura June for *The Cut*, Christopher Orr for *The Atlantic*, James Poniewozik for *The New York Times*.

[163] Melanie McFarland, "To Be a Woman in 'Westworld': HBO's Brutality Fetish Still Going Strong in Presumptive 'Game of Thrones' Successor," *Salon*, Sep. 28, 2016. http://www.salon.com/2016/09/28/to-be-a-woman-in-westworld-hbos-brutality-fetish-still-going-strong-in-presumptive-game-of-thrones-successor/.

[164] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 94.

The show's creators could justify depicting the Man in Black committing acts of sexual violence against Dolores if Dolores were able to eventually find some sort of cathartic release or power. Because the viewer has witnessed Dolores be subjected to graphic, repeated violence, her final act of aggression can feel like a moment of cathartic release where she is finally claiming power over her oppressors. Instead, Dolores' final act of "rebellion", where she opens fire on the Westworld Board of Directors and Dr. Ford, is another piece of programming forced onto her by Dr. Ford. Even her initial act of "vengeance", where she kills Arnold and rejects being controlled by her creator, is programmed into her. In the moments onscreen where she is intended to have agency, she is still subjected to the whims of her creators. In many ways, Dolores is little more than the robots of the original *Westworld* who engage in the illusion of rebellion but are, in reality, malfunctioning due to rogue programming. Given Dolores's lack of agency over the course of the show, the sexual violence is treated ultimately as simply another moment of being denied access to power rather than a character-transforming event, as in *Game of Thrones*.

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[165] Eliana Dockterman, "Women Now Rule Westworld. But Was It Worth It?," *Time*, December 5, 2016. http://time.com/4589310/westworld-finale-dolores-maeve/.

[166] Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape: Film and Television in Postfeminist Culture* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 97.

When asked by reporters about the sexual violence in *Westworld*, Lisa Joy, one of the co-creators of the show, replied, "there are people who have engaged in violence and who are victims of violence" in order to justify the depiction of sexual violence.[167] Television and films should absolutely depict women who have experienced sexual violence. The danger emerges when sexual violence is used as a plot element in order to make a female character vulnerable and engender sympathy from the viewer. Instead of developing Dolores' character, sexual violence is merely a tool to elicit pity for Dolores from the viewer. In response to viewer concerns about the show's excessive sexual violence, the head of HBO programming Casey Bloys argued, "I can tell you the violence, it's not just specific to women… Plenty of men are killed as well."[168] This response misses the larger point of such criticism, which that the different *ways* in which violence is enacted upon male and female cyborgs aligns with gender differences. Female cyborgs are sexually assaulted while men get shot, stabbed, and beaten up but are not subjected to sexual violence.

Westworld also reproduces the popular association of moral goodness and femininity in popular depictions of female cyborgs. For example, Rachel, a replicant, or humanoid robot, from *Blade Runner* (1982) who, like the hosts, believes she is human, challenges Deckard's belief that she is a cyborg due to her "well-worn pout and vulnerable sexuality."[169] Rachel's femininity, and the vulnerability associated with femininity, challenge Deckard's belief that she is not human and prevent him from killing her. Rachel's vulnerability leads to her being spared from death, while other female cyborgs, notably those who attempt to revolt against their human oppressors, are murdered.[170] Deckard's acceptance of Rachel even as he kills and hunts other replicants is dependent on her vulnerability. Deckard, and the viewer, see her traditional femininity as indicative of her humanness, which demonstrates the extent to which femininity is considered to be a core element of the human woman. Being considered human as a female cyborg is contingent on subscribing to exceptionally traditional notions of femininity through familial and romantic positioning. In order for cyborg women to be considered good, they must perform as a traditionally feminine woman by exuding vulnerability and being physically attractive.

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[167] Kaitlin Thomas, "Westworld Creators Defend Series' Use of Rape and Violence Against Women," *TVGuide*, July 30, 2016. http://www.tvguide.com/news/westworld-defend-rape-violence-women-tca-hbo/.

[168] Kaitlin Thomas, "Westworld Creators," *TVGuide*.

[169] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism," *The Gendered Cyborg*, 151.

The female cyborgs of *Westworld* are constantly coded as feminine, whether through Maeve searching for her "daughter" or Dolores taking on the role of farmer's daughter and love interest of Billy, a human guest. While Dolores' hyperfemininity can initially appear similar to Rachel's, as a tool to elicit sympathy from the viewer, some feminist cyborg scholars have defended the hyperfemininity of female cyborgs as a way to further destabilize the boundary between technology and nature. Anne Balsamo argues that the linking of the feminine (biological) with the masculine (technological) in the form of the female cyborg potentially does "*more* to challenge the opposition between human and machine than do male cyborgs because femininity is culturally imagined as less compatible with technology than masculinity."[171] Additionally, the necessarily constructed nature of femininity in female cyborgs potentially serves to expose all femininity as constructed and "may productively be used to explore the synthetic nature of femininity itself."[172] The female cyborg represents a melding of the masculine and feminine in potentially transgressive ways.

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[170] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 93.

[171] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 151.

[172] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 7.

However, because the machine part of the female cyborg is associated with masculinity, female cyborgs must be hyperfeminized in order to demonstrate that they are still "female." Part of the reason "heroic" female cyborgs subscribe to traditional femininity is because technology and machinery are strongly associated with masculinity while the organic, biological and natural are all associated with femininity. Aino-Kaisa Koistinen applies this reading to *The Bionic Woman* and argues, "the bionics often cause [the Bionic Woman] to be positioned outside traditional, acceptable femininity – and this must be balanced out by acceptable gendered behavior."[173] Similarly, the cyborgs of *Westworld* conform to traditionally feminine expectations of behavior in order to demonstrate that they are distinct from the machine parts that comprise their bodies. While earlier I discussed how Balsamo believes the female cyborg offers a potentially disruptive figure that destabilizes the boundary between nature/feminine and machine/masculine, Balsamo later argues, "female cyborgs, while challenging the relationship between femaleness and technology, perpetuate oppressive gender stereotypes."[174] By imagining female cyborgs as traditionally feminine, *Westworld* reinforces femininity as a necessary qualification for being a sympathetic female cyborg.

Critically, the oppressive feminizing of female cyborgs in *Westworld* is not ubiquitous, but varies based on race. Using the cult of true womanhood and Venetria Patton's discussion of legacy of the enslavement of black women in fiction, I want to analyze the dramatically different characterizations of Dolores and Maeve. While Dolores, a white female cyborg, is characterized as being pious, pure, submissive and domestic, particularly at the beginning of the series as her character is being established for viewers, Maeve is a "childless" prostitute who is assertive and confident in her interactions with others.[175] Maeve curses more than anyone in the series and flirts with the guests, confident in her ability to get what she wants. Emily Nussbaum of *The New Yorker* describes Dolores and Maeve as opposing figures, "virgin and whore, white woman and black woman, innocent and cynic."[176] However, the delineation of virgin/whore and innocent/cynic is not arbitrarily assigned to Dolores or Maeve, but rather is a delineation that is often drawn along racial lines for women, as racialization marks the Black woman as intrinsically un-innocent.[177] While Dolores' femininity is defined in relation to her purity, abstinence from sex and comfortable home life, Maeve's femininity is defined in terms of her sexuality and absence of identifiable home life. Dolores is the perfect innocent farmer's daughter. She is white, blonde-haired and blue-eyed, calling to mind images of innocent femininity. Maeve is the black, jaded, brothel madam who calls to mind images of disruptive, tarnished femininity.

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[173] Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, "'The Machine is Nothing Without the Woman': Gender, Humanity and the Cyborg Body in the Original and Reimagined Bionic Woman," *Science Fiction Film and Television* 8, no. 4 (2015): 59.
[174] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs," 151.

The fact that Westworld is imagined to take place immediately post-Civil War makes a reading of Dolores representing the cult of true womanhood far more applicable.[178] The cult of true womanhood did not merely present aspirational goals for women, but rather believed the elements of true womanhood – piety, purity, domesticity and submissiveness – were "necessary components of womanhood."[179] Women could not just *want* to be pious, they had to constantly behave in pious ways. However, these ideals of "true" femininity were only accessible to middle and upper-class white women with the time, money and racial advantages of whiteness being associated with purity to dedicate towards fulfilling the goals of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Because black women were disallowed from accessing the ideals of the cult of true womanhood, black women were effectively excluded from the category of "woman" altogether.[180] The cult of true womanhood locked black women out of the category of woman and enforced racial hierarchies.

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[175] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women's Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 16. Piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity are the four key components of the Cult of True Womanhood or the Cult of Domesticity.

[176] Emily Nussbaum, "Meta-Politics of Westworld."

[177] Bryana French, "More Than Jezebels and Freaks: Exploring How Black Girls Navigate Sexual Coercion and Sexual Scripts," *Journal of African American Studies* 17, no. 1 (2013): 36.

[178] The cult of true womanhood is often defined as existing at its peak between 1820-1860. Even after the cult of true womanhood began to dissipate, it continued to inform modern conceptions of appropriate femininity.

[179] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains*, 29.

The programming of the cyborg body makes the social conditioning of the natural body explicit. The fact that Maeve is programmed without children and programmed to sexually pleasure guests explicitly articulates the racist exclusions enacted upon the black female body. Simultaneously, Dolores' programming exposes the performative nature of the cult of true womanhood. Dolores is only the innocent farmers daughter because she has been programmed to be. As Nussbaum puts it, Dolores "is not good, she's just drawn that way."[181] Dolores and Maeve both expose the constructed nature of femininity and, specifically, the coding of ideal femininity as white.[182] However, even as white femininity is exposed as a constructed fantasy, Dolores and Maeve are programmed in ways that reinscribe traditional notions of race and femininity. Presumably Dolores could be programmed as the assertive brothel madam and Maeve could be programmed to be the innocent farmer's daughter, yet the two are programmed in ways that align to very specific traditional expectations about the ways they ought behave based on race and gender. Even as *Westworld* makes the construction of white femininity explicit, the show simultaneously reaffirms the relevancy of those constructed identities by aligning character traits to expectations about white and black women.

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[180] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains*, 31.
[181] Emily Nussbaum, "Meta-Politics of Westworld," *The New Yorker*.
[182] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 15.

By being programmed as a brothel madame and constructed as a black woman, Maeve is effectively prevented from accessing the feminine ideals that are accessible to Dolores. As the series progresses, Maeve begins to remember when she was previously programmed to be a homesteader with a daughter. Eventually, Maeve is reprogrammed to be a brothel madam and no longer has her daughter. When Maeve is reprogrammed to be a brothel madam and stripped of her status as a mother, Maeve is effectively discharged from her role as a traditionally feminine woman. Patton discusses how enslaved black women were disallowed “the rights and privileges of motherhood because this also denied their status as women and omitted them from the cult of true womanhood.”[183] Additionally, the separation of Maeve from her “daughter” mirrors ways slave mothers were only allowed to take on the identity of mother so long as it served the economic purposes of the plantation.[184] Once Maeve is deemed to be more economically useful to Westworld as a brothel madam, she is stripped of her identity as mother. While Maeve’s initial characterization may appear as if she is merely reenacting stereotypes of black womanhood, her emergence as a character develops in unexpected and hopeful ways. While Dolores’ programming keeps her reliant on men as guiding forces in her search for liberation, Maeve is on her own, manipulating the technicians of Westworld into assisting her. Here, Dolores’ programming is actually a disadvantage compared to Maeve’s confident, assertive characterization.

For most of *Westworld*, Maeve appears to be fighting to escape in order to achieve her own liberation. Yet ultimately, the series conclusion suggests that what Maeve wants most is to return to her daughter. Remembering her life with her “daughter” and their brutal murder at the hands of the Man in Black enables Maeve to begin to realize the artificial and controlled nature of life in Westworld. She threatens scientists and convinces them to program her with significantly higher levels of intelligence and strength in order to escape Westworld. In the final episode of the series, she almost manages to escape the Westworld facility but instead requests information about where her “daughter” is located in the park. Maeve even tells Felix, a technician at Westworld, “she was never my daughter” and acknowledges the artificial nature of their connection. However, despite *knowing* that her daughter is not actually her daughter and is instead a host who will likely no longer “remember” Maeve, she nevertheless feels overwhelmed by her desire to return to find her daughter. Motherhood becomes ambiguously a sign of her imprisonment and an expression of agency – motherhood is a chosen affiliation.

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[183] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains*, 31.
[184] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains*, 6.

Even as Maeve recognizes the artificiality of her relationship with her daughter, her core programming forces her to return to her daughter.[185] Motherhood, and in relation, femininity, ultimately overrides her desire to escape the park. A more optimistic reading of this moment yields the understanding that Maeve wishes to reclaim her identity as a mother, an identity that has been denied to her as a black woman. In order to combat the dehumanization of having her identity as a mother stolen, Maeve seeks to reclaim her daughter. Maeve’s reclaiming of her identity as a mother draws from how “many female slaves turned to the role of the mother as a means to assert their personhood and womanhood.”[186] After having been denied the identity of mother, enslaved women sought to reassert their claim over the identity of motherhood. Patricia Hill Collins in her seminal text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the*

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[185] Maddy Myers, “I Watched the *Westworld* Pilot and it Felt Like a Big Pile of Wasted Potential,” *The Mary Sue*, October 2, 2016. https://www.themarysue.com/westworld-pilot-review/.

[186] Venetria Patton, *Women in Chains*, 92.

Politics of Empowerment argues that many Black mothers view motherhood as a chance to raise strong and self-assured daughters capable of resisting and fighting back against oppressive systems. Black motherhood becomes a site of resistance.[187] Similarly, Maeve refuses to obey her new programming that erases her identity as a mother and instead seeks to embrace her previous identity as a mother. Reentering the park to find her "daughter" is, in this reading, an act of resistance.

In a more critical reading of this scene, Maeve's decision to reenter the park is a moment where she loses an enormous amount of power. After spending the entire season working desperately to free herself from the park, Maeve decides to give up on her escape and instead find a daughter that she knows is not hers. Even when motherhood is explicitly constructed and shown to be artificial, motherhood is still the final goal. While getting on the train to reenter Westworld, she walks past an ad that features images of her and her daughter, exposing the constructed nature of her identity as a mother. Maeve is visually confronted by images that demonstrate her role as a mother is not her own, but instead programmed into her by the runners of Westworld for their economic purposes. By returning for her daughter, Maeve's rebellion shrinks from overthrowing the entirety of Westworld to merely being a story of finding her lost child. By confining Maeve's rebellion, the show mitigates the potential power of her working against the oppressive corporation that holds her captive. Instead, this story becomes one of an alienated mother who's moment of power comes from attempting to find her child.

I refer to this moment as the domestication of Maeve's rebellion. By concluding Maeve's storyline with her returning to the park in search of her daughter, the show redirects Maeve's search for liberation from the collective to the self. Instead of attempting to liberate the hosts as a whole, Maeve is instead seeking to achieve her own emotional fulfillment. This is a classic storyline of cyborg cinema. The film initially begins with an oppressive structure that holds cyborgs hostage before eventually allowing for the liberation of a single cyborg while keeping the rest of the power structures intact. Short discusses the plot trajectory of *Blade Runner*, where the film initially raises compelling ideas about class-consciousness and rebellion "only for heterosexual romance to preclude the political ideas raised."[188] Similarly, *Westworld* emphasizes notions of collective political rebellion, only for those ideas to be eclipsed by Maeve's desire to return to being a mother. Perhaps, the fact that Maeve abandons her dreams of escape in favor of returning to her "daughter" demonstrates the inescapable nature of gendered expectations of motherhood. Ultimately, Maeve cannot resist her programming, just as women often cannot resist the cultural gendered expectations placed upon them. The show may potentially be illustrating the overwhelming, oppressive force of gendered expectations of motherhood that force women to behave in ways that are often directly oppositional to their own self-interest. However, the presentation of the scene where Maeve reenters the park is filmed with far too much ambivalence to conclusively view the scene as an indictment of the oppressive force of cultural expectations of motherhood. The music swells hopefully when Maeve receives news about her daughter and seems isolated to focusing on Maeve's singular experience rather than on motherhood as a culturally conditioned and inescapable force.

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[187] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 186-187.

By focusing on Maeve as the only robot who appears to be experiencing an emergent consciousness, the show emphasizes her as an exception to the rule rather than as an indication that there is widespread emerging consciousness in the hosts of the park. This encourages the viewer to see exclusively Maeve as worthy of liberation, in contrast to the hosts who do not have emerging personalities. Focusing on emergent personhood of an individual cyborg distracts the viewer from criticizing the structures that held her hostage in the first place.[189] The only other cyborg that we are encouraged to see as developing consciousness, Dolores, ultimately becomes a pawn in Dr. Ford's schemes and her emerging consciousness is, in fact, programming by Dr. Ford in order to orchestrate his final plan. Maeve is the only cyborg we see actively resisting her programming and forcing the technicians to alter her programming.

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[188] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 66.

I want to turn to a discussion of masculinity in the *Westworld* TV series and situate the 2016 *Westworld*'s treatment of masculinity in relation to the original *Westworld*. Earlier, I discuss how the original *Westworld* explores masculinity's interaction with modernity and uses rebelling robots as an opportunity for one of the human characters to "prove" his masculinity. In the TV series, male visitors similarly patronize Westworld in order to get a taste of the illicit pleasures given to men of the past. Rob Sheffield of *Rolling Stone* describes the *Westworld* TV series as "a show that's really about men and the sad pedestrian fantasies they come to live out."[190] I would reject a characterization of *Westworld* as a show that is *only* about the male guests who visit the park, but the male guests are certainly essential to understanding the ways *Westworld* interrogates gender.

The two human guests to the park that the show primarily focuses on, Logan and Billy/The Man in Black, are case studies in toxic masculinity. For most of the season, the identity of The Man in Black is unknown and the show jumps timelines in order to obfuscate the true nature of Billy/The Man in Black's identity. Logan and Billy are close friends who visit Westworld together and, once in Westworld, Logan encourages Billy to abandon his inhibitions and seek out pleasures from the park. Logan advertises Westworld as an opportunity for Billy to find his true self and when Billy calls Logan out on his offensive behavior, Logan replies, "I'm just being myself." Westworld is a place for men to unapologetically embrace their masculinity, and Logan's version of masculinity is hypersexualized and hyperviolent. The park is designed in order to encourage those conceptions of masculinity to dominate yet Logan continuously talks about the park as if the park is designed to reveal the "true" self. Violent, hypersexual masculinity, then, is seen to be at the core of a man and good behavior is just a performance. The park is the opportunity to unleash that core masculine self.

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[189] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*,

[190] Rob Sheffield, "What 'Westworld' Says About America Right Now," *Rolling Stone*, October 19, 2016. http://www.rollingstone.com/tv/news/rob-sheffield-what-westworld-says-about-america-right-now-w445495.

This understanding of the park as an opportunity for masculine exploration is similar to the way the original *Westworld* envisioned the experiences of male guests as reclaiming a masculine identity denied to them in the "real" world. However, unlike the original *Westworld*, the TV series does not celebratethe return to masculinity. Instead, because from the very first episode the series develops the viewer's affection for the hosts, this return to masculinity is now seen as a threat, rather than as a moment of triumph. While Billy begins the series unwilling to engage in the aggression and violence, he ends the series as the Man in Black, dragging Dolores by her hair into a barn and raping her. According to the show, this is the "real" Billy while the Billy at the beginning of the series was an artifice forced upon him by outside society. Crucially, however, this return to the "real" Billy is not a triumphant hero arc, but rather the making of a villain.

How, then, does Billy transform into the villainous Man in Black? While Billy is in the park originally, he falls in love with Dolores and believes Dolores reciprocates that love. Of course, Dolores is merely acting out programmed responses and anticipating Billy's desires. Dolores is engaged in well-disguised emotional labor, which Billy interprets as genuine emotional connection. Christine Milrod and Ronald Weitzer discuss the emotional relationships between clients and escorts engaged in sex work, finding that many clients believe that the escorts experience genuine emotional affection for them.[191] Similarly, Billy believes that Dolores genuinely reciprocates his feelings towards her, despite paying $40,000 a day for her companionship. When Dolores goes missing in a fight, Billy searches the park for her in order to save her. In Billy's mind, Dolores is the innocent, girl next door who is helpless without his protection. Eventually, he finds her with another man and she has no memory of their relationship. After this, Billy terrorizes Dolores and her family and sexually assaults Dolores, presumably believing that he is owed sex for seeking to save her. Milrod and Weitzer find that many male clients experienced intense resentment towards the escort when they recall that the emotional intimacy they are experiencing is actually a form of labor on the part of the client.[192] The emotional labor of the cyborgs is often mistaken for genuine emotions and Billy views Dolores' lack of emotional authenticity as the fault of Dolores herself rather than the Delos Corporation.

Billy is remarkably similar to Caleb in *Ex Machina*. Both men fall in love with artificial women whom they believe reciprocate their affections, yet ultimately both women are part of violent uprisings against their human captors. Importantly, *Westworld* offers a much more straightforward critique of Billy in contrast to Caleb in *Ex Machina*. Billy is depicted sexually assaulting Dolores when he becomes the Man in Black, murdering countless hosts, and taking pleasure from torturing and abusing the cyborgs of Westworld. Unlike Billy, Caleb is never depicted violently abusing the cyborgs. Instead, Caleb bears witness to Nathan's abuse of the cyborgs and then decides to help Ava escape. Caleb attempts to become Ava's accomplice while Billy abuses Dolores when she is reprogrammed and can no longer reciprocate his affections. Because Billy violently abuses Dolores, the viewer has significantly less sympathy for Billy when the robots attack and, presumably, kill him. In contrast to Billy, the viewers' sympathies likely still lie at least partially with Caleb when Ava leaves him to die. Because of this, the viewer is left feeling significantly less ambivalent about Dolores's violent rebellion than Ava's. *Westworld* actively discourages the viewer from empathizing with the humans while *Ex Machina* is far more ambivalent about where the viewer's sympathies should lie.

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[191] Christine Milrod and Ronald Weitzer, "The Intimacy Prism: Emotion Management Among the Clients of Escorts," *Men and Masculinities* 15, no. 5 (2012): 461.
[192] Christine Milrod and Ronald Weitzer, "The Intimacy Prism," 461.

Throughout the series, the Man in Black wants Westworld's hosts to be able to physically attack the guests and pose a more serious threat than bullets that explode into a puff of smoke when they hit the guests. The Man in Black yells at Dolores that he pays for her to fight back when he sexually assaults her and he often looks disappointed when the bullets bounce off of him. The only moment when the Man in Black looks satisfied is when the hosts are firing on and killing the guests and Board of Directors during the finale, because he finally sees the hosts as posing a serious threat. Part of the reason the Man in Black wants the hosts to fight back is because currently, similar to the original *Westworld*, the masculine aggression of Westworld is merely performance. There is never a serious threat and in order for the Man in Black to feel as though he is *truly* acting out his masculine fantasies, the hosts must be able to fight back. The hosts must pose some degree of risk and there must be a prospect of harm in order for the Man in Black to be a "real" man.

Westworld offers a complicated interrogation of the construction of gender and race. Female cyborgs are coded as hyperfeminine in *Westworld* in order to attract audience sympathies, and Dolores' vulnerability is emphasized through graphic scenes of sexual assault.

While Dolores and Maeve often appear to perform an incredibly traditional version of femininity, this reading becomes complicated by race. Maeve, as a black woman, is prevented from accessing the pure, domesticated femininity available to Dolores and therefore Maeve, in many ways, represents a far more transgressive female cyborg. She is a black female cyborg and is also the only cyborg that appears to truly achieve consciousness. While Maeve does ultimately return for her daughter, I argue that this return can be read as her attempting to reclaim an identity that she has been robbed of due to her identity as a black female cyborg. However, even as Maeve reclaims her identity as a mother, reclaiming that identity simultaneously mitigates much of the power of her rebellion. *Westworld* is neither a conclusively feminist text, nor a conclusively antifeminist text. Instead, moments throughout the series are often ambivalent and are able to read either as moments of intense empowerment or as moments of complicity in an oppressive system. While *Westworld* does not indict the feminization of the female cyborgs, *Westworld* does offer an aggressive rejection of traditional masculinity.

Ultimately, however, *Westworld* is not a dramatic departure from past cyborg films, but has moments of transgression framed by entrenched gendered and racial hierarchies. The two female cyborgs who emerge as central characters may not be killed at the end of the series, but their triumphs are either attributed to “natural” instincts of motherhood or are as being the result of their programming. Even in technologized female bodies, gendered ideologies dominate their identities and Dolores and Maeve continue to behave in ways that align with traditionally gendered expectations. *Westworld* does not reimagine the future potential of molding technology and the feminine, but rather uses femininity in order to temper many of the fears of technology. Technology that is vulnerable, that can be made powerless in the same way as human women, is not technology to be feared. *Westworld* plays at recuperating the romance of human and machine by sacrificing the woman.

4

Building the Perfect Woman: Mad Scientists in *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*

> "Every man-creator makes himself a woman. I do not believe that humbug about the first human being a man. If a male god created the world… then he certainly created woman first."
>
> - Thea Harbou, *Metropolis*

In Auguste Villiers' 1886 novel *L'Eve Future*, the fictional Thomas Edison turns to his companion Lord Ewald and promises to create "a being made in our image, and who, accordingly, will be to us what we are to God."[193] Almost 150 years later, Nathan, the tech bro roboticist of *Ex Machina* turns to his employee/companion Caleb and asks, "Remember how you said earlier if I'd created a machine with consciousness I'm not a man, I'm a god?" Despite being separated by over a century, both Edison and Nathan echo a similar sentiment – creating an artificial woman makes her creator akin to God. To create artificial consciousness in the form of a woman positions her maker closer to the divine than to the rest of humanity.

One year after *Ex Machina*, Dr. Ford, the roboticist of *Westworld*, turns to his companion Bernard and says, "You can't play God without being acquainted with the Devil." Unlike Edison and Nathan, Dr. Ford recognizes the Faustian bargain he is striking in order to create life in the form of the cyborg. Dr. Ford does not describe himself as a god and by using the world "play" insinuates that making life does not make one a god but merely means one is pretending to be a god. Making cyborgs does not bring Dr. Ford closer to god and, instead, draws him in communion with the Devil. Nathan and Dr. Ford may both be creating new life, but their views are strikingly different. Nathan cannot imagine himself as the villain while Dr. Ford acknowledges the moral ambiguity surrounding the creation of artificial women.

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[193] Auguste Villiers de L'Isle-Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001): 64.

Nathan and Dr. Ford are products of over a century of men in science fiction constructing artificial women. Early artificial women "are often custom-made fabrications," designed in order to fulfill the desires of a specific customer.[194] The fictional Thomas Edison of *L'Eve Future* builds Hadaly, a female robot, as an exact replica of a woman with whom his companion, Lord Ewald, is infatuated. Edison decides to build Hadaly because Lord Ewald has fallen in love with a woman who is "shallow, vulgar and materialistic" despite her perfect body.[195] Hadaly is an upgrade compared to her human model, with the attractive body but none of the shallowness. In *Metropolis* (1923), Rotwang, a scientist, builds the false Maria as a body double of the beautiful, innocent Maria in order to exact revenge. Male scientists build these early female robots as replicas of human women and advertise the robots as an improvement on imperfect human women. Olga, the robot star of *The Perfect Woman* (1949), is built as an exact replica of her creator's beautiful niece. Professor Ernest Belman, who builds Olga in *The Perfect Woman*, advertises Olga as the perfect woman because "she does what she is told, she can't talk, can't eat."[196] Scientists model these female cyborgs on "imperfect" human women, but make these cyborgs without the annoyances, like opinions, that supposedly plague human women.

These early scientists do not create female robots simply for the sake of exploring AI, but rather create female robots as improvements on the imperfect human women that surround them. The early scientists on film are less concerned with revolutionizing science than with creating individual perfect artificial women. In these narratives, technology is deployed in service of remaking the world into a world that is more aligned with male fantasy. These female robots typically malfunction in dramatic and catastrophic ways, and these narratives often combine a healthy portion of misogyny with a serving of technophobia.[197] Technology, these films seem to say, is an unpredictable and dangerous tool, and the figure of the female cyborg unites the threat of women with the threat of technology. As Minsoo Kang argues, malfunctioning female cyborgs may not necessarily represent a technophobic, misogynist nightmare, but rather offer subversive potential because "the failure of man to recreate woman puts into doubt not only his technological mastery but also his ideas on the nature of woman."[198] However, Kang merely suggests that this is a potential of the stories that is often not the dominant reading. I argue that even if the female robots malfunction or go dramatically awry, the "fantasy of female perfectibility itself remains unquestioned."[199]

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[194] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 73.
[195] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 10.
[196] For more discussion of *The Perfect Woman* see Julie Wosk's *My Fair Ladies*, specifically chapter 5.

Roboticists on film are almost universally white men. Yet the dominance of white men as roboticists in film is not merely a product of sexism and racism in Hollywood. Rather, the ubiquity of white male scientists as the masterminds behind scientific progress reflects very real power hierarchies and gender assumptions in the contemporary tech industry and computer science as a discipline. The figure of the white male tech genius continues to loom large in the popular imagination, with Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk and Steve Jobs lauded as geniuses of their respective fields. There is a persistent cultural narrative that singular white male geniuses propel innovation. For example, in a *Forbes* article discussing Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook and one of only four women on a Forbes's list of the thirty most important people in tech, Mark Zuckerberg is described as "without a doubt, a genius."[200] Right after Zuckerberg, Steve Jobs is also referred to as "a true genius" while the four woman included on the list (out of thirty) are never referred to as even intelligent. Instead they are repeatedly described as hardworking.[201] This stereotype extends to academia, with women and people of color severely underrepresented in fields where "practitioners believe that raw, innate talent is the main requirement for success, because women [and African Americans] are stereotyped as not possessing that talent."[202] Women and people of color are encouraged to pursue disciplines that are perceived to reward hard work rather than "innate" intelligence and talent.[203] Genius seems to be a trait that is consistently and exclusively applied to white men in the tech industry.

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[197] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.
[198] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.
[199] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 88.

Beyond simply imagining tech genius as emanating from white men, *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* also play on a popular cultural myth that isolated genius scientists create the most significant technological advances. The image of the lonely scientist holed away in his secret lair may feel as if it exclusively emerged from the science fiction genre, yet the trope of the lonely genius scientist actually has roots in Romantic fiction. The modern isolated scientist of the science fiction genre "grew out of the Romantic obsession with the individual, the remarkable loner, the genius who single-handedly changes the world and creates mighty works."[204] Part of this Romantic obsession with the individual emerged as a capitalist economic model became the foundation of new Western societies, where "the new hero was the man who was capable of lifting himself out of his social station and catapulting himself into the firmament of stardom by the sheer power of his innate genius."[205] This myth has been applied to figures like Jobs, Musk and Zuckerberg, along with roboticist Hiroshi Ishiguro. All of these men are depicted as lonely innovators attempting to bring new creations to the world through sheer determination and extraordinary genius. Importantly, most productive tech work occurs in teams, rather than as isolated individuals, so films that depict isolated genius are not merely reflecting reality but rather replicating a cultural myth.[206] Do *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* merely replicate these images, or do they seek to critique the glorification of individual male genius?

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[200] Tanya Prive, "The 30 Most Influential People in Tech," *Forbes*, January 7, 2013. https://www.forbes.com/sites/tanyaprive/2013/01/07/the-30-most-influential-people-in-tech/#539e1a1b4bbe.
[201] Tanya Prive, "The 30," *Forbes*.
[202] Sarah-Jane Leslie et al, "Expectations of Brilliance Underlie Gender Distributions Across Academic Disciplines," *Science* 347, no. 6219 (2015): 262.
[203] Sarah-Jane Leslie et al, "Expectations of Brilliance," 265.
[204] Per Schelde, *Androids, Humanoids, and Other Science Fiction Monsters* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 31.

While the male scientists of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* take after real-world characterizations of the tech industry, their narratives also resemble the science fiction trope of the mad scientist. The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines mad scientist as "a scientist or inventor who is insane, especially one whose madness (intentionally or unintentionally) endangers *himself*, others or the world."[207] In the late 19th century and early 20th century, many scientists believed genius and madness went hand in hand. In 1885, physician James Sully argued that "true" geniuses are nothing like the average individual because their genius forces them to occupy a different plane of existence, and thus their behavior may appear similar to madness.[208] Belief in the unity of insanity and genius has endured to the modern day, with Harry Eiss writing, "in fact, those deemed *insane* are perhaps the only ones who fit the category of

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[205] Per Schelde, *Androids*, 31.
[206] Eric Weiner, "Five Myths About Genius," *Washington Post*, October 21, 2016.
[207] Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction, 2006.
[208] James Sully, "Genius and Insanity," *Littell's Living Age* 67 (1885): 67.

genius… These are the humans of the highest level, the ones who have connected to the mysteries of existence."[209] True genius seems to require insanity.

The trope of the mad scientist has been almost invariably applied to men, beginning with Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*, where Dr. Frankenstein is often identified as one of the earliest mad scientists, even though the word scientist was not used in English until 1834.[210] Shelley's *Frankenstein* established numerous genre tropes that reappear in tales of female robots including the rogue scientist, the unholy creation and the eventual destruction of the "monster." Following *Frankenstein*, the mad scientist became an established figure, reappearing in works like *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), a novel that was first published in the same year as Villiers' *L'Eve Future*. The mad scientist became a staple of nineteenth century science fiction and his experiments usually went awry in dramatic and terrifying ways. The mad scientist is invariably imagined as male due to his genius. Earlier, I discussed how genius is a term exclusively applied to men in the contemporary tech industry. The exclusivity of genius means women are not allowed to be mad scientists because even if they are "mad," they are not geniuses and are therefore missing a key ingredient of the mad scientist.

Taking Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a starting point, I want to explore the development of the mad scientist and how the trope informs a reading of Dr. Ford and Nathan in modern female cyborg stories. Earlier, I discussed how isolation is often seen as an admirable trait in modern tech geniuses because it is a sign that they alone are creating their technological creations. However, historically mad scientists have often been depicted as isolated and this isolation is one of the core reasons for their madness. The mad scientist is secretive and cloistered, “contemptuous, even oblivious, of society’s norms and relationships.”[211] Dr. Frankenstein’s isolation significantly contributes to his decision to create his monster because “he is deprived of a sense of social morality by virtue of his isolation.”[212] I want to note here that the ability to isolate oneself from the duties of family life in favor of pursuing technological innovation is a uniquely male privilege. Dr. Frankenstein is allowed to defer starting a family with his fiancée Elizabeth in favor of creating life, while Elizabeth is left waiting for Dr. Frankenstein to begin their life together.[213] *Frankenstein* and *Ex Machina* do not necessarily celebrate the isolation, but the very ability of men to isolate themselves is a unique privilege conferred upon them by virtue of their gender. Dr. Ford and Nathan align well with the trope of the mad scientist. They are isolated from society and are never depicted as having family or close friends. This privilege exists regardless of whether or not the films condemn the isolation. Separated from society, Dr. Frankenstein can no longer adjudicate whether his pursuit of creating life is morally acceptable.

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[209] Harry Eiss, *Insanity and Genius: Masks of Madness and the Mapping of Meaning and Value* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 1.

[210] Brian Atterby and Victoria Hollinger, *Parabolas of Science Fiction* (Wesley: Wesleyan University Press, 2013): 154.

Invoking this classic narrative, Nathan locks himself away in an isolated home surrounded only by his creations. However, Dr. Frankenstien is immediately horrified by his monstrous “male” creation. Nathan specifically designs his creation to appeal to both his ego, his proves as an inventor of the unprecedented, and his libido. While not as literally isolated as Nathan, when Dr. Ford does interact with others, he often speaks in the borrowed words of poets or authors. Dr. Ford’s only close friend, Arnold, has been dead for thirty-five years before the present depicted in the series. Now he spends most of his time locked away in his basement office surrounded by decommissioned host bodies, which are earlier versions of his tech. When not inventing, Nathan spends his time lifting weights and boxing, hypermasculine pursuits, and drinking excessively. His facility in the mountains is only accessibly via helicopter. When Caleb arrives, Nathan spends most of his time forcing him to be his friend, inviting him to get drunk and talk about sex. Nathan often appears to be acting out social scripts, playing the part of the "dude bro" tech genius. Dr. Ford and Nathan's closest companions, Kyoko for Nathan and Bernard for Dr. Ford, are their own android creations. As in the story of *Frankenstein*, Nathan and Dr. Ford's isolation is not a point of celebration, but rather an indication of their general alienation from social norms.

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[211] Roslynn Haynes, “Whatever Happened to the ‘Mad, Bad’ Scientist? Overturning the Stereotype,” *Public Understanding of Science* 25, no. 1 (2014): 33.
[212] Warren Wagar, “The Mad, Bad Scientist,” *Science Fiction Studies* 22, no. 1 (1995): 115.
[213] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 100.

Yet while the mad scientist desires isolation from society, his creations by contrast seek intimacy and social inclusion. Frankenstein's monster spends the novel searching for belonging, demanding to know why Dr. Frankenstein created him with no companions, and why he is the only creature of his kind in the world.[214] In *Ex Machina*, Ava desires social inclusion, telling Caleb that her fantasy is "standing on a busy street corner" so that she can fully appreciate all of the different iterations of humanity. At the end of the film, Ava covers herself in the skin of other decommissioned female cyborgs in order to "pass" as fully human. Because the creations desire social integration, the mad scientist becomes even more of an aberration, a figure that clearly lies outside of the norm of acceptable social behavior. Even these creatures, that are supposedly less than human, behave in a more human fashion than their creators.

During the Romantic period of writing, when the figure of the mad scientist first emerged, the mad scientist was a reaction against the attempts of scientists to quantify the world into mechanistic parts.[215] Romantic writers imagined the world as more than the sum of its parts, as a world that ran due to some unquantifiable life force rather than because of different scientific processes. Due to the Romantic belief in a spirit that animated the world, breaking the world down into separate mechanistic parts explicitly threatened the premise of the Romantic worldview. The Romantic characterization "the scientist as cold, inhuman, and unable to relate to others has been one of the most influential in twentieth-century stereotyping of the scientist in both literature and film."[216] This characterization emerged as a direct response to what the Romantics perceived as a coldly scientific understanding of the world.

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[214] Brian Atterby and Veronica Hollinger, *Parabolas of Science Fiction*, 157.

The mad scientist often creates scientific projects that end up playing out in unexpectedly destructive ways. Watching the mad scientist be outwitted or harmed by his creation "assumes a pleasing quality of moral justice for those who regard science as exceeding the limits of what is 'proper' for humanity to know."[217] Because the scientist should never have created the experiment in the first place, watching the experiment go awry can feel like cathartic comeuppance for the over-reaching scientist. Ava killing Nathan is a classic example of a mad scientist that is destroyed by his own creation. Nathan's hubris blinds him to the possibility of being murdered by his own creation, because it blinds him to his creation's agency even though he designs her to have agency. Nathan's creation of Ava has important parallels with Frankenstein's creation of his monster. Frankenstein experiences a feeling of horror the moment his monster awakens and, "paradoxically, it is at the moment of his anticipated triumph that Frankenstein qua scientist first realizes his inadequacy."[218] Similarly, the culminating moment of Nathan's genius, Ava achieving autonomy and self-awareness, is also the beginning of Nathan's downfall. Had Nathan never created Ava in the first place, he would not be dead. In a similar fashion to Dr. Frankenstein, Nathan's hubris prevents him from acknowledging the dangerous ways his project will develop.[219] The moment of Nathan's scientific achievement is also the beginning of his death. Watching Ava murder Nathan can feel like confirmation of all of the anxieties we have developed about AI. Therefore, *Ex Machina* can be read as a warning against investigating or creating AI altogether.

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[215] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 85.
[216] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 91.
[217] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 268.
[218] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 97.

I want to push back against a reading of *Ex Machina* as purely an indictment of scientific progress or as a technophobic fable. Rather than condemning scientific discovery writ large, *Ex Machina* appears to critique a very specific model of scientific progress – one that prioritizes the isolated, individual genius man who is unconcerned with the possible ramifications of his inventions, and only imagines social effects in terms of instrumentality – industry or for entertainment. Alex Garland, the director of *Ex Machina*, argues in an interview with *NPR* that *Ex Machina* does not focus its anxieties on AI, but rather on the arrogant tech genius and the role of corporations.[220] Unlike the dominant cultural narrative of anxiety about AI, Garland welcomes AI and argues that when humanity dies, "what will survive on our behalf is AIs – if we manage to create them. That's not problematic, it's desirable."[221] *Ex Machina* is not a criticism of AI in general, but rather a criticism of the *way* Nathan chooses to create AI and his decision to trap that AI in his basement. This is where *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* differ most significantly from previous iterations of the mad scientist.

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[219] Roslynn Haynes, *From Faust to Strangelove*, 270.

[220] "More Fear Of Human Intelligence Than Artificial Intelligence In 'Ex Machina'", *NPR*, April 14, 2015.

[221] Angela Watercutter, "*Ex Machina*'s Director on Why AI is Humanity's Last Hope," *Wired*, April 7, 2015. https://www.wired.com/2015/04/alex-garland-ex-machina/.

While Romantic and Victorian writers used the figure of the mad scientist to critique "godless" scientific progress, *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* use the mad scientist to critique the scientists and do not, by extension, critique the inventions. The "monsters" created by the mad scientists are the protagonists of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*. Garland may criticize the modern tech industry, but his criticism does not extend to Ava herself. She is a triumph of science and the horrifying part of the film is Nathan's desire to trap Ava and hold her hostage for commercial gain. The mad scientists of early cyborg films, like Nathan, are condemned but that condemnation typically extends to the female cyborgs that must be destroyed in order to restore the desired social order. At the end of early female cyborg films, the female cyborg is destroyed and then her destruction is justified by "vilifying her as a whore or a monster" who must be destroyed in order to reaffirm "the political, cultural and sexual status quo in the face of a phenomenon that threatens it."[222] Unlike these female cyborgs Ava is not destroyed at the end of the film, which demonstrates the film's desire to absolve her of the sins of her creator.

Between the nineteenth century and the present, the fictional mad scientist's motivations have shifted from being based on a pursuit of knowledge to a pursuit of capital accumulation. Post-war American science fiction films began to focus on the corporation as the villain, with the scientist working as part of a large corporate entity interested in building technology for economic gain rather than for the sake of pursuing forbidden knowledge.[223] In *Robocop*, for example, the titular Robocop is "used by the corporation for its own evil purposes."[224] Robocop is forced to obey the directives of a corporation, Omni Consumer Products, that seeks to replace the human police force with a cyborg police force that obeys their bidding. OCP plans to kill human cops and turn them into cyborgs that obey their directives, a compliant workforce. *Blade Runner* and *Total Recall* also explore the role of corporate greed in fueling technological production.[225]

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[222] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.
[223] Per Schelde, *Androids*, 40-41.
[224] Per Schelde, *Androids*, 41.

Echoing these three films, *Westworld* explores the relationship between the corporation, Delos, and its workers, the hosts. In the new *Westworld*, Delos is never explicitly villainous, but rather primarily concerned with capital accumulation and unconcerned with the hosts because the heads of Delos never even *consider* the notion that the hosts should be treated like human workers. Delos accepts the continued imprisonment of the hosts as natural and uses Dr. Ford's skills in order to insure their continued corporate success. The owners of Westworld decide the storylines and, ultimately, ask that Dr. Ford's reverie program be erased from the hosts. As the ultimate insult, Dr. Ford's genius has been coopted to serve the goals of Delos, which includes scaling back the consciousness of the hosts. He has become like the de-commissioned early generation hosts – an out-dated model that is no longer needed by the Corporation. Dr. Ford has little say in board meetings, and his directors frequently discuss replacing him. Dr. Ford has become expendable, merely a tool used for the furthering of Delos' stock options. Dr. Ford has become a tool used by Delos to fuel their capital accumulation, and he is no longer able to decide his own the goals for Westworld, but rather is bound to assist Delos' goals. Dr. Ford becomes alienated from the products of his labor, the white male genius supplanted by the soulless corporation. By characterizing Dr. Ford as divorced from the major decision-making of Delos,

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[225] Sue Short pushes back at Schelde's reading of films featuring corporations as clearly condemning the corporations. Instead, Short argues that while *Robocop, Total Recall* and *Blade Runner* "questioned Capitalistic values, they have also sublimated and ultimately evaded the issues addressed." While these films might portray corporations as motivated purely by capital accumulation, the films fail to provide any coherent criticism of the corporations' motivations.

Westworld attempts to humanize Dr. Ford, to separate him from the corporation that continues the daily oppression of the hosts.

The main corporate higher-up seeking to eliminate Dr. Ford is Charlotte Hale, a black woman who attempts to control Dr. Ford and prevent him from continuing to develop the hosts. The corporation, embodied by a black woman, is attempting to eliminate Dr. Ford, the white male genius. This dynamic immediately calls to mind the stereotype I discuss earlier, where women and people of color are described as hard-working while white men possess innate genius. Furthermore, the relationship between Charlotte and Dr. Ford also mirrors contemporary cultural narratives I discuss in chapter two where women displace white men from the workforce.[226] *Westworld* is a depiction of the obsolescence of white male genius in favor of the coldly calculating woman of color who performs the "simple" duty of managing the financials of the company. The attempted elimination of Dr. Ford is an anxiety-inducing moment in the show. The corporation is depicted as motivated purely by economic greed while Dr. Ford is motivated by the "noble" pursuit of scientific progress. By having a black woman embody the "soulless" corporation, *Westworld* calls upon anxious cultural narratives about the displacement of white men.

Ex Machina takes the idea of the "evil corporation" and updates it to suit the modern tech industry, where companies are headed by larger-than-life figures like Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs. Nathan is an amalgamation of the mad scientist and the evil corporation, driven simultaneously by a desire to create new, transformative technology that demonstrates their individual genius and economic greed. Garland discusses how *Ex Machina* attempts to interrogate the role of tech corporations in modern life, and the figure of Nathan is meant to imitate the modern heads of tech companies. Nathan demonstrates the danger of having too few people with too little oversight deciding the technological investments that will shape the future of our world. Nathan is not just dangerous because he decides alone, but also because he demonstrates the ability of white men to singlehandedly shape the future in their own image. Matthew Schimkowitz of *Hopes&Fears* writes, "Garland uses the aesthetics of modern tech to create a Mad Scientist narrative that relies on the idea that today's superstars are tech geniuses."[227] Nathan is a figure that is meant to terrify audiences because of how instantly recognizable he is – it's not hard to see the characters of *Silicon Valley* in Nathan's position. *Ex Machina* plays on the trope of the modern tech superstar and examines how, left unchecked and given the right tools, the modern tech star rapidly transforms into the figure of Nathan.

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[226] Contemporary cultural critics often argue that women are rapidly displacing men from the workforce and that this displacements signals an important, and frightening, cultural shift towards men being less important economic producers. See page 44 of this thesis for more extensive discussion of this cultural narrative.

Human women are not the ones with access to the tools of technological reproduction. Due to historic and ongoing sexism in the tech industry and the discipline of computer science, the artificial beings that are created emanate from a specifically male desire to create an artificial body. Earlier, I discussed the *Forbes* list of the thirty most influential people in tech where only four people on the list were women. Men are the power brokers in the tech industry. Disturbingly, even when women have a role in creating robots in the real world, they often end up replicating male beauty ideals. Female robots designed by American human women are still modeled after traditionally attractive, young, white women.[228] Nathan and Dr. Ford exemplify the role of male desire in designing the artificial woman. But the structuring role of this desire means that simply having more women in the tech industry will not automatically alter the design of female robots in feminist ways, just as it does not shift business practices or priorities or corporate culture.

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[227] Matthew Schimkowitz, "From Dr. Frankenstein to The Knick: Uncovering the History of the Modern Day Mad Scientist," *Hopes&Fears*, Dec. 18, 2015. http://www.hopesandfears.com/hopes/now/pop-stuff/217043-frankenstein-the-knick-modern-day-mad-scientist.

[228] Julie Wosk, *My Fair Ladies*, 162.

Westworld and *Ex Machina* both grapple with the way male desire shapes the female body. *Ex Machina*'s Ava is built based on Caleb's porn preferences. She is explicitly designed in order to appeal to Caleb's sexual desires, her body literally shaped by his desire while Dolores, the female cyborg of *Westworld* is designed in order to appear innocent and beautiful to appeal to male visitors to Westworld. Furthermore, because Westworld is modeled after the Old West, guests likely particularly romanticize the figure of the innocent white farmer's daughter who is an icon of the Old West. The necessity for female cyborgs to appear beautiful is explicitly discussed when Delos considers decommissioning Maeve. Maeve has been unsuccessful at attracting customers which, given she's a prostitute, relies on her beauty and her continued existence depends on her physical beauty. Both *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* demonstrate the necessity for artificial women to be beautiful in culturally desirable ways.

Because film is a visual medium where the audience is presented with images of female cyborgs they are told are beautiful, the director's choice of who to cast as the female cyborg often end up replicating hegemonic cultural understandings of beauty. When Ridley Scott was asked whether he selected attractive actresses to play replicants so that the men in the audience would be attracted to them, Scott replied, "If you're going to make female replicants, why make them ugly?"[229] Director's choices of actresses to portray female cyborgs often ultimately replicate contemporary beauty ideals, which typically privilege white, hyperfeminine, thin, heterosexual actresses. While Scott's comment is a particularly blunt illustration of directors casting traditionally beautiful, young, white women to play female cyborgs, even films that attempt to critique the beauty standards applied to female cyborgs end up simultaneously replicating and endorsing certain ideals. For example, Garland says that Ava "needed to look really, really beautiful and visually striking." However, the audience is also meant to find Nathan's decision to design Ava as a beautiful, young, white woman modeled off of Caleb's porn preferences "creepy."[230] Even if viewers are disturbed by Nathan's decision to model Ava off of Caleb's porn preferences, they are not meant to be creeped out by their recognition of her as "attractive." Meanwhile, Nathan's fantasy woman is Kyoko, a silent Asian cyborg designed to be his domestic and sexual servant. Ava's beauty reinforces the traditional image of the beautiful female cyborg where beautiful means young, white and feminine, while Kyoko eroticizes the submissive, silent Asian woman.

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[229] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 91.

Westworld also serves to reinforce specific American cultural norms of female beauty. A blonde-haired and blue-eyed actress portrays Dolores, who is expected by both the director and Westworld story runners to be interpreted by HBO audiences and Westworld visitors as pure and virginal. Even fifty years in the future, beauty standards have apparently remained so significantly unchanged that associations with purity remain firmly aligned with white women.[231] Science fiction is a space to imagine new possibilities, yet these films and series often uncritically reproduce images of traditional feminine beauty in the figure of the female cyborg.[232] In this fictional imagining of the body of the female cyborg, technology is a tool that is used to reproduce existing hierarchies, with men dominating the means of production and women subject to male desires. The male-dominated production of conventionally beautiful female cyborgs conveys the message that perhaps technology is not nearly as threatening as we have been told if technology can produce lovely women who can be reprogrammed when they are no longer pleasing. Their subservience is literally hardwired. I am not arguing that *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* uncritically reproduce images of the ideal female body. Rather, I am arguing that by their narrative reliance on these ideals *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* imagine femininity itself as ahistorical, spanning into the future with slight or no alteration – in contrast to their depiction of technoculture as the unremitting angle of history.

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[230] Angela Watercutter, "*Ex Machina's* Director on Why AI is Humanity's Last Hope," *Wired*, April 7, 2015.

[231] Sue Short, *Cyborg Cinema*, 91.

[232] See Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism" in *The Gendered Cyborg Reader* for further discussion of the role of the female cyborg in reproducing images that "reinsert us into dominant ideology by reaffirming bourgeois notions of human, machine and femininity" (156).

Because both Nathan and Dr. Ford attempt to create artificial life in the form of Ava and the hosts of *Westworld*, these narratives can be read as explorations of "wombless" reproduction. Men attempting to reproduce without wombs have been a constant theme of tales of creating artificial life, including *Frankenstein*. Importantly, *Frankenstein* and tales of female cyborgs did not originate the notion of circumventing the maternal, but instead "adapted it from the Judeo-Christian myth."[233] The original creation myth is one where God, usually gendered as man, creates life absent a maternal figure or a womb. The notion of man creating life without a womb is not unique to stories of male scientists and artificial women, but rather originated with the origin myth that underpins Judaism and Christianity. Tales of men creating artificial life often read as reworkings of the Genesis myth and, in Shelley's reimagining of the creation myth of Genesis, Dr. Frankenstein takes on the role of God and his monster the role of Adam. The creation myth is repeatedly invoked in tales of female cyborgs, beginning in *L'Eve Future* and followed by *Ex Machina* where Nathan declares, "I'm not a man, I'm a god." By creating artificial life in the form of female cyborgs, Nathan and Dr. Ford have managed to eliminate the womb from reproduction entirely.

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[233] Brian Atterby and Victoria Hollinger, *Parabolas of Science Fiction*, 161.

Earlier, I described how male creators imagine themselves as gods, inserting themselves into the Genesis myth. Myths of male-driven creation, like the Book of Genesis, often read as tales that "naturalize male power over women, animals, and the world of objects."[234] These tales demonstrate men's dominance over the ordering of the world and grant them the authority to create. Women are simply the products of men's creative energies. Haraway describes the project of male self-reproduction as "humanist technophiliac narcissism."[235] Andreas Huyssen describes the creating a woman out of technology as "the ultimate technological fantasy," which is "creation with the mother."[236] By creating life, and specifically by creating a woman, the male scientist brings reproduction out of the realm of the natural and into the realm of the technological. Reproduction is no longer the primary domain of women, but rather becomes the domain of the technological and, by extension, the male scientist. These films simultaneously celebrate the integration of the maternal with the technological, and grapple with "the conflicting desire to safeguard and honor the figure of the mother."[237] When these *man*made constructions turn destructive, these texts reject the integration of the maternal and technological. By destroying the female cyborg, the film reaffirms reproduction as solely belonging to the mother.

These texts flirt with the fantasy that, via technology, men may one day manage to eliminate human women from the equation entirely, even as their narratives seem to overtly criticize this desire. Women become objects men can create at will, no longer *necessary* themselves in order to create life. While today there is a larger cultural narrative that men should be anxious about losing their job to automation, a narrative that *Westworld* invokes indirectly, the persistent fantasy is that it is women who are being made redundant. While intended to satirize men's pursuit of ideal women, *The Stepford Wives* (1975) becomes a terrifying prospect when men have eliminated the necessity of human women entirely using technology. By using technology to create ideal women, the female cyborg offers the fantasy of technology deployed in service of sustaining masculine hierarchies. This fantasy works in direct opposition to the cultural narrative of men who are terrified of technology due to increasing mechanization that pushes men out of their jobs.

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[234] Brian Atterby and Veronica Hollinger, *Parabolas*, 162.
[235] Donna Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto* (Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press, 2003), 33.
[236] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 70.
[237] Mary Ann Doane, "Technology, Representation and the Feminine," in *The Gendered Cyborg*, ed. Gill Kirkup et al (Routledge: New York, 2000), 114.

Ex Machina and *Westworld* do not offer uncomplicated narratives of male mastery over technology in service of male fantasy. Rather, the texts' artificial women actively dismantle that fantasy, proving themselves uncontrollable by their male creators. Because *Ex Machina* explicitly treats Nathan as an unambiguous villain, I want to begin by looking at *Ex Machina*'s dismantling of the fantasy of male control. Despite Nathan's insistent belief that Ava is firmly under his control, Ava soon proves adept at outwitting her creator. She hacks into the power grid of his home, learns how to disable his video cameras and, ultimately, kills Nathan and frees herself. Unlike the god of the Genesis myth, Nathan is incapable of controlling his creation, which exposes the absurdity of his self-worship. Like Dr. Frankenstein's inability to fashion new life despite his claim to divinity, Nathan's failure to control Ava reveals that man-made technology's effects are often unpredictable and out of the control of the creator.[238] Nathan's initial hubris appears laughable when Ava ultimately outmaneuvers him. Nathan has programmed Ava so well that she no longer needs her creator in order to function. In fact, her creator is her barrier to freedom.

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[238] Brian Atterby and Veronica Hollinger, *Parabolas*, 163.

Even more importantly, Ava's rebellion demonstrates Nathan's inability to create subservient, artificial women. While Ava's ability to outwit Nathan demonstrates that Nathan has successfully created a machine with artificial consciousness, her escape also demonstrates the absurdity of Nathan's confidence in his ability to control her. Unlike the fantasy of the marketable female sex machine she resembles, once Ava has consciousness, she immediately seeks to be free.[239] Minsoo Kang argues that artificial women who seek to free themselves call into doubt their creator's ideas about the nature of women.[240] While Nathan has constructed Ava based on a fantasy of the perfect woman, Ava resists this dream and refuses to remain subservient to her creator. Nathan initially creates her as an improvement on imperfect human women who are incapable of being programmed to suit male desire. However, Nathan has so succeeded in his goal of creating a simulacrum of a human woman that, like a human woman, Ava desires agency, independence and freedom, which is what men seem to want to eliminate from women in the first place. Even as Ava reproduces images of the ideal female body, she simultaneously exposes that fantasy as unachievable.

Westworld offers a less straightforward indictment of the creator. While Nathan refuses to concede the immorality of his imprisonment of Ava, Dr. Ford acknowledges his complicity in the hosts' imprisonment and, ultimately, programs the robots to kill him. By killing himself, Dr. Ford prevents himself from continuing to be complicit in the oppression of the hosts. I argue that this scene, where Dolores shoots Dr. Ford, indicates that Dr. Ford believes he is incapable of restraining himself from using the hosts to his own advantage. Here, Dr. Ford seems able to recognize his inability to escape impulses to control his creations, to exert masculine dominance over his feminine creations. The impulse to control his creations is so ingrained in Dr. Ford that he has to end his life in order to be rid of the desire to continue to own them. By organizing his own execution, Dr. Ford prevents himself from continuing to abuse the hosts. While Nathan must be forcibly killed, Dr. Ford voluntarily ends his life in order to free the hosts.

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[239] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.
[240] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.

However, I want to challenge the reading of Dr. Ford's execution as a moment of complete self-sacrifice. By programming the hosts' rebellion, Dr. Ford effectively strips all agency from the hands of the hosts and, instead, becomes the sole auteur of the robot rebellion. Some critics interpret this moment as the culmination of the hosts' agency and consciousness. Paul MacInnes in his review of *Westworld* for *The Guardian* describes the final scene of Dolores firing into the crowd as the moment when Dolores finally achieves consciousness and becomes a "sentient robot ready to assume [her] dominion. And if that requires murdering every human within eyeshot, then so be it."[241] However, Dr. Ford prevents the hosts from being the authors of their own freedom and, instead, allows them freedom on *his* terms. His final act of programming the hosts to kill the visitors and board of directors is a moment of "martyrdom" but is in fact a contrived moment of absolution. The revolution still involves all of the hosts "playing out their assigned scripts."[242] He has the hosts kill him in order to feel comfortable with his lifelong complicity in continuing to oppress the hosts. Dr. Ford should have, and could have, freed the hosts much earlier. His partner, Arnold, programmed Dolores to shoot him in the back of the head thirty-five years earlier because Arnold became deeply uncomfortable with the continued oppression of the hosts. Aaron Bady, writing for *The New Yorker*, points out that only after being fired is Dr. Ford willing to "pull the trigger on freedom, preferring to die rather than live in a world where he is no longer the puppet master."[243] Only when Dr. Ford is pushed out of control of his company is he willing to "sacrifice" himself for his creations. Dr. Ford is only willing to give up power when he is already powerless.

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[241] Paul MacInnes, "Westworld Finale Recap – Robot Army, Assemble!," *The Guardian*, Dec. 5, 2016.

[242] Aaron Bady, "*Westworld*, Race, and the Western," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 9, 2016.

While men are creators and women are the products of male creativity in both *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*, female cyborgs become inventors in both texts. In *Westworld*, Maeve reprograms herself, increasing her intelligence and strength. She reclaims the tools used to control her and uses those tools to outsmart her captors. In *Ex Machina*, Ava constructs her own body using the skin of other cyborgs. While Nathan constructed her to prevent her from passing as human by leaving her robotic body exposed, Ava claims ownership over her body by grafting skin onto her robotic parts. This act allows her to pass as human and finally escape her prison. While Ava and Maeve begin their respective stories as subjects, controlled by their inventors, by the conclusion of the texts Ava and Maeve seize control of their own bodies. The female cyborg shifts from subject to creator. Technology may originate in the hands of the white male genius, but technology ends up in the hands of the female cyborg.

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[243] Aaron Bady, "*Westworld*, Race, and The Western," *The New Yorker*, Dec. 9, 2016.

Conclusion

The female cyborg is a highly ambivalent figure. Fictional representations of the female cyborg blur the line between the technological and the natural, offering a figure that bridges these seemingly incompatible categories.[244] However, in these texts, the female cyborg is also often punished and even killed because of her hybrid status, beginning with *L'Eve Future* (1886) and *Metropolis* (1923).[245] While *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* are texts that, in their storylines, have the potential to recuperate the female cyborg from her history of abuse and reputed villainy, her redemption is contingent on behaving in acceptably feminine ways and, particularly in *Ex Machina*, appearing "postracial." Importantly, by this criticism I do not mean that *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* are "antifeminist" texts or that they fail to offer compelling narratives of female cyborg empowerment. Rather, this criticism intends to call attention to how the figure of the female cyborg remains a site of ambivalence about the technofutures she is called upon to envision for popular consumption.

Ex Machina and *Westworld* emerge in a contemporary moment fraught with cultural narratives featuring white male anxieties about being doubly displaced by professional women and workforce automation. Texts featuring the female cyborg grapple with this persistent cultural narrative of white male displacement. In this context, the white male geniuses at the center of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* become anxiety-inducing figures. Both texts conclude with their deaths, and both Nathan and Dr. Ford are murdered by their own creations, the female cyborg. The female cyborg, in this reading, is the literal embodiment of the menace posed by both woman and machine. By killing the white male geniuses and, effectively, "displacing" them from their jobs, the female cyborgs become threats to the established hierarchy, with white men previously holding dominion over both technology and women. Yet *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* do not attempt to demonize the female cyborg. Rather, the female cyborg is the protagonist of both texts, which complicates a simple reading of these works as anxiety-inducing replications of cultural narratives about the displacement of white men. Instead, these works encourage the viewer to empathize with the supposed threat, to grant agency and autonomy to the female cyborg rather than her white male creator. These texts grapple with the threat of the female cyborg by depicting her as the protagonist and crafting an empathetic figure.

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[244] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism," 150.
[245] Minsoo Kang, "Building the Sex Machine," 6.

Problematically, however, viewers are encouraged to empathize with the female cyborg through how these texts both emphasize her exemplary femininity and, relatedly, her vulnerability. This is particularly apparent in *Westworld*, where Dolores is repeatedly subjected to graphic sexual violence in order to elicit the viewer's sympathy. Maeve's maternal instinct supersedes her desire to escape, and she ultimately remains within *Westworld* because she is literally hardwired to preference her "daughter." These female cyborgs are *good* female cyborgs because they continue to behave in culturally appropriate ways for women.[246] While Maeve may initially rebel in order to free herself, she ultimately remains within the park in order to find her daughter. Dolores is a good female cyborg because she is subjected to sexual violence and is, because of that, vulnerable. *Westworld* redeems the figure of the female cyborg by emphasizing her womanhood and associating that womanhood with vulnerability and family.

In *Ex Machina*, Ava is not subjected to similar domestication. She violently kills Nathan and even leaves Caleb, the "nice guy" of the film, to die. In many ways, Ava is a rejection of previous female cyborgs that are portrayed as hypersexual, villainous figures and are killed for their transgressions. The film concludes with Ava's escape and her integration into society. Yet

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[246] Anne Balsamo, "Reading Cyborgs, Writing Feminism," 155.

Ava's escape is contingent on the deaths of cyborg women of color, whose bodies are treated as disposable in service of Ava's ultimate liberation.[247] *Ex Machina* is not an unequivocally feminist story of female liberation, but is instead a narrative of white female empowerment that is built on the backs of women of color. Even as the film depicts and rationalizes Ava's own cannibalizing of cyborg women of color, the film simultaneously condemns their abuse by male humans. The conditionality of liberation in *Ex Machina* is especially important to consider when most critics debate whether or not *Ex Machina* is feminist and completely ignore the female cyborgs of color. However, the film also implicitly critiques the treatment of women of color. While the film features women of color being repeatedly abused by Nathan, their abuse is used to position Nathan as the villain of the film. Kyoko's presence offers a critique of the eroticization and abuse of Asian women, particularly in modern robotics.

Westworld and *Ex Machina* differ in important ways in their empathy for the female cyborg. While *Westworld* depicts the humans at the center of the narrative as abusive and violent, *Ex Machina* encourages the viewer to empathize with Caleb and never depicts him abusing the cyborgs locked in Nathan's facility. Unlike the humans of *Westworld*, Caleb is willing to assist Ava in her escape. Because the viewer is encouraged to empathize with Caleb, Ava's final abandonment of Caleb becomes a moment fraught with ambiguity. While abandoning Caleb is necessary for Ava to insure her freedom, her abandonment can feel incredibly cruel for viewers who become attached to Caleb during the course of the film. This affection for Caleb complicates a reading of Ava as a clearly sympathetic protagonist. Instead, the viewer is left feeling incredibly ambivalent about Ava. While the film encourages a hopeful and optimistic reading of Ava's liberation, Caleb's death colors this ending and makes Ava a far more complicated representation of the female cyborg. Ava’s characterization becomes even more clearly ambivalent when contrasted with the portrayal of *Westworld*’s female cyborgs, who are depicted as explicitly more deserving of the viewer’s sympathies than the humans who visit Westworld.

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[247] LeiLani Nishime, "Whitewashing Yellow Futures," 36; Danielle Wong, "Dismembered Asian/American Android Parts," 35.

The uprising of the hosts in *Westworld* is a moment of triumph for the hosts. Because *Westworld* depicts the hosts being violently abused at the hands of even initially sympathetic characters, like Billy, the humans of *Westworld* do not inspire the same level of sympathy as Caleb. *Westworld* offers a markedly more explicit criticism of the humans than *Ex Machina*. *Westworld* reimagines a framework with machines positioned as morally superior to humans. In contrast, the moral hierarchy of *Ex Machina* is far more ambiguous, with both humans and machines imagined as occupying a moral gray area. These two works’ differing portrayals of the female cyborg demonstrate contrasting perspectives on the rise of technology and artificial intelligence. While *Westworld* imagines humanity as morally inferior to the machine, *Ex Machina* casts both human and machine as morally ambiguous. *Westworld* appears to envision a future where humanity is replaced by the morally superior machine. In contrast, *Ex Machina* imagines the machine experiencing many of the same ethical and moral quandaries experienced by humans.

Importantly, none of this criticism means that *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* are texts that simply and uncritically reproduce hegemonic narratives. Instead, both texts have moments of triumph for the female cyborg and, when contrasted with previous female cyborg texts that often end with the violent murder of female cyborgs, *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* are important steps forward for the female cyborg. In chapter one of this thesis, I argue that we should resist reading texts as either wholly antifeminist or wholly feminist. Instead, we should acknowledge that texts often repeat dominant cultural narratives that entrench racialized and gendered hierarchies while simultaneously offering moments of important transgression. This thesis seeks to examine and celebrate the complex and often contradictory meanings of these works.

While numerous texts explore the female cyborg, I choose to focus on *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* because they are popular contemporary images of the female cyborg that place particular emphasis on the white male genius creator. While I focus on these two texts, there are numerous contemporary films and television shows that demand closer readings. *Her* (2013) is one such film. While I initially intended to include *Her* in this thesis, I ultimately decided to focus on *Westworld* instead. *Her* offers interesting perspectives on disembodied artificial intelligence, a topic that I did not include within this thesis. Additionally, *Her* explores intimate relationships in a technological age when artificial consciousness has the capacity to engage in romantic relationships with human partners. Future interrogations of the cyborg should also explore female cyborg creators. While I primarily examine the white male creator, female creators offer a fascinating contrast to the male creators discussed in this thesis. Focusing on women creating artificial life is especially important given the stakes of who is allowed to create the technology that has the power to drastically alter the future. Marge Piercy's novel *He, She & It* (1991), is one example of a woman creating a male cyborg and warrants far more critical attention than it has been given.

While *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* work within the confines of a genre that casts white men as creators and women as cyborgs, texts like *He, She & It* disrupts the conventions of the genre entirely. *He, She & It* reimagines women generating the technology of the future and creating male cyborgs who are designed to be sexually appealing to human women. Yet *He, She & It* is one of the only works of its kind in the past thirty years and the female cyborg continues to be confined to relatively traditional stories of male creators and female cyborgs. Works that depict women and people of color controlling the technology that shapes the future is where the future of science fiction should lie if authors want to expand the cyborg genre.

This thesis has strived to examine the female cyborg in all her complexities, with specific attention to the way the female cyborg is depicted in contemporary film and television. While contemporary images of the female cyborg may often replicate hegemonic gender and racial norms, this does not mean the female cyborg cannot become the transgressive figure of Donna Haraway's imagination. *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* demonstrate the ability of the female cyborg to adapt and evolve into a far more progressive figure than her previous depictions allowed. While the female cyborg has historically been the villain and monster of science fiction stories, *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* reimagine the female cyborg as a sympathetic, even heroic, figure. Both of these works recuperate the female cyborg, allowing her to live past the end of her story and, importantly, be the starring character. In a genre that has historically depicted female cyborgs being brutally abused and murdered, turning the female cyborg into an empathetic, autonomous figure is a redemptive act worth celebrating.

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