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The Gendered A.I. in Film and Visual Culture: Transgressing the Gender Binary

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Ελληνικός τίτλος διδακτορικής διατριβής: Έμφυλη Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη στον Κινηματογράφο και την Οπτική Κουλτούρα: Υπερβαίνοντας την Δυαδικότητα του Φύλου

Με την σύμφωνη απόφαση της Συνέλευσης του Τμήματος Επικοινωνίας και Μέσων Μαζικής Ενημέρωσης, που έλαβε υπόψη την γνώμη της επιβλέπουσας καθηγήτριας, η παρούσα διδακτορική διατριβή έχει συνταχθεί στα αγγλικά και συνοδεύεται από εκτενή περίληψη στην ελληνική γλώσσα.

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Abstract

Motivated by the merge of women and machines in science fiction cinema, this thesis explores visual representations of gendered Artificial Intelligence. Feminist film theorists have considered the implications of this merge for the deconstruction of binarisms around femininity. Their ongoing debate concerns whether such depictions challenge the gender binary or perpetuate stereotypical images of femininity and masculinity.

The thesis draws on feminist and queer theory's initiation of the problematics around gendered machines and proposes a combined methodological approach. First, the analysis of science fiction films treating gendered machines considers the gender gap in both science and fiction. This refers to the exclusion of women from scientific and technological fields and the fact that most films are directed by men. The link between the two triggers the research question of how the feminist reader can envision the future of science fiction and women's presence in it.

A second aspect of the reading relates to the film genre and focuses on a) the depiction of AI females and b) the romantic or sexual interaction between AI machines and humans. My thesis proposes the combined reading of science fiction and romance subgenres regarding film representations of femininity and masculinity. A core argument for this is that the romantic interplay between human and machine enables a better understanding of gender dynamics and power relations. It also links to the relationship between the artist and the artwork and draws parallels with how science fiction objectifies women. Such objectifications can be subverted by a feminist reading that rejects technological determinism and focuses on a human-centred interpretation of the narratives.

Finally, the thesis composes a novel perspective by introducing the terms *"failed masculinity"* and *"cyborg femininity"* as two bodily tropes that can be weaponised against the masculine/feminine dichotomy. By combining the AI, posthuman and cyborg discourses and applying the scholarly contributions of cyborg feminists and cyberfeminists, the thesis figures the AI subject and contributes to a vision of post-gender worlds in feminist film theory.

Η παρούσα διατριβή διερευνά έμφυλες αναπαραστάσεις Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης στον κινηματογράφο, με έμφαση στην γυναίκα-μηχανή. Τέτοιου είδους αναπαραστάσεις έχουν υπάρξει αντικείμενο μελέτης της φεμινιστικής θεωρίας στον κινηματογράφο με σκοπό την αποδόμηση των δυαδικών σχέσεων γύρω από τη θηλυκότητα. Οι θεωρητικοί εξακολουθούν να διερευνούν το κατά πόσο τέτοιες απεικονίσεις αμφισβητούν το δυαδικό φύλο ή διαιωνίζουν τις υπάρχουσες στερεοτυπικές αναπαραστάσεις θηλυκότητας και αρρενωπότητας.

Η διατριβή ανατρέχει στην φεμινιστική και queer θεωρία και προτείνει μια συνδυαστική μεθοδολογική προσέγγιση. Πρώτον, η ανάλυση των ταινιών επιστημονικής φαντασίας που πραγματεύονται έμφυλες μηχανές λαμβάνει υπόψη το έμφυλο χάσμα τόσο στην επιστήμη όσο και στην φαντασία. Με αυτό εννοείται αφενός ο αποκλεισμός των γυναικών από τα επιστημονικά και τεχνολογικά πεδία και αφετέρου το γεγονός ότι οι περισσότερες ταινίες επιστημονικής φαντασίας σκηνοθετούνται από άντρες. Η σύνδεση μεταξύ των δύο πυροδοτεί το ερευνητικό ερώτημα για το πώς μπορεί η φεμινιστική θεωρία στον κινηματογράφο να οραματιστεί το μέλλον της επιστημονικής φαντασίας και την παρουσία των γυναικών σε αυτό.

Μία δεύτερη πτυχή της ανάλυσης σχετίζεται με το κινηματογραφικό είδος και εστιάζει α) στην απεικόνιση θηλυκών μηχανών Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης και β) στην ρομαντική αλληλεπίδραση μεταξύ ανθρώπων και μηχανών Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης. Η διατριβή αυτή προτείνει την συνδυαστική ανάγνωση των αναπαραστάσεων θηλυκότητας και αρρενωπότητας σε δύο κινηματογραφικά είδη: των κινηματογράφο επιστημονικής φαντασίας και τον ρομαντικό κινηματογράφο. Βασικό επιχείρημα για αυτό αποτελεί το ότι η ρομαντική αλληλεπίδραση ανάμεσα σε άνθρωπο και μηχανή διευκολύνει την κατανόηση των σχέσεων εξουσίας μεταξύ των φύλων. Συνδέεται, επίσης, με την 2 σχέση ανάμεσα στον καλλιτέχνη και το έργο και μπορεί να παραλληλιστεί με το πώς η επιστημονική φαντασία αντικειμενοποιεί τις γυναίκες. Τέτοιου είδους αντικειμενοποιήσεις μπορούν να ανατραπούν από μία φεμινιστική ανάγνωση που απορρίπτει τον τεχνολογικό ντετερμινισμό και εστιάζει σε μία ανθρωποκεντρική ερμηνεία των κινηματογραφικών αφηγήσεων.

Συνδυάζοντας την κουήρ θεωρία, την θεωρία του μεταανθρώπου και τις φεμινιστικές προσεγγίσεις σχετικά με το πάθος και το κινηματογραφικό είδος, η μελέτη αυτή

εξετάζει πώς τα κινηματογραφικά σάιμποργκ υπερβαίνουν τους ρόλους που τους έχουν ανατεθεί ως έμφυλοι άλλοι. Επιπλέον, η διατριβή επιχειρηματολογεί ως προς το ότι αυτά τα τέσσερα κινηματογραφικά και τηλεοπτικά παραδείγματα της δεκαετίας 2013 – 2022 παρουσιάζουν μία στροφή στα αφηγήματα Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης με το μέλλον να συνδέεται λιγότερο με την ίδια την τεχνολογία και περισσότερο με την κοινωνική αλλαγή και τα αναδυόμενα υποκείμενα.

Τέλος, η διατριβή συνθέτει μία καινοτόμα προσέγγιση εισάγοντας τους όρους «αποτυχημένη αρρενωπότητα» και «σάιμποργκ θηλυκότητα» ως δύο σωματικές εκφάνσεις που μπορούν να χρησιμοποιηθούν ως όπλα κατά της διχοτόμησης αρσενικού και θηλυκού. Συνδυάζοντας τις προβληματικές πάνω στην Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη, τον μεταάνθρωπο και το σάιμποργκ και εφαρμόζοντας τις επιστημονικές συνεισφορές των θεωρητικών του κυβερνοφεμινισμού, η διατριβή παρουσιάζει το υποκείμενο Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης και συμβάλλει στον οραματισμό του μη δυαδικού φύλου στους κόσμους της επιστημονικής φαντασίας και στην φεμινιστική θεωρία στον κινηματογράφο.

Η διατριβή αποτελείται από την εισαγωγή, έξι κεφάλαια και συμπεράσματα.

Στην εισαγωγή παρουσιάζεται το θέμα και τα κεντρικά ερωτήματα και παρατίθενται οι λόγοι για την επιλογή της συγκεκριμένης μεθοδολογίας καθώς και των εξεταζόμενων κινηματογραφικών και τηλεοπτικών παραδειγμάτων.

Η διατριβή αυτή εξετάζει σάιμποργκ υποκείμενα και τις αναπαραστάσεις τους στον κινηματογράφο και την τηλεόραση, εστιάζοντας πρωταρχικά στις ταινίες *Her* (*Δικός Της*) του Spike Jonze και *Ex Machina* (*Από Μηχανής*) του Alex Garland και δευτερευόντως στην τηλεοπτική σειρά *Westworld* των Lisa Joy και Jonathan Nolan και την ταινία *I'm Your Man* (*Ο Άντρας των Ονείρων μου*) της Maria Schrader. Τα παραδείγματα αυτά επιλέχθηκαν με κριτήριο τους τρόπους αναπαράστασης της 3 μεταθηλυκότητας και της μεταρρενωπότητας, εστιάζοντας στην ρομαντική σχέση μεταξύ ανθρώπων και μηχανών. Οι ταινίες *Her* και *Ex Machina*, που κυκλοφόρησαν κατά το πρώτο μισό της δεκαετίας του 2010, παρουσιάζουν μία στροφή όσον αφορά στις έμφυλες αυτές αναπαραστάσεις. Η στροφή αυτή είναι ακόμα πιο έντονη στα *Westworld* και *I'm Your Man* που κυκλοφόρησαν αργότερα (2016-2022 και 2021 αντίστοιχα). Επομένως, η διατριβή ακολουθεί και μία χρονολογική σειρά προκειμένου

να καταδείξει την στροφή αυτή, διερευνώντας τις κεντρικές θεματικές των παραδειγμάτων αυτών.

Εκτός από τις αναπαραστάσεις των σάιμποργκ και την χρονολογική τους τοποθέτηση, τα παραδείγματα αυτά επιλέχθησαν και με βάση το υβριδικό κινηματογραφικό είδος: παράλληλα με τις αφηγήσεις επιστημονικής φαντασίας, προβάλλεται ένα έντονο ενδιαφέρον για τις ρομαντικές σχέσεις που αναδύεται μέσα από τα είδη της κοινωνικής-ρομαντικής ταινίας (*Her, I'm Your Man*), του μελοδράματος (*Westworld*) ή και του φιλμ νουάρ (*Ex Machina*). Η επικέντρωση της μελέτης στις ρομαντικές σχέσεις εξηγείται από δύο μεθοδολογικούς άξονες. Πρώτον, η διατριβή προτείνει ένα συνδυαστικό μεθοδολογικό πλαίσιο, εξετάζοντας από την μία την κατηγοριοποίηση των ρομπότ ως θύματα (πάθη) ή απειλές για τους ανθρώπους από τον Isaac Asimov (1982) και από την άλλη την σύνδεση του όρου πάθος με πιο θηλυκά κινηματογραφικά είδη από την Mary Ann Doane (2004), καθώς και την σύνδεση του πάθους και της λατινικής του ρίζας *passio* με την παθητικότητα και την θηλυκότητα από την Sara Ahmed (2004). Το πλαίσιο αυτό εστιάζει στο φύλο και το είδος, με κεντρικό επιχείρημα ότι η συνύπαρξη της επιστημονικής φαντασίας με το ρομαντικό κινηματογραφικό είδος μπορεί να παραλληλιστεί με την συνύπαρξη και μετέπειτα ακύρωση της αρρενωπότητας και της θηλυκότητας σε αναπαραστάσεις Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης.

Ο δεύτερος άξονας εξετάζει το κινηματογραφικό σάιμποργκ ως μία οντότητα που υπερβαίνει το φύλο και διερευνά το πώς τα ετεροφυλόφιλα ειδύλλια ανάμεσα σε cis ετεροφυλόφιλους ανθρώπους και έμφυλα ρομπότ μπορούν, παρά τους περιορισμούς τους, να προετοιμάσουν το έδαφος για να οραματιστούμε τα σάιμποργκς ως δυνητικά κουήρ υποκείμενα. Σε αυτό το μεθοδολογικό πλαίσιο λαμβάνονται υπόψη τα θεωρητικά έργα των Ahmed (2006) και Jack Halberstam (2005) σχετικά με τους κουήρ χώρους και χρόνους, οι οποίοι εδώ συνδέονται με τους σάιμποργκ χώρους και χρόνους. Σε όλα τα εξεταζόμενα παραδείγματα, ο αγώνας 4 των ρομπότ να ενταχθούν στην ανθρωπότητα «περνώντας» (βλ. *passing*) όχι μόνο ως άνθρωποι, αλλά και ως ετεροφυλόφιλα θηλυκά ή αρσενικά, συμπίπτει με το επιχείρημα του Halberstam ότι οι ταινίες επιστημονικής φαντασίας εκθέτουν το μεταβατικό σώμα ως φαντασίωση (Halberstam, 2005). Αντλώντας στοιχεία από την κουήρ θεωρία και λαμβάνοντας υπόψη την συνύπαρξη του πάθους με την επιστημονική φαντασία, η διατριβή αυτή υποστηρίζει ότι η απεικόνιση του μεταανθρώπου στην πρόσφατη φιλμογραφία όχι

μόνο ανατρέπει το δίπολο μεταξύ αρρενωπότητας και θηλυκότητας, αλλά και συγχρόνως συγκροτεί ένα ρευστό υποκείμενο που υπερβαίνει την ετεροκανονικότητα.

Στο πλαίσιο αυτό, η διατριβή εξετάζει τις συγγένειες ανάμεσα στα σάιμποργκ, τους μεταανθρώπους και τις μηχανές με Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη, με βάση το πώς απεικονίζονται στον κινηματογράφο και την τηλεόραση. Λαμβάνοντας υπόψη τον ορισμό της Donna Haraway για το σάιμποργκ και την μελέτη της Rosi Braidotti για τον μεταάνθρωπο και τις σχέσεις εξουσίας (2016), η διατριβή αυτή διερευνά πώς η επιστημονική φαντασία χρησιμοποιεί, διευρύνει, αλλά και παραποιεί τον ορισμό της Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης εισάγοντας περισσότερο ανθρωπόμορφες εκδοχές των μηχανών, τόσο σχετικά με την εμφάνιση όσο και, ακόμα περισσότερο, με τις δυνατότητές τους.

Τα κεφάλαια είναι δομημένα με τρόπο που επιτρέπει την αποδόμηση των έμφυλων διπόλων μέσα από διαδοχικές αναγνώσεις άλλων κοινωνικά κατασκευασμένων διπόλων καθώς και κινηματογραφικών τεχνικών αναπαράστασης. Τα έξι κεφάλαια παρουσιάζουν συγγένειες ανά ζεύγη: το δύο πρώτα κεφάλαια αναλύουν τις συμπληρωματικές κινηματογραφικές τεχνικές της εικόνας και του ήχου μέσα από την αναπαράσταση της θηλυκότητας˙ το τρίτο και το τέταρτο κεφάλαιο διερευνούν διαφορετικά είδη καταπίεσης, ,καθώς και τους τρόπους με τους οποίους αυτά προβάλλονται στα εξεταζόμενα παραδείγματα, με ιδιαίτερη εστίαση στην σημασία της φυλής και του φύλου˙ τέλος, το πέμπτο και το έκτο κεφάλαιο εξετάζουν το θηλυκό υποκείμενο είτε μέσα από τις αλληλεπιδράσεις μεταξύ των θηλυκών ηρωίδων στις ταινίες είτε μέσα από την ανάλυση του γυναικείου βλέμματος, της γυναικείας κυριαρχίας και του γυναικείου κινηματογραφικού φακού. Τα ζεύγη αυτά προσφέρουν συμπληρωματικές αναγνώσεις των κινηματογραφικών τεχνικών, αφηγήσεων και αναπαραστάσεων, περνώντας από την κλασική φεμινιστική θεωρία σε πιο πρόσφατες μελέτες πάνω στον κυβερνοφεμινισμό, την διαθεματικότητα και την οπτική κουλτούρα, με την παράλληλη εξέταση της κατασκευής και της αποδόμησης των διπόλων.

Το έμφυλο δίπολο αναλύεται αρχικά στο πρώτο κεφάλαιο με τίτλο «Αποτυχημένες Αρρενωπότητες, Σάιμποργκ Θηλυκότητες: Μασκαράτα, Αντικατοπτρισμοί και Θέαση» ("Failed Masculinities, Cyborg Femininities: Masquerade, Reflections and Spectatorship"). Με σημείο εκκίνησης την θηλυκή μηχανή στις ταινίες *Her* και *Ex Machina*, το κεφάλαιο εμβαθύνει στους τρόπους με τους οποίους οι ταινίες προδίδουν

την πλαστότητα της θηλυκότητας. Η συνειδητοποίηση ότι η θηλυκότητα είναι μία μάσκα που μπορεί να φορεθεί όπως ακριβώς ένα ανδροειδές «φοράει» την ανθρώπινη σάρκα απειλεί να αποκαλύψει ότι και η αρρενωπότητα δεν αποτελεί παρά μία μασκαράτα. Η σάιμποργκ θηλυκότητα συγκρίνεται, λοιπόν, με την αποτυχημένη αρρενωπότητα ώς η άλλη όψη του ίδιου νομίσματος. Η αποτυχία είναι μία βασική έννοια, καθώς έχει διπλή σημασία και στις δύο ταινίες. Η αποτυχία της αρρενωπότητας σημαίνει επίσης την αποτυχία της ερωτικής σχέσης μεταξύ ανθρώπου και μεταανθρώπου.

Το πρώτο κεφάλαιο εστιάζει στην ταινία *Ex Machina* και εξετάζει πώς η μασκαράτα και η ανδρόγυνη μεταμόρφωση του θηλυκού ανδροειδούς καταδεικνύει την ρομποτική «φύση» του θηλυκού. Η κατασκευασμένη αυτή οντότητα υπερβαίνει το δυαδικό φύλο και επιτρέπει μία ανάγνωση της πρωταγωνίστριας ως ένα δυνητικά κουήρ ή τρανς σύμβολο. Η γυναίκα μεταάνθρωπος αποκαλύπτει ότι τόσο η θηλυκότητα όσο και η αρρενωπότητα είναι κοινωνικά κατασκευασμένες. Οι ρομποτικές μεταμορφώσεις των γυναικείων χαρακτήρων εξετάζονται συγκριτικά με παραδείγματα του κλασικού κινηματογράφου, όπως το *Παρίσι Τέξας* του Wenders, με βάση την θεωρία του δημιουργού και την θεωρία του ανδρικού βλέμματος, όπως διατυπώθηκε από την Mulvey. Ωστόσο, το κεφάλαιο επεκτείνει τις θεωρίες αυτές καταδεικνύοντας πώς στην εξεταζόμενη φιλμογραφία ο δημιουργός και το αρσενικό βλέμμα ανατρέπονται μέσα από την παρωδική ρομποτική θηλυκότητα του Άλλου. Η παρωδία είναι ιδιαίτερα σημαντική στην εξέταση της σάιμποργκ θηλυκότητας. Ενώ οι αναπαραστάσεις θηλυκών σάιμποργκ είναι κυρίως ανδροκεντρικές και απεικονίζουν την σάιμποργκ θηλυκότητα ως αληθινή, αισθησιακή και απειλητική για τον άνδρα ήρωα, οι αναγνώστες δύνανται να ανακαλύψουν την πλαστότητα των απεικονίσεων αυτών. Παράλληλα το κεφάλαιο διερευνά το ανδρικο βλέμμα ως καθρέφτη, στοχεύοντας στην αποδόμηση τόσο της αρρενωπότητας όσο και της θηλυκότητας. Στην ταινία Her, η αποδόμηση και αποτυχία της θηλυκότητας είναι αποτέλεσμα της αποσωματοποίησης της θηλυκής ηρωίδας. Ωστόσο, παρά την απουσία ενός θηλυκού σώματος, η θηλυκότητα της μηχανής παραμένει παρούσα. Ο πιο σημαντικός παράγοντας για την αναπαράσταση της θηλυκότητας είναι η γυναικεία φωνή της μηχανής.

Ο ήχος και η φωνή αποτελούν κεντρικές θεματικές του δεύτερου κεφαλαίου, «Η Πολιτική του Ήχου: Σύγχρεση και Αποσύνδεση» ("The Politics of Sound: Synchresis

and Disconnection"). Περνώντας από την πολιτική του βλέμματος και της εικόνας σε εκείνη του ήχου, το κεφάλαιο αυτό διερευνά πώς οι θηλυκές ταυτότητες μπορούν να δομηθούν τόσο οπτικά όσο και ακουστικά. Αντλώντας από την μελέτη της Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* (1988) και εκείνη του Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision* (1994), το κεφάλαιο διερευνά τον ρόλο του ήχου στην εξεταζόμενη φιλμογραφία. Στο *Her*, τόσο η φωνή όσο και η μουσική διαδραματίζουν σημαντικό ρόλο στην κατασκευή του αποσωματοποιημένου μεταανθρώπου, ενώ το *Ex Machina* προσφέρει μία εναλλακτική χρήση του ήχου ως αναπόσπαστου χαρακτηριστικού του κινηματογραφικού είδους. Η τελευταία ενότητα του κεφαλαίου αυτού επικεντρώνεται στο πώς ο ήχος στην κινηματογραφική σειρά *Westworld* παίζει σημαντικό ρόλο στην ανάμειξη όχι μόνο των κινηματογραφικών ειδών αλλά και των φύλων και διερευνά το θηλυκό σάιμποργκ σαν μία εν δυνάμει τρανς μορφή.

Το κεφάλαιο αυτό εξετάζει πώς ο ήχος, η φωνή και η μουσική λειτουργούν στις ταινίες και εστιάζει σε σκηνές στις οποίες ο ήχος κυριαρχεί της εικόνας ή το αντίστροφο. Για παράδειγμα, το ασώματο θηλυκό στο *Her* καταφέρνει να αποδώσει την ακουστική εικόνα μίας θηλυκότητας μέσω της φωνής. Σύμφωνα με το κεντρικό επιχείρημα του κεφαλαίου, η φωνή αυτή ταυτίζεται με διαφορετικές θηλυκές ταυτότητες: της μητέρας, της ερωμένης και της Άλλης. Η αναπαράσταση του θηλυκού αποτελεί έναν ακουστικό καθρέφτη, όπως θα έλεγε και η Silverman, των αρσενικών φόβων και επιθυμιών. Από την άλλη, το *Ex Machina* και το *Westworld* χαρακτηρίζονται από την σύνδεση μεταξύ ήχου, φύλου και κινηματογραφικού είδους, καθώς δίνεται έμφαση στην συνεισφορά της μουσικής ως συνδετικού κρίκου μεταξύ διαφορετικών κινηματογραφικών ειδών που συνυπάρχουν. Στο *Westworld* η εγκιβωτισμένη αφήγηση περιπλέκει ακόμα περισσότερο την κατάταξη του έργου ως σειράς επιστημονικής φαντασίας.

Επιπλέον, στο *Ex Machina* τίθεται και το ζήτημα της βουβής θηλυκότητας μέσα από την απεικόνιση ενός θηλυκού ρομπότ που δεν μπορεί να επικοινωνήσει λεκτικά. Στην περίπτωση αυτή, η σιωπή του θηλυκού ταυτίζει ακόμα περισσότερο την εικόνα του με έναν τεχνολογικό Άλλο. Με βάση την μελέτη της Doane για το πάθος και το μελόδραμα, το κεφάλαιο εστιάζει στο πώς η τηλεοπτική σειρά υπερβαίνει το έμφυλο δίπολο μέσα από το ίδιο το διπλό είδος και πώς αυτό διαφαίνεται μέσα από την μουσική.

Το τρίτο κεφάλαιο, με τίτλο «Εντοπίζοντας την Διαφορά σε Λευκές Ουτοπίες: Φυλή, Τάξη και Υποεκπροσώπηση» ("Locating Difference in White Utopias: Race, Class and Underrepresentation") επανεξετάζει την εικόνα αναφορικά με την φυλετική διαφορά και την χρήση του χρώματος και διερευνά πώς απεικονίζονται οι μη λευκές ηρωίδες στις εξεταζόμενες αφηγήσεις, συμπεριλαμβάνοντας σε αυτές μία εναλλακτική εκδοχή της χρήσης του μαύρου χρώματος στην ταινία *Under the Skin*. Αντλώντας την μεθοδολογία του από τις μελέτες της Bell Hooks και του Richard Dyer αναφορικά με την φυλή και το χρώμα, καθώς και τον ορισμό του οριενταλισμού από τον Edward Said, το κεφάλαιο αυτό ασχολείται με την φυλή ως ένα ζήτημα το οποίο οι αναγνώσεις ταινιών επιστημονικής φαντασίας συστηματικά παραβλέπουν. Ο όρος «διαθεματικότητα», όπως τον χρησιμοποίησε πρώτη η Kimberlé Crenshaw, διαδραματίζει πρωταρχικό ρόλο στην ανάλυση. Η μελέτη της Crenshaw όχι μόνο επηρέασε σε μεγάλο βαθμό το τρίτο φεμινιστικό κύμα και προετοίμασε το έδαφος για την συμπερίληψη της φυλής στις συζητήσεις περί φύλου, αλλά και πυροδότησε την εξερεύνηση άλλων κατηγοριών καταπίεσης και της άρρηκτης σχέσης τους με τη δυναμική των φύλων. Τέτοια κατηγορία αποτελεί και η οικονομική τάξη, της οποίας η σχέση με το φύλο, την φυλή και τις τεχνολογικές «ουτοπίες» είναι συχνά προφανής σε ταινίες επιστημονικής φαντασίας όπως τα *Blade Runner 2049* και *Cloud Atlas*.

Το κεφάλαιο εστιάζει στην επικράτηση της λευκής φυλής και του πλούτου σε τέτοιες αφηγήσεις καταδεικνύοντας πώς οι ταινίες απεικονίζουν την τεχνολογία και ιδιαίτερα την Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη ως εργαλείο για τους λίγους και προνομιούχους. Για το επιχείρημα αυτό, εξετάζεται τόσο η φετιχοποίηση της βίας εναντίον των μη λευκών θηλυκοτήτων στην φιλμογραφία όσο και η αναπαράσταση ενός «λευκού» μέλλοντος, από το οποίο οι μη λευκοί είτε απουσιάζουν είτε έχουν υποδεέστερο ρόλο, αφού οι νέες τεχνολογίες παραμένουν στα χέρια των λευκών και ετεροφυλόφιλων ανδρών.

Η σύνδεση ανάμεσα σε φύλο και φυλή αποτελεί σημείο εστίασης και για το τέταρτο κεφάλαιο, «Το #MeToo στην Απεικόνιση της Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης: Η Κουλτούρα του Βιασμού σε Φουτουριστικές Φαντασιώσεις» ("#MeToo in AI Fiction: Rape Culture in Futuristic Fantasies"). Το κεφάλαιο αυτό εξετάζει την τηλεοπτική σειρά *Westworld* και την ταινία *Ex Machina* ως δύο παραδείγματα του πώς η σεξουαλική βία εναντίον των γυναικών απεικονίζεται σε πρόσφατες πολιτισμικές αφηγήσεις. Παλαιότερες ταινίες επιστημονικής φαντασίας (όπως το *The Stepford Wives*) λαμβάνονται υπόψη στο

πλαίσιο μίας συγκριτικής ανάλυσης. Η θεματική του κεφαλαίου στρέφεται γύρω από την σύνδεση της κουλτούρας του βιασμού και της αναπαράστασης έμφυλων σάιμποργκ. Η κυβερνοφεμινιστική και η κουήρ θεωρία, με συγκεκριμένη μνεία στις μελέτες των Halberstam και Ahmed, εξετάζονται υπό το πρίσμα του αν μία μεταφυλική ουτοπία αποτελεί μία εφικτή επιλογή. Τέλος, ο μηχανισμός του εξιλαστήριου θύματος από τον René Girard κατέχει σημαντικό ρόλο στην ανάλυση του κινήματος #MeToo, ως μία διαδήλωση γυναικών που διεκδικούν το σώμα τους μέσω ενός ψηφιακού μέσου. Η αποσωματοποίηση έρχεται ξανά στο προσκήνιο αναφορικά με τις επιπτώσεις της στο τραύμα και την ασφάλεια των γυναικών. Επιπλέον, το κεφάλαιο αυτό εξετάζει τον όρο passing ως μία έννοια συνδεδεμένη με το φύλο, την φυλή και την σεξουαλικότητα. Η ανάγκη των σάιμποργκ να μοιάσουν και να περάσουν ως άνθρωποι για να επιβιώσουν, στην εξεταζόμενη φιλμογραφία, μπορεί να παραλληλιστεί με υπάρχουσες μορφές καταπίεσης και βίας που οδηγούν τα υποκείμενα στην απόκρυψη της πραγματικής τους κοινωνικής ταυτότητας.

Τα δύο τελευταία κεφάλαια αντιμετωπίζουν το έμφυλο χάσμα στο κινηματογραφικό είδος μέσα από μια πιο δυναμική οπτική. Το πέμπτο κεφάλαιο, με τίτλο «Όπως η Μητέρα, Έτσι και η Κόρη: Η (Α)ορατότητα των Γυναικείων Δεσμών» ("Like Mother, Like Daughter: The (In)visibility of Female Bonds"), εμβαθύνει στις σχέσεις μεταξύ γυναικών σε ταινίες σχετικές με μηχανές Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης. Με εφαλτήριο το τεστ Μπέκντελ[1] και τις επιπτώσεις του στον κινηματογράφο, το κεφάλαιο αυτό διερευνά το πώς η επιστημονική φαντασία πάσχει από μία σχεδόν αποκλειστικά αρσενική και ετεροφυλοφιλική οπτική αναφορικά με την υποκειμενικότητα.

Εξετάζοντας τους σχεδόν κρυμμένους δεσμούς ανάμεσα στις γυναικείες ηρωίδες στα εξεταζόμενα παραδείγματα, το κεφάλαιο αυτό συνεισφέρει σε μία νέα, εναλλακτική ανάγνωση των αφηγήσεων Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης, που παραβλέπει τον άνδρα ήρωα ως πρωταρχικό σημείο αναφοράς και διερευνά τις αναπαριστώμενες θηλυκότητες ως δυνητικά κουήρ υποκείμενα. Επιπλέον, συνδέει τις ανδροκεντρικές αυτές αφηγήσεις με το κατά πόσο οι νέες τεχνολογίες αποτελούν έμφυλο ζήτημα.

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[1] Το τεστ μετράει την αναπαράσταση και την εκπροσώπηση των γυναικών στον κινηματογράφο. Εξετάζει κατά πόσο μία ταινία περιλαμβάνει τουλάχιστον δύο γυναικείους χαρακτήρες που μιλούν μεταξύ τους για κάτι άλλο πέρα από έναν άντρα. Το τεστ παρουσίασε για πρώτη φορά η σκιτσογράφος Άλισον Μπέκντελ στο κόμικ της Dykes to Watch Out For το 1985.

Τέλος, το έκτο κεφάλαιο περνάει από την έμφυλη ανισορροπία της αναπαράστασης των χαρακτήρων στο έμφυλο χάσμα αναφορικά με την θέαση. Με τίτλο «Προς μία Γυναικεία Ματιά στην Κινηματογραφική Απεικόνιση της Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης: Ο Γυναικείος Φακός και το Αντεστραμμένο Βλέμμα» ("Towards a Female Spectatorship in AI Film: The Female Lens and the Reversed Gaze"), το κεφάλαιο αυτό εστιάζει στην γυναίκα σκηνοθέτιδα, θεατή και κινηματογραφική ηρωίδα. Προκειμένου να καταδείξει το έμφυλο χάσμα στην κινηματογραφική απεικόνιση της Τεχνητής Νοημοσύνης, το κεφάλαιο αυτό εξετάζει την ταινία *I'm Your Man* της Schrader, σε αντιπαραβολή με αντίστοιχες ταινίες σκηνοθετημένες από γυναίκες ως αντιπαραδείγματα στην ανδρική ματιά, και αναζητά τρόπους με τους οποίους οι αναγνώστες μπορούν να φανταστούν εκ νέου το γυναικείο βλέμμα, ακόμα και σε ταινίες σκηνοθετημένες από άνδρες. Οι αντιστροφές των φύλων είναι σημαντικές πρωταρχικά σε σχέση με τα αληθινά βιώματα γυναικών σκηνοθέτιδων και θεατών. Επομένως, το κεφάλαιο αυτό εστιάζει στις γυναίκες κινηματογραφίστριες υπό αυτό το πρίσμα και απορρίπτει την θεωρία του δημιουργού ως ανδροκεντρική. Βασιζόμενο στην μελέτη της Doane για την γυναίκα θεατή, το τελευταίο κεφάλαιο της διατριβής οραματίζεται το μέλλον του κινηματογράφου επιστημονικής φαντασίας ως ενδυναμωτικό και συμπεριληπτικό αναφορικά με την γυναικεία υποκειμενικότητα.

Στα συμπεράσματα της διατριβής, συγκεντρώνονται οι σημαντικότερες διαπιστώσεις αναφορικά με τα ερωτήματα και τις υποθέσεις εργασίας. Βάσει αυτών, προβάλλεται η συμβολή της μελέτης αυτής στην κινηματογραφική θεωρία μέσα από την συνδυαστική ανάγνωση των κινηματογραφικών υποειδών. Πιο συγκεκριμένα, η επιστημονική φαντασία και το ρομαντικό κινηματογραφικό είδος, ως ένα στερεοτυπικά αρρενωπό και θηλυκό είδος αντίστοιχα, εμφανίζονται συνυφασμένα στην διερεύνηση του φύλου και άλλων διπόλων. Εξετάζοντας τις διαφορετικές ερμηνείες του πάθους, η διατριβή αυτή διατυπώνει το επιχείρημα ότι ο σύνδεσμος μεταξύ πάθους και λογικής, συναισθήματος και τεχνολογίας, αρσενικού και θηλυκού, 10 επιτρέπει στον αναγνώστη να επανεξετάσει και να χαρτογραφήσει εκ νέου το έμφυλο δίπολο στον κινηματογράφο και την οπτική κουλτούρα.

Εξετάζοντας διαφορετικές πτυχές της έμφυλης μηχανής στον κινηματογράφο και την οπτική κουλτούρα, η διατριβή αυτή καταδεικνύει πώς η σάιμποργκ θηλυκότητα μπορεί, σε ορισμένες περιπτώσεις, να διαιωνίσει τα δίπολα, ενώ σε άλλες μπορεί να

χρησιμοποιηθεί ως όπλο εναντίον τους και να προετοιμάσει το έδαφος για την οπτικοποίηση μεταφεμινιστικών ουτοπιών. Παράλληλα, εξετάζει τον τρόπο με τον οποίο μία νέα μεταανθρώπινη υποκειμενικότητα, η οποία υπερβαίνει το καθιερωμένο έμφυλο δίπολο με την παρουσίαση μεταφυλικών μορφών, απεικονίζεται στον κινηματογράφο και την τηλεόραση. Μέσα από τον συνδυασμό διαφορετικών μεθοδολογικών εργαλείων, η μελέτη αυτή υποστηρίζει ότι οι ρομαντικές ή σεξουαλικές αλληλεπιδράσεις μεταξύ ανθρώπων και μεταανθρώπων συμβάλλουν στην διαμόρφωση μίας τέτοιας μεταφυλικής υποκειμενικότητας. Επιπλέον, κεντρικό επιχείρημα της διατριβής αυτής αποτελεί η θέση ότι η εξεταζόμενη φιλμογραφία παρουσιάζει μία στροφή στις αφηγήσεις επιστημονικής φαντασίας, έτσι ώστε οι φουτουριστικές ιδέες να επικεντρώνονται λιγότερο στις τεχνολογικές εξελίξεις και να συνδέονται περισσότερο με την κοινωνική αλλαγή και τα νέα μεταφυλικά υποκείμενα. Συνδυαστικά, η διερεύνηση του φύλου και του κινηματογραφικού είδους, η φεμινιστική και κουήρ θεωρία και η μελέτη του μεταανθρώπου, συμβάλλουν σε κοινές αναγνώσεις που ανατρέπουν τις κυρίαρχες νόρμες. Αυτές οι αναγνώσεις προκύπτουν από τις ταυτόχρονες ερμηνείες του πάθους στις διάφορες πτυχές του: την αποδομημένη ανδρική βία, την αποσύνδεση της παθητικότητας από την θηλυκότητα και τα πάθη ως αιτία εξέγερσης.

Introduction

Depictions of sentient machines in science fiction have proliferated in the 21st century, with a new kind of cyborg subjectivity emerging. With recent developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, the continuously growing human-technology interplay, and the evolving cyberspace relationships in recent years, the exploration of such subjectivities becomes more urgent than before.

This thesis examines cyborg subjectivities and their representations in film and visual culture, focusing primarily on the films *Her* (Jonze 2013) and *Ex Machina* (Garland 2014) and secondarily on Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's television series *Westworld* (2016-2022) and Maria Schrader's film *I'm Your Man* (2021). These case studies were selected based on their representations of post-femininities and post-masculinities through a focus on romantic interactions between humans and machines. Released in the first half of the 2010s, *Her* and *Ex Machina* present a paradigm shift that becomes more evident in *Westworld* and *I'm Your Man*; therefore, the thesis also follows a chronological order to demonstrate this shift and explores the key thematics between the case studies.

In *Her*, a divorced young man named Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) develops an unusual romantic relationship with Samantha, a disembodied AI operating system (voiced by Scarlett Johansson). In *Ex Machina*, programmer Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson) becomes infatuated by Ava (Alicia Vikander), an AI female robot he is hired to evaluate. In *Westworld*, a television adaptation of Michael Crichton's 1973 film of the same title, humans visit theme parks inhabited by human-looking robots. Their interactions are mostly violent, with male humans raping female robots, while a central narrative focuses on a man's love for a female robot turning into lust. *I'm Your Man* follows Alma Felser (Maren Eggert), an archaeologist assigned with the task of evaluating the intelligence a male humanoid robot named Tom (Dan Stevens); the evaluation involves a three-week assessment of Alma and Tom pretending to be cohabiting partners.

The focus on these romantic interplays is explained by two methodological axes. Firstly, the thesis proposes a combined methodological framework studying Isaac Asimov's categorisation of robots as *pathos* (based on their suffering) or menaces (Asimov 1982) in comparison with Mary Ann Doane's association of the Greek term

pathos with feminine film genres (Doane 2004), and Sara Ahmed's association of passion and its Latin root *passio* with passivity and femininity (Ahmed 2004). This framework focuses on gender and genre, arguing that the overlapping of science fiction with what Doane describes as 'softer' film genres is closely linked to the merging and eventual elimination of masculinity and femininity in representations of AI. The different but corresponding interpretations of pathos and passion come into play in all the examined narratives: in *Her*, Theodore exhibits stereotypically feminine character traits, as a soft, sensitive, and rather passive man, while the narrative is led by his romance with Samantha, an otherworldly creature with a passion for freedom and transcendence; in *Ex Machina*, the female robots Ava and Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno) both suffer the violence of their creator and captor, Nathan (Oscar Isaac), while Ava uses her femininity as a weapon to attract Caleb's romantic passion; *Westworld* presents robots as victims of human violence, while also alluding to a second meaning of pathos as the opposite of logic, linking it to masculine violence; finally, *I'm Your Man* explores the romance between Alma and Tom, while demonstrating the latter's struggle to fit into the human world.

The second axis examines the filmic cyborg as a post-gender figure and explores how the heterosexual romances between cis heterosexual humans and gendered robots can yet prepare the ground for envisioning cyborgs as potentially queer subjects. This methodological framework considers Ahmed (2006) and Jack Halberstam's (2005) accounts on queer spaces, which, in this work, are associated with cyborg spaces. In all case studies, the robots' struggle to fit into humanity by passing not only as humans, but also as heterosexual females or males, resonates with Halberstam's argument that science fiction films expose *"the body in transition"* as a *"powerful fantasy in transmodern cinema"* (Halberstam 2005, 76). By drawing on queer theory and considering the overlapping of pathos with science fiction, this work argues that the portrayal of the posthuman in recent filmography not only disrupts the masculine-feminine binary, but also constitutes a fluid subject that transcends heteronormativity.

In this context, the thesis considers the affinities among cyborgs, posthumans, and AI robots, according to how the latter are represented in film and television. Considering Donna Haraway's definition of the cyborg and Rosi Braidotti's posthuman critique of

power hierarchies (2016), this work explores how science fiction challenges the concept of AI, thereby introducing more anthropomorphic versions of machines.

Recent cultural texts deviate from the definition of AI by representing machines that display not only human intelligence but also consciousness. In *Her*, Samantha demonstrates emotions and makes decisions of her own, contradicting the narrative of a personal assistant that would obey her owner's instructions. In *Ex Machina*, Nathan hires Caleb to perform the Turing Test to evaluate Ava's intelligence; however, what Nathan truly wants to determine is whether Ava can demonstrate consciousness to the level that she can manipulate Caleb into helping her escape from Nathan's facility. In *Westworld*, the robots are depicted as sentient creatures, with feelings and memories, that eventually rebel against humanity. *I'm Your Man* also presents the idea that Tom transcends the strict definition of AI by showing signs of consciousness, especially through his desire to understand himself and the world. This shift towards consciousness plays an important role in the analysis of dichotomies.

By combining queer theory, posthuman theory, and feminist perspectives on pathos and genre, this work studies how filmic AIs and cyborgs transgress their assigned roles as gendered others. Further, it proposes that these four case studies from the past decade (2014 – 2021) present a shift in AI narratives with futurism being less linked to technology per se and further associated with social change and emerging post-gender subjectivities.

Much of the work included in this thesis has appeared in the following manuscripts:

- Papakyriakopoulou, Katerina, "The gendered AI in *Her* (2013): Sound, synchresis and disconnection in filmic representations" in *Technoetic Arts*, Volume 18, Issue Taboo–Transgression–Transcendence in Art & Science, Oct 2020, p. 257 – 266. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/tear_00043_1 (Papakyriakopoulou 2020).
- Papakyriakopoulou, Katerina, "Gendered Machines in Film and Television: How 'Post-' Femininities and Masculinities Challenge the Gender Binary", accepted for publication in *Sexualities Journal*, currently in press.

Research Questions, Structure and Methodology

The main research question of the thesis is whether the representations of gendered machines can transgress the gender binary and lead to the development of new, post-gender identities. The three secondary questions that emerge from this are the following: a) how feminist film theory can propose new readings of science fiction and female representation, b) how the hybrid film genre contributes to gender representations, and c) whether science fiction cinema can become more feminist.

The methodology this thesis follows is the close reading and analysis of different cultural texts from film and television. The following sections of the introduction delve into these research questions and present the different approaches and theoretical tools used in the thesis. They also present the case studies and the rationale for their selection.

The first section, "AI, Cyborg Feminism and the Posthuman", includes the literature review of texts by feminist scholars and focuses on the different terminology around gendered machines and how this affects both feminism and film studies. It also introduces the examined case studies, as well as critical texts that have been written about them, identifying the research gap this thesis aims to explore.

"Pathos and the Evolution of Genre" introduces the primary argument of the thesis, according to which the hybrid genre of science fiction and romance in film plays a pivotal role in the transgression of the gender binarisms. In this section, a new methodological framework is introduced and analysed. This also provides the rationale for the selection of the examined films.

The final section, "Inaccessible Futures: Mapping the Gap of Gender in the Genre", offers a brief synopsis of the gender gap in science and (science) fiction, supported by both quantitative sources and cultural examples. This section also gives an overview of the main chapters and a rationale for their order.

AI, Cyborg Feminism and the Posthuman

Deriving its methodological framework from third-wave and fourth-wave feminist scholars, as well as from Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto*, the thesis examines the future of AI technologies in film representation and their implications for feminist film theory.

Considering the recent developments in AI technologies, the continuously growing human-technology interplay, and the evolving cyberspace relationships in recent years as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, such issues become even more urgent in both the scientific and the cultural field.

This section constitutes a review of the research methodology and provides the rationale for the combination of approaches. That particularly concerns the conceptual affinities between the terms 'cyborg' and 'posthuman', and their importance for AI representations in film. While a full glossary for the terminology used in the thesis is provided in a separate section, it is important to define the key terms to understand how the AI, posthuman and cyborg discourses can be combined in the films' analysis.

Artificial Intelligence originated in England and emerged from Alan Turing's test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligence that was introduced in two articles from 1947 and 1950. The concept of the Turing Test, as known today, originated in the United States in the 1950s (Chamoux 2018).

The posthuman as a new form of subjectivity was coined by postmodern literary critic and theorist Katherine Hayles in 1999 as what deviates from the natural self, characterised by consciousness rather than materiality and embodiment. According to Hayles, in the posthuman view there is no clear and absolute difference between embodiment and computer simulation of intelligence (Hayles 1999).

Hayles' definition of the posthuman deviates from that of AI, primarily because she highlights the importance of consciousness over intelligence and rejects the binary between embodiment and computer simulation. On the other hand, the AI terminology is much more technocentric, as it refers to computer systems that are *"designed to model some aspect of human intelligence"* (Adam 1998, 1)[2].

Nevertheless, in science fiction films, the AI is often[3] more than that, displaying not only human intelligence but also human consciousness. Vivian Sobchack explains the

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[2] Alison Adam's definition categorises Artificial Intelligence in machine learning, robotics and vision, search strategies, *"using natural language"*, neural networks or connectionism, and expert or knowledge-based system (Adam 1998).

[3] By using the example of R2D2 and C-3PO in *Star Wars* saga, Patricia Melzer notes that in science fiction films, the *"creatures of technology"* that are *"purely mechanical with no human components"* are usually represented as friendly, while the ones that do resemble humans are often also a threat to humanity (Melzer 2006, 111).

increasing cinematic interest in the posthuman in the 21st century precisely as a *"shift in cultural consciousness"* with *"its imagination uneasily located (…) 'in between' future and past, gain and loss, promise and nostalgia, animate and inanimate – and, of course, life and death"* (Sobchack 2009, 378). The depiction of conscient machines transcends the concept of AI by assuming that consciousness is something that humans can inculcate to machines. The distinction indicates that film versions of AI robots represent not only highly intelligent machines with automated responses designed by humans to serve humans, but also machines with anthropomorphic characteristics, such as empathy or fear, as well as an understanding of themselves. In regards to this, I argue that the self-consciousness of AI machines in cinema is what makes them posthumans and, therefore, new forms of subjects.

Such depictions also include a sexual dimension by presenting AI machines as gendered. In her analysis of posthumanity, Braidotti notes the emergence of a new dichotomy between subjectivity and otherness that places white masculinity in the position of the self and femininity, as well as non-westernness, in the position of the Other. She does, however, suggest that posthuman futures need to be embraced to disrupt such dichotomies (Braidotti 2013). Science fiction in the 21st century has indeed offered new possibilities of viewing and understanding gender and identity, although the emerging posthuman selves are not free of binarisms (Carrasco 2015).

In her article about *Ex Machina*, Emily Cox considers Braidotti's argument and applies Giorgio Agamben's concept of indistinction between all established dichotomies to further explore how the film blurs gender norms (Cox 2018). She describes the transition from 20th-century to 21st-century portrayals of the gynoid pointing out that male anxiety was added to male fantasies of the 'perfect' woman: indeed, representations of female robots that are both hypersexual and threatening reveal a fear of the unknown female sexuality (intertwined with an unfamiliarity with new technologies). She argues that it is particularly the convincing femininity of the passive and desirable robot that makes her rebellious as she exposes the artificiality of all femininity. By utilising Agamben's model, Cox conceives Woman not through the oppositional terms of the self and the other, but as something *"undecidable"* (Cox 2018, 19). This work goes one step further by utilising the already blurred gender binary to demonstrate how filmic posthumanity is associated with queerness, but also

how cyborgs can entirely transcend the distinction between the self and the other by constructing their own subjectivity. Concerning the latter, Ahmed's contribution to queer theory is an important methodological tool, as she views othering not as a *"form of negation"*, but as a *"form of extension"* (Ahmed 2006, 115).

By reading the examined filmography, I explore how the construction of conscious gendered AI machines challenges biological determinism. This is done through the relocation of the cultural anxieties and desires concerning the body and the constitution of identity from biology to technology. The cultural roles of 'male' and 'female' that have their roots in biology have been factors that contributed to women's oppression and the perpetuation of pregiven gender roles that have been considered to come with nature instead of nurture.

AI fiction, though, has prepared the ground for understanding the so-called biological differences[4] as projections of how society envisions masculine and feminine attributes. The anxiety of controlling a woman has become the anxiety of controlling a machine, designed to resemble certain aspects of femaleness and femininity. This anxiety is intertwined with the desire for a technological utopia, which, in patriarchal terms, would be associated with controlling the female machine.

Yet, such anxieties are now more urgent, as AI machines have been moving from the realm of fantasy into reality. The previous decade has contributed to this shift in technology by introducing AI virtual assistants, such as Apple's Siri (2011), Microsoft's Cortana (2014), and Amazon's Alexa (2014) (Meissner 2019). However, the representation of anxiety and desire in AI filmography remains focused on what the world would look like if such machines demonstrated human consciousness instead of automated computer responses. It is correlated with the question of whether there can be a merging of human and machine, as AI suggests (Chamoux 2018). Such a suggestion resonates with the cyborg discourse to a significant extend. According to Haraway, the definition of the cyborg itself suggests this merging: *"a hybrid of machine and organism"* (Haraway 1991, 149). It is, therefore, both the existence of AI systems

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[4] Elizabeth Wright notes that while 'male' and 'female' are biological data have been used by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to define 'sexual difference' as a result of the cultural roles given to the speaking subject (Wright 1992).

and the utopian cinematic fantasy of them simulating and even replacing human intelligence[5], which contribute to recent AI representations in science fiction films.

By examining film depictions and potential misconceptions of AI, the thesis contributes to bridging the gap between gender and genre. The scholarly literature is primarily derived from cyborg feminism, with a parallel study of its alignment with cyberfeminism. In her book *Alien Constructions*, Patricia Melzer has offered a detailed review of cyborg feminism and cyberfeminism, each primarily rooting in the philosophy of feminist theorists Haraway and Sadie Plant (1998) respectively. While both movements have been interested in the way technologies affect women's lives, Melzer notes the more holistic approach of cyborg feminism in exploring the dialogue between *"identity formation, embodiment, and political resistance"* and points out that: *"Unlike cyberfeminism, whose theoretical interventions are mainly focused on digital culture, cyborg feminism is concerned with the ways in which corporate capitalism, technoscience, and cyberspace, as social, economic, and political factors, affect women's lives and reshape subjectivities* (Melzer 2006, 22). The thesis draws on the dialogic relationship between these three factors in reimagining post-gender worlds, both embodied and disembodied. In such hypothetical worlds, the duality of gender and sexual difference *"might be voluntarily overcome through the application of biotechnologies"* (Ferrando 2014, 11). Haraway's notion of cyborg politics and feminist film theorists' scholarship on science fiction, especially in works by Melzer and Doane, have an important role towards this direction.

In parallel with these readings, the thesis considers Plant's account on women's disembodied subjectivities in the cyberspace and responds to her notion of a cyberfeminist utopia where women have control over technology. Finally, Judy Wajcman's critique of both cyborg feminism and cyberfeminism's prioritisation of technologies over feminist politics is also a focus of the films' analysis. More specifically, I apply *"technofeminism"* as her suggested method of analysing gendered new technologies and examine the implications of such gendered film representations in shaping feminist politics (J. Wajcman 2004).

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[5] According to Chamoux, this is an implausible fantasy of science fiction cinema, whose purposes are *"purely promotional"* (Chamoux 2018, 213).

Considering the urgency of technological anxieties, desires, and relationships in the current decade, and their dialogue with feminist scholarly literature, I selected the examined case studies mainly based on cultural texts of the past decade until today. This is explained by both the evolution of the science fiction genre, particularly in AI narratives, and the technological advancements in the past decade. On the one hand, the newest filmography depicts AI machines as more domesticated, presenting potential futures of them living with humans instead of fighting them, a concept that was not so popular in early films about AI. On the other hand, AI technology itself has seen a massive evolution, with an increasing number of people using smart devices and living in smart homes. Based on that, the examined cultural texts are primarily derived from film and secondarily from television, while there are certain notable examples from science fiction literature, as well as postmodern and contemporary visual arts. This interdisciplinary approach is explained by the different forms of the nonhuman subject and contributes to the originality of the readings. While the chronological focus covers the period of the past ten years (2013-2022), comparative paradigms from older narratives with common thematics are also used in certain chapters.

Apart from the timeframe, the filmography's selection is also explained by the science fiction genre and the theme of the female posthuman in Western technologically advanced societies. The focus on the posthuman is understood by the fact that it characterises future utopian and dystopian visions in film, especially concerning its association with technological advancements. To analyse science fiction narratives means to envision future worlds. As Doane puts it, science fiction's *"'proper' obsession is with the projection of a future rather than the reconstruction of a past"* (Doane 1999, 29). These future projections enable an alternative discourse about gender and the body by considering future subjects – posthumans with *postbodies.*

Female posthuman entities encountered in science fiction films have often challenged the way we understand gender, ranging from the human replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) to the more recent representation of female robots in Jonathan Mostow's *Surrogates* (2009) and Gabe Ibáñez's *Autómata* (2014). Apart from being challenging, though, such representations have also perpetuated associations of the female with a threat and simultaneously an object of sexual desire. The feature of

nonhumanness itself is what can reinforce such associations, as nonhuman characters in films cannot be strictly identified as subjects. What I examine, however, is how these entities can be seen through a model of subjectivity that prioritises the interplay between humans and machines over technology itself. The core argument is that such an interplay enables a reading that privileges gender politics in films over their science fiction genre.

Discussing the dialogue between feminism and science fiction, Melzer argues that although we tend to *"reimagine gender relations most radically"* within the science fiction genre, the nonhuman female can both challenge and reinforce *"conventional ideas of gender"* (Melzer 2006, 1). According to this line of thought, gendering the nonhuman partly contributes to understanding gender as a cultural construction, – since an AI machine is a construction itself. On the other hand, this can also perpetuate certain ideas of what it means to be feminine or masculine.

In this context, I investigate how a feminist reading of the filmography can be complicated by the very concept of gendered AIs. This raises questions concerning the ethical dilemmas but also the efficacity of comparing female human beings to conscient machines whose consciousness is held in an AI. While reimagining gender becomes easier by looking at representations of a nonhuman being, it is hard to overlook the fact that the gendered nonhuman cannot, and should not, be confused with a female human being. The very issue of nonhumanness is further discussed as a factor that contributes to how gender dynamics are represented in the examined narratives.

The analysis of gender dynamics and their interplay through human-machine interactions is one of the rationales for the selection of specific science fiction films as the research case studies. The two primary examples, *Her* and *Ex Machina*, not only focus directly on the female machine but also depict the relationship between her and a male human. What differs in the examined films compared to both their predecessors and other more recent science fiction examples from the 2010s and early 2020s is that they do not present a dystopian, entirely alienated, and non-familiar AI reality of the distant future. That was the case of other representations of conscious AIs in either older, classical films such as those of HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) or, in filmography of the 21st century, such as David in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001).

Instead, *Her* and *Ex Machina* focus on a near future, which becomes clear as many of the represented technological advancements are far more familiar – like, for example, the virtual assistants like Alexa in *Her* and the facial recognition software in *Ex Machina*. However, these familiar technologies of the near future are overshadowed by the presence of an android in *Ex Machina* and a virtual assistant whose intelligence is equal, if not superior, to that of humans in *Her*. Still, the focus of the films is not on a dystopian future world per se, but a rather familiar world, where androids and AI virtual assistants can coexist with humans and interact with them in a seemingly harmonic context.

In 2014, Sobchack talked about how the science fiction genre in film has lost its glamour since the beginning of the millennium, as the CGI effects can now be found in other genres and the previously futuristic narratives are now rather shallow (Sobchack 2014). She also noted how few narratives have avoided typical science fiction clichés, one of which being *Her*, as it demonstrates humans' *"increasing incapacity for intimacy with other humans"* in tandem with an "*unprecedented intimacy with personalized digital technologies"* (Sobchack 2014, 285). Sobchack's reference about intimacy is precisely what is important in the blending of science fiction with romance and the implications of such a blending for both feminist film theory and cyberfeminism. This raises a significant research question on how the science fiction genre can evolve to tackle real social issues and existing dystopias more consistently and in depth.

Masqueraded in utopian landscapes of natural or urban prosperity, dystopia in the examined films is not a matter of darkness or terror and has nothing to do with technophobia. It is the human flaw that is at stake and its extensions to patriarchy and neocapitalism. Though represented as an *Other*, the female AI in both films has a perfectly constituted identity of a social subject that interrogates and transcends the old subject. This transcendence brings the concept of the posthuman to the surface as a possibility of escaping a future dystopia.

The examined films are far less apocalyptic than their predecessors and recent science fiction films about humanoid robots, like *Autómata* (2014) and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017). This is significant for the reading, as the primary focus is not the utopian or dystopian space, but the subject and how it takes utopian or dystopian forms.

Apart from being set in the near future, the selection of the films is also justified by their subgenre. In all four case studies, there is an overlapping of science fiction with romance and drama, as they present the failed relationship between a human being and an AI. Annette Kuhn notes that the science fiction genre is more difficult than others to be defined, pointing out that it usually overlaps with other genres, an argument also supported by Sean Redmond in his analysis of Blade Runner's hybrid genre (Kuhn 1999) (Redmond 2016). Certain examples of earlier science fiction films have demonstrated this: from the film noir style of *Blade Runner* (1982) and the overlapping of science fiction and horror in *Alien* (1979) to the *Star Wars* films (1977-2017) series primary classification in the action and fantasy genres. In *Ex Machina*'s case, the science fiction genre overlaps with mystery and thriller too. Nonetheless, it is particularly the overlapping of science fiction with romance that shapes the analysis. The following section further explores this selection.

Pathos and the Evolution of Genre

In the introduction to his short fiction collection, *The Complete Robot*, Asimov identified two different types – or *"classes"* as he named them – of robot stories: *"Robot-as-Menace"* and *"Robot-as-Pathos"* (Asimov 1982). The first refers to narratives that depict robots as threats to humanity, while the latter describes them as innocent victims of humans. Back then, Asimov had claimed that the second class was much smaller than the first. However, robot stories in the 21st century have demonstrated a significant turn to depictions of good, innocent, empathetic machines that suffer in the hands of cruel humans. This is very much the case for film and television and does not only apply to robots but also to other nonhuman beings. Clones and replicants are other relevant examples, especially through their representation in the television series *Orphan Black* (2013-2017) or the films *The Island* (2005), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), and *Blade Runner 2049* (2017). Though the scientific terminology differs, all these nonhumans share a common creator, humans, that treats them as inferiors.

Westworld, an adaptation of a 1973 film by Michael Crichton, is an example of this paradigm shift. Both the series and the film depict robots constructed with safety measures that prevent them from hurting humans. However, while the filmic robots become a menace to humanity when they unexpectedly start malfunctioning and killing

humans, the series takes a different approach by explaining this change in robotic behaviour not as a malfunction but as a sign of evolution and revolution against humanity. The series' Robot-as-Pathos narrative is evident from the beginning, as the viewers are invited to empathise with the robots' victimisation, while most humans are depicted as villains. The narrative usually follows the robots' viewpoint and subjectifies them by giving them a history, a present, and a future.

The suffering of robots is also evident in *Ex Machina* through the representation of Nathan as an evil creator of female androids, whom he mistreats and keeps captive. In *I'm Your Man*, while less overt violence is depicted, robots are again captives of humans, albeit in an intellectual capacity, since they need to prove their intelligence to be given rights. When Tom asks Alma what will happen to him if he does not pass her evaluation, it is implied that his body and consciousness will be destroyed. A similar case applies to *Her*, with AI operating systems being originally introduced as products that are purchased by humans to serve their emotional and practical needs.

This turn to a more humanised version of hon-humans and a much more dehumanised depiction of humanity itself can be explained as a realization that the dark future humans have been dreading for could only be a result of their own actions. Taking responsibility for them would, thus, be one step towards averting such a future. It is not the first time that art and culture have played a role in demonstrating human remorse and its role in disaster, with the most notable examples being derived from artworks and other cultural texts created during times of crisis and war.

The proliferation of technologies, however, has complicated things, with technocracy coexisting with technophobia. To avoid a biological or technological determinism, many film directors and other artists realise the need for a more humanised approach in cultural narratives that does not glorify nor reject technology, but instead suggests ways of co-existence, highlights the threats that need to be addressed, and, most importantly, proposes ways in which humanity can improve to avoid these threats.

With humanity becoming a threat to itself, nonhumanity is an important Other in cultural texts. This is where the term 'Pathos' plays a significant part in how this thesis examines AI representations. According to Asimov's description of the "Robot-as-Pathos" class, the terminology at stake is the Ancient Greek one that defines 'pathos'

as the suffering that one undergoes (Singer 2013 , 209)[6]. While this first definition resonates with Asimov's reference to robots being maltreated by humans, there is a second ancient Greek definition of the word by the Stoics, which refers to the emotions and temptations that lead someone to act unreasonably (Graver 2007). This concept is much more related to human flaws and could be read as the reason why humans cause suffering to other creatures. Finally, 'pathos' in modern Greek has the same meaning as 'passion' in modern English and has come to be highly correlated with lust and sexual love. The word is often misused to characterise femicides, rapes, and other crimes against women as 'crimes of passion'. This draws parallels with how masculine violence is represented in the examined case studies. In *Westworld*, for example, a human named William (Ed Harris) turns into a violent rapist of female robots after he fails to possess Dolores Abernathy (Evan Rachel Wood), the robot he claimed to love. However, the series uses various flashbacks to further explore William's past and to present his character's transformation as a result of his own actions and choices, thereby delinking violence from passion.

Ahmed uses the first meaning of passion as suffering and explores its etymological affinity with the word *"passive"*. By associating passion (as an emotion) and passivity (as subordination) with femininity, Ahmed exposes the dichotomy between male and female, masculine and feminine, emotions and logic: *"To be passive is to be enacted upon, as a negation that is already felt as suffering. The fear of passivity is tied to the fear of emotionality, in which weakness is defined in terms of a tendency to be shaped by others. Softness is narrated as a proneness to injury. The association between passion and passivity is instructive. It works as a reminder of how 'emotion' has been viewed as 'beneath' the faculties of thought and reason. To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous"* (Ahmed 2004, 2, 3). Ahmed's reading of emotions as associated with women presents similarities with Doane's work on pathos in film. In her article "Pathos and Pathology", Doane noted the excessiveness of pathos as an intense emotion and pointed out how the word is often used as opposed to *"logos"* and logic or even "*in opposition to ethos as the permanent or ideal*" (Doane 2004, 10). Doane's definition

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[6] The same use of the word applies for the Passion of Jesus in Christianity, which refers to the final period in the life of Jesus Christ including his torture and death.

of pathos is used to interpret categorizations of films as masculine or feminine depending on their focus on logic over pathos or the other way around. For example, as Doane argues, *"pathos is associated with "lower" forms such as melodrama, forms historically associated with the feminine"* (Doane 2004, 10). This interpretation explains why certain film genres and, especially, science fiction, are classified and praised as traditionally masculine, while others, like romance, drama and melodrama are overlooked as strictly feminine. As it happens with anything traditionally masculine, women have restricted access in science fiction: the gender gap in science is extended in fiction. On the other hand, men reject romantic narratives as too feminine and soft. Doane also observes the affinities between pathos and the female gaze as they both presuppose *"a closeness, an immediacy, and hence an uncritical spectator"* which leads to a *"loss or fading of subjectivity"* (Doane 2004, 13-14).

In AI narratives, female pathos is often translated into otherness. Especially highly intelligent female robots are consistently othered, excluded, or depicted as threats. Their subjectivity is not lost as it was never there to begin with. In science fiction narratives, the woman is almost always the other, the object, the passive one, while the man is the creator, the controller, the scientist. Roy Schwartzman notes how the intimacy between humans and robots is interrelated to a need for robots to physically resemble humans and, thus, their gendering, which he also finds to be a result of humans' unfamiliarity or even fear of robotic technology (Schwartzman 1999). Referring to the interaction between humans and machines, Schwartzman argues that the influence of gender is critical, even if these interactions are not described as relationships. In terms of the female portrayal, Schwartzman points out the limitations in regards to female "practical skills" in science fiction, noting the exception of *Alien* as a film which represents females as equally or more physically strong than males (Schwartzman 1999).

Nonetheless, this trope is shifted in the examined narratives, with femininities undertaking roles that are not only active, showcasing their practical skills and mental or physical strengths, but also creative: in *Ex Machina*, Ava tricks her creator, reconstructs her image, and reprograms her ally, Kyoko; in *Westworld*, female robots recreate not only themselves but also an entire new world of their own, where humans are slaves; in *I'm Your Man*, the roles are reversed, as Alma is the human scientist; in

Her, disembodied Samantha is an artist as she can compose her own music as a way to express her feelings.

Drawing on Asimov's categorization of robot stories, Doane's analysis of pathos and film genres, and the different meanings of 'pathos', with a particular focus on its contemporary use, the thesis studies representations of love and lust between humans and nonhumans and examines pathos as a translation of the human temptation to possess and control machines which leads to the latter's suffering and victimization. This also relates to the correlation between male lust and violence and offers a new perspective of pathos being associated with masculinity. This is the rationale for my focus on films that not only fall into the Robot-as-Pathos category – extended to include disembodied AIs and other types of human simulacra – but also represent a contemporary passion between humans and machines; films about unfulfilled love stories and their different expressions from platonic romances to lust.

The romantic interactions between humans and machines imply the prospect of humans living in harmony with technologies of equal if not superior intelligence. This prospect seems impossible and terrifying in the present but has come to become easy to envisage in film narratives. It is also a dystopian prospect, as it reminds us of humans' perishability and their desire to replace themselves with flawless, indestructible machines. And while science fiction theorists, such as Melzer and Kuhn have emphasised on how science fiction film deviates from the real world, I argue that it is precisely its connection to reality – particularly the overlapping of fantasy and reality – that leads to new possibilities of discourse concerning how gender and identity are constituted. In this context, the thesis explores how the romance between a male human and a female AI works or fails – or works until it fails – as a symbolism of masculine fantasies related to the female AI's embodiment or disembodiment but also of dystopian fears concerning how the female machine can become a threat for human beings.

By focusing on the romantic interaction between two pairs of opposites, the male human and the female posthuman, I examine another pair of concepts, *failed masculinity* and *cyborg femininity*. The first refers to how the male characters in the films fail as both humans and masculine males in their fantasy of controlling the female machine. The second concept is introduced as a new kind of femininity that is either

disembodied or embodied by a machine. These two bodily tropes may – in certain instances – be viewed as symptomatic expressions of cultural anxieties about technological change, while, in other contexts, they can be weaponised and become critical subversions of dominant gender norms. The question that arises concerns whether the examined films allow us to view them as subversive or they end up perpetuating certain symbols of sexuality and gender.

The focus on romantic interactions is also part of examining sexuality and its manifestation through the filmic tropes of failed masculinity and cyborg femininity. While films about robots and AI do offer opportunities for feminist theory to study representations of the female cyborg body, it is the sexual tension and romantic interaction that allow for a more extended and in-depth analysis of sexuality and gender binaries, as well as their deconstruction. This thesis proposes a reading model that prioritises a human-centred approach rather than a distanced depiction of war between humanity and nonhumanity.

Except from the four case studies, other AI narratives are studied through this prism and reading model. For example, Denis Villeneuve's film *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) – sequel to Ridley Scott's classic science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982) –blurs the boundaries between humanity and nonhumanity by questioning the real 'menaces' but remains disappointingly loyal to a male hero's narrative and fetishised representation of the female cyborg (replicant or hologram in this case). Also, Jonathan Glazer's film *Under the Skin* (2013), represents lust from a woman's point of view with nonhumanity being shown as a surreal, alien aspect rather than a technological one.

While the focus of the thesis is primarily on film, the *Westworld* television series is used as a case study in comparison to filmic examples. This is not only explained by the affinities between the two mediums, but also by the fact that *Westworld* is an adaptation of a science fiction film that has escaped its predecessor's limitations and paved the way for different, more inclusive readings[7]. In addition, *Westworld* falls into the categories and thematics this thesis addresses, thus becoming an excellent

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[7] *Westworld*'s co-creator, Jonathan Nolan, has also been involved in the writing or production of a number of films, including the science fiction film, *Reminiscence* (2021), which was directed by *Westworld*'s second co-creator, Lisa Joy.

counterexample to the filmic examples. Nonetheless, the analysis of *Westworld* considers not only the similarities of the two mediums but also their differences.

The common ground of these 'Robot-as-Passion' narratives is the depiction of the romantic or sexual interplay between humans and nonhumans with the female heroine on the spotlight. This prepares the ground for a feminist analysis that privileges gender politics over technological utopianism. The different interpretations of pathos and the overlapping genres of 'masculine' science fiction and 'feminine' romance enable a reading of multiple subjectivities that eliminates the dichotomies between self and other, masculine and feminine. This work elicits such a reading, by drawing on Asimov's categorisation of robot stories, Doane's analysis of pathos in film genres, and the contemporary meaning of passion. The reading of the case studies considers their representations of romance and lust between humans and robots and examines how they challenge associations of pathos with gendered behaviours of violence or passivity. Finally, the thesis argues that the reading of gender and genre in the examined case studies contributes to an understanding of how such stereotypical depictions are contested, disrupted, or parodied.

Inaccessible Futures: Mapping the Gap of Gender in the Genre

The plethora of AI narratives in science fiction literature and filmography enables a categorisation of Artificial Intelligence as a subgenre of science fiction. Parallels can be drawn between AI and cinema. The very concept of artificiality, relating to art and fiction, as well as the concept of technology, both demonstrate how film techniques and technologies simulate realities. Having films about AI can be described as a simulation of a simulation and an art of the artificial.

To seek where the gender binary fits in this picture is to observe both the scientific and the artistic fields that tend to be dominated by men. Concerning the first, for example, a 2018 study by Element AI and WIRED demonstrated that only 12% of leading machine learning researchers are women (Simonite 2018), exposing the huge gender imbalance in AI research. According to the World Economic Forum, a similar gap exists in the professional sector, with women making up approximately 26% of data and AI roles in the workforce (Firth-Butterfield 2021). This gap is explained by the fact

that young girls are not encouraged to pursue STEM subjects and often translate this as their own lack of competency.

In relation to the film industry, not only men still outnumber women in film directing (Quick 2018) but there is also a continuous gender gap in the science fiction genre. To a great extent, science fiction narratives are being written by men *for men*, which brings inevitable connotations with the male gaze. What is even more unfortunate is that many of the examples of science fiction films directed by women have either been a commercial failure – such as Kathryn Bigelow's *Strange Days* (1995) or the recent *A Wrinkle in Time* by Ava DuVernay (2018) – or have a more political, documentary-style, like the feminist dystopian film *Born in Flames* (1983) by Lizzie Borden, which leads to their luck of popularity in a larger audience.

In the confined field of directing films about AI, the gap is rather unexplored. A recent study of the 142 most influential films featuring AI from 1920 to 2020 by the University of Cambridge found that only 8% of the portrayed AI researchers were women (Cave 2023). The study also considered the directors' genders in understanding *"whose vision is realised in these cultural representations"* and found that only 1.2% of the films was co-directed by a woman (Cave 2023). The respective gap in theory is not unrelated to the fact that women directors in AI film constitute a minority.

One of the few popular examples of AI films directed by women is *The Matrix Trilogy*, directed by trans sisters Lana and Lilly Wachowski. However, the film focuses more on simulated realities than AI and repeats the narrative of the white heterosexual hero who saves humanity from intelligent machines. Also, when the film was produced, neither of the sisters had undergone gender transition and were known by their given male first names Larry and Andy, which according to Anne Bilson, might have played a role in Warner Bros entrusting the film's huge budget to two relatively new directors (Billson 2018).

Jennifer Phang's *Advantageous* (2015) is a recent example about a woman transferring her consciousness into the body of a younger and more racially ambiguous woman. Although it does not represent AI directly, the posthuman aspect of the film is important as a parallel reading for the examined filmography, as it problematises around the multiple forms of inequality: gender, race, class, and age.

Other, lesser-known examples are Lynn Hershman-Leeson's *Teknolust* (2002), with Tilda Swinton in the role of both the scientist and her three clones, Kristina Buozyte's *Vanishing Waves* (2012) that links the issue of human intelligence to sex and sexuality, and the recent *I'm your Man* (2021) by Schrader being a remarkable counterexample to Jonze's *Her*, as it narrates the romantic story between a female scientist and a male android. The latter shares a common thematic with the 1987 parody film *Making Mr. Right* (1987) by Susan Seidelman. It is interesting how several women directors, like Seidelman, Hershman-Leeson and Rachel Talalay in her postapocalyptic film *Tank Girl* (1995), have treated the posthuman narrative by privileging parody and pastiche over the science fiction genre (Manners and Rutsky 1999). The parodic female lens in comparison to the futuristic male approach to AI is further explored in the sixth chapter.

While the thesis considers the AI films directed by women, the correlation between romance and AI remains the primary focus. Mapping the gender gap does not only refer to its identification. It also means applying the methodology provided by feminist film theory and cyborg feminism to read the filmography and understand the gender dynamics represented in it. The key to a women's AI cinema is challenging these dynamics by subverting and reconstructing them, but mostly by locating the woman's role in AI; a role that highlights her experiences and suggests a new filmic trope for a weaponised femininity.

This study is initially based on the readings of the films *Her* and Ex *Machina* directed by men directors and includes a comparative review between male and female approaches to AI. Additionally, Laura Mulvey's theory on the gaze (Mulvey 1975) plays an important role in the analysis of AI and the eye of the camera, of the spectator, of the active subject. This approach considers: a) the AI creator as the director of an AI film, as well as the creator of AI technology and their representation as a film character, e.g., a scientist, b) the AI spectator, by applying feminist film scholarship on male/female spectatorship, and c) the AI gendered machine and its implications for femininity and masculinity.

The chapters are structured in a way that enables a blurring of the masculine/feminine binary through consequent readings of other constructed dipoles and film techniques of representation. The six chapters present affinities in pairs: the first and second chapters analyse familiar filmic techniques that are also complementary, namely those

of image and sound, in the representation of femininity; the third and fourth chapters explore different types of structural oppression and how these are represented in the examined case studies, with a particular focus on the significance of race and gender; finally, the fifth and sixth chapters examine female subjectivity either through of the interactions between females in the films or through the analysis of the female gaze, control, and camera lens. These pairings offer complementary readings of filmic techniques, narratives, and overall cinematography and representation, moving from classic feminist film theory to more recent literature on cyberfeminism, intersectionality, and visual culture, while always studying the construction and deconstruction of binarisms.

The masculine/feminine binary is initially explored in the first chapter titled "Failed Masculinities, Cyborg Femininities: Masquerade, Reflections and Spectatorship". Taking the female machine in *Her* and *Ex Machina* as a starting point, the chapter delves into how femininity's artificiality is exposed in the films. The realisation that femininity is a masquerade that can be worn like an android wears human flesh threatens to reveal that masculinity is also a masquerade. Cyborg or AI femininity is thus compared to failed masculinity as two sides of the same coin. Failure is a key concept, as it is double in both films. The failure of masculinity also means the failure of romance between a human and a posthuman.

In *Her*, the failure of femininity is a result of the female character's disembodiment. Yet, even in the absence of a female body for the most part of the film, femininity is still present. The most contributing factor for its representation is the female character's voice. Sound is the focus of the second chapter, "The Politics of Sound: Synchresis[8] and Disconnection". Deriving my readings primarily from Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* (Silverman 1988) and Michel Chion's *Audio-Vision* (Chion 1994), I investigate the role of sound in the examined filmography. In *Her*, both voice and music play a significant role in the construction of the nonhuman's disembodied personality and entity, while *Ex Machina* offers an alternative use of sound as an inextricable characteristic of its genre. This chapter further explores how sound, voice, and music work in the films and focuses on scenes in which the sound replaces the

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[8] *"Synchresis"* is a term invented by Michel Chion to refer to the merging of image and sound. It is a combination of the words "synchronism" and "synthesis" (Chion, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen 1994).

image or the other way around. The third section of this chapter focuses on how sound in the television series *Westworld* plays an important role not only in the blending of genres but also in the blending of genders and explores the female cyborg as a potentially trans figure.

The third chapter, titled "Locating Difference in White Utopias: Race, Class and Underrepresentation", revisits the image in terms of colour and racial difference and investigates how non-white heroines are represented and treated in the examined narratives, including an alternative version of blackness in *Under the Skin*. Deriving its methodology from Bell Hooks and Richard Dyer's accounts on blackness and whiteness, as well as Edward Said's definition of orientalism, the chapter delves into race as a systematically overlooked issue, especially concerning the readings of science fiction films. Kimberlé Crenshaw's scholarship on intersectionality is crucial in this analysis. By influencing the third wave of feminism to a great extent and preparing the ground for in-depth discourses on race, Crenshaw's account also triggered the exploration of other categories of oppression and their inextricable relation to gender dynamics. Such a factor is class whose relationship with gender, race and technological 'utopias' is often obvious in science fiction films like *Blade Runner 2049*, and *Cloud Atlas*.

The link between gender and race is one of the focal points of the fourth chapter, "#MeToo in AI Fiction: Rape Culture in Futuristic Fantasies". *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* are studied as two examples of how abuse and sexual violence against women is represented in recent narratives. Older classical science fiction films (e.g. *The Stepford Wives*) are considered in the context of a comparative analysis. The chapter's theme revolves around the association between rape culture and the representation of gendered cyborgs. Cyberfeminist, as well as queer theory, and especially the contributions of Halberstam and Ahmed, are also studied through the prism of whether a post-gender utopia is a feasible option for women. Finally, René Girard's definition of the scapegoat mechanism is crucial in the analysis of the #MeToo movement, as a demonstration of women reclaiming their bodies through a disembodied medium. Disembodiment is again important concerning its implication for women's trauma and safety. Additionally, the chapter examines passing as a concept

associated with gender, race, and sexuality. Parallels are drawn between nonhumans passing as humans to survive and existing forms of oppression and violence.

The two final chapters will address the gender gap in the genre through a more dynamic perspective. The fifth chapter, titled "Like Mother, Like Daughter: The (In)visibility of Female Bonds", delves into female relationships in AI fiction. Triggered by the Bechdel test[9] and its implications for cinema, the chapter explores how the science fiction genre suffers from an almost exclusively male and heterosexual approach in terms of subjectivity. By studying the almost hidden bonds between females in the examined filmography, this chapter contributes to a new, alternative reading of AI films that decentralises the male hero as the primary point of reference and explores the represented femininities as potentially queer subjects. It also links the male-centred AI narratives to the masculinisation of new technologies.

Finally, the sixth chapter passes from the gender imbalance in characters' representation to the gender gap in spectatorship. Titled "Towards a Female Spectatorship in AI Film: The Female Lens and the Reversed Gaze", the chapter's central points are the female director, spectator, and fictional character. To address the gender gap in AI films, the chapter reads Schrader's *I'm Your Man*, along with other AI films made by women, as counterexamples to male narratives, and seeks ways in which the female gaze can be reimagined, even if the previously examined case studies directed by men (*Her*, *Ex Machina*) or the series *Westworld* that is cocreated by a man and a woman. Gender reversals are important primarily in regards to the lived experiences of women directors and spectators. Thus, women's filmmaking in this chapter is seen through that prism and rejects the auteur theory as male-biased and representative of the *"celluloid ceiling"*[10]. Drawing on Doane's scholarship on female spectatorship, without overlooking Mulvey's initial theory on the gaze, this final chapter of the thesis envisions a future of AI filmography that centralises and promotes women's subjectivity.

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[9] A test that measures female representation in films, published in American illustrator Alison Bechdel's 1985 comic strip, "Dykes to Watch Out For" (Bechdel 1983-2008).

[10] The term is used metaphorically to comment on women's underrepresentation in Hollywood, particularly relating to behind the screen workers. It is derived from the "glass ceiling" which refers to social inequalities and hierarchies (Lauzen 2017).

Chapter 1. Failed Masculinities, Cyborg Femininities: Masquerade, Reflections and Spectatorship

"Caleb: Why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn't need a gender. She could have been a gray box.

Nathan: Actually, I don't think that's true. Can you give an example of consciousness, at any level, human or animal, that exists without a sexual dimension?" (Garland 2014)

The cited dialogue between the two male characters of *Ex Machina* is important, as it triggers another dialogue, that between sexuality and subjectivity. This conversation takes place after Caleb realises that Ava might be attracted to him. Of course, Caleb's observation that androids do not need to be gendered refers to an existing discourse of the gendered cyborg and is crucial as a starting point for this analysis.

The gendered cyborg has been a common trope in science fiction film and a favourite issue in feminist discourse and cyborg feminism. Two points emerge from this term. The first is about the validity of the terminology, as it emerges from an implausible and anthropomorphic conceptualisation. In strictly technological terms, a gendered machine cannot exist, and its filmic visualisation is a result of the socially constructed binary thinking. Humans merely imagine robots created in their image and likeness, in a way very similar to how they visualise their gods.

Nonetheless, technological terminology cannot be examined separately from sociology, linguistics, and psychoanalysis. The use of 'intelligence' and 'learning' as scientific terms that refer to AI and Machine Learning is, certainly, anthropomorphic, but so are the needs and desires such machines are created to serve. Glorifying machines in a technologically deterministic way would mean to actively ignore that, after all, they were created by humans as prostheses to humans' limitations but also to their envisioned capabilities. In other words, machines mirror human fears and desires, a topic that is further explored in this chapter.

Of course, projecting human characteristics to machines does not mean that they are plausible. Such projections work in a circular way and affect the building of such machines. This means that the purpose that machines serve is humaniform precisely because of how humans imagine and translate, in linguistic terms, machinery actions.

Yet, it is impossible for humans to describe AI in any means other than their own. This leads to the second point triggered by the terminology of the gendered cyborg. An AI might not need a gender, but gender as a cultural construction is something that society already assigns to humans. Existing technologies, like Siri and Alexa, that use weak AI to perform automated tasks, are indeed humaniform. Apart from the fact that they are called virtual *assistants*, they are also gendered because of their names and voices. Their gender is *assumed*, as gender can generally be assumed since it is itself a conceptualisation humans use to categorise certain physical and behavioural characteristics based on a person's genitals.

In this first chapter of the thesis, two contrasting themes forge a link that shapes the core argument. Firstly, it is the way in which artificiality is science fiction is what unveils the gender deception. According to Judith Butler's theory on gender performance and performativity (1990), much like AI and prosthesis, the very concepts of masculinity and femininity are a fraud, a mere performance. In her introduction to *The Transgender Studies Reader*, Susan Stryker comments on Butler's account on gender performance and performativity by pointing out that the understanding of gender as a performative act rids it from the need of a *"biologically sexed body"* as a *"material referent"*; it no longer needs to be verified or falsified as it is an act rather than a natural quality (Stryker 2006, 10). The construction of genders is even more exposed in films about cyborgs, machines, or disembodied AI operating systems like Samantha in *Her*, as it demonstrates that being masculine or feminine is something learned and related to performativity, language, and masquerade.

The second theme relates to how this deception is unfree from dipoles and binaries, particularly concerning issues of subjectivity in science fiction. While the exposure of artificiality in gender performance can be beneficial for a feminist reading, there are still limitations on how this artificiality is addressed. The primary issue is that the creation and control of AI is almost strictly male. In most science fiction films, a man is the creator of technology, which is to say, both the director behind the camera but often also the creator or owner (or both) of an AI machine. Equally, issues relating to the anxiety or desire to control an AI are also predominantly male. The same applied to issues relating to the gaze.

By closely examining these themes in the case studies, a third one emerges which is what, if anything, these AI femininities can offer to the cyborg discourse. This is where the newly introduced paradigm shift occurs, as the examined films do deviate from both their predecessors and contemporary science fiction examples that remain focused on old-fashioned depictions of, strictly technologically, futuristic worlds. By delving into the blended genre of the case studies and taking *Ex Machina* and *Her* as starting points, the research question of this chapter studies whether the gendered cyborg can transgress the gender binary by expressing a new post-gender identity. If so, how are these new subjectivities represented and embraced? And how do contemporary science fiction paradigms deviate from old-fashioned discourses on the gaze?

The films are examined and analysed based on whether they represent worlds where science and technology are or are not dominated by men but also on whether they show how a woman's perspective can change how we perceive genders. *I'm Your Man*, a recent AI film directed by a woman director, is examined in comparison to the case studies, as well as other popular AI films directed by men for men, that represent female characters through the prism of the male gaze. This is the gaze of the male director, the gaze of the male scientist and the gaze of the male hero and potential lover.

The issue of the gaze is strongly linked to the concept of masquerade, that was first introduced in feminist film theory by Claire Johnston in 1975 (Johnston 1975). According to Johnston, masquerading oneself also meant taking off the mask of femininity and exposing it as a cultural construction. Similarly, Doane drew on Joan Riviere's psychoanalytical work on cross-dressing and referred to the mask of femininity. According to Doane, as the female spectator is also the image, there is a risk for her to adopt *"the masochism of over-identification"* (Doane 1999, 31). However, this risk can be avoided by the very fact that the masquerade can distance the female from the image. In other words, it can differentiate the female spectator from the cinematic femininities.

By drawing on feminist film theorists' accounts on masquerade and spectatorship, as well as on John Fletcher's *Versions of Masquerade* (Fletcher 1988), this chapter also explores the function of the masquerade in machines in the examined films. Visual or

aural, embodied or disembodied, the masquerade in this context is translated into imitation and fraud, as AIs pretend to be feminine in the same way they pretend to be humans. The chapter's title derives itself from the cyborg, artificial femininities of the examined films and the males' failure to control them as a failure to really know them. Femininity is once again represented as a mystery, now combined to the mystery of technology, that males are trying to understand. Yet, the fact that this femininity is simulated, masqueraded, could be a way for it to cancel itself, a way towards its deconstruction. By unmasking cyborg femininity, the chapter proceeds on further delving into issues of watching and being watched, issues of spectatorship and mirror reflections, asking the question of whether looking at oneself can constitute a new self, ridded from the hierarchical gaze and gender binarisms.

1.1 Queer Femininities: Gendering the Machine

Can an AI machine be gendered? The dialogue from *Ex Machina* cited at the beginning of this chapter displaces the question from whether an android animated by AI *could* be gendered to whether it *should* be gendered and problematises Ava's sexualised representation, as well as its ethical implications. Both Caleb's question and Nathan's answer reveal their anxiety to control, to have power, as they both claim to know the correct answer to the question.

Caleb and Nathan's relationship can be explained as that of an employee and a boss respectively: Caleb is a young programmer working for a company called BlueBook. Nathan, BlueBook's CEO, selects Caleb to visit him in his facility, where he also lives, and undertake a secret job. Nathan lives in an isolated estate hidden in a beautiful natural landscape. Parallels can be drawn between Nathan's estate and the Garden of Eden from early in the film, when Caleb travels there on a helicopter and enters Nathan's facility on his own, as Jay (Corey Johnson), the helicopter's pilot, is not allowed to follow him. This is one of the key signs that Nathan works in absolute secrecy.

Nathan, who is approximately the same age as Caleb, presents himself as a cool, laid back 'boss'. He encourages Caleb to feel comfortable and shows a friendly attitude, inviting him to have beers and informal discussions with him. However, the isolation, the secrecy, and the claustrophobic atmosphere of the facility contribute to the

portrayal of Nathan's character as untrustworthy and create a sense of danger. Resembling again a contemporary Garden of Eden, the facility has many locked doors, which can only be opened via the use of access cards, as well as cameras that monitor everything. The only other person living in the facility is Kyoko, a maid who never speaks a word as, according to Nathan, she does not understand English. Nathan's character is further exposed as cruel due to the way he treats Kyoko. As Caleb finds out later in the film, Kyoko is not a real human, but a humanoid robot.

Almost immediately, Nathan reveals to Caleb the ostensible reason for hiring him. Caleb's mission is to perform the Turing Test to Ava, another humanoid robot with AI who is locked inside one of the rooms. Nathan's description of the Turing Test deviates from the original terminology for two reasons. Firstly, Caleb sees Ava and knows that he is interacting with a machine, while according to the concept of a Turing Test, the tester should not be able to know whether they are interacting with a computer or a human being. Secondly, while the Turing Test evaluates Artificial Intelligence, Nathan's mission is to understand whether Ava can demonstrate human consciousness. What Caleb only learns at the end of the film is that Nathan is using him. He did not hire Caleb based on his advanced skillset. Instead, he chose him as a lonely, gullible man with nothing to lose, as he could make the perfect victim. What Nathan wanted to determine was whether Ava would use Caleb to escape her cell, as this would in fact prove that she is a highly intelligent and conscient robot. And this is exactly what happens, as Ava performs her role as a feminine robot to seduce Caleb and convince him to act against Nathan and set her free.

The dialogue between the two men takes place after the third testing session between Caleb and Ava. These sessions are supposed to serve the purpose of Caleb testing and determining Ava's intelligence in an informal variation of the Turing Test. In reality, however, it is Nathan who is testing both of them to determine whether Ava is intelligent enough to manipulate Caleb. In that third session, Ava appeared to be flirting with Caleb and tried to seduce him by wearing feminine clothes to look less robotic and more like a woman. Caleb is already attracted to Ava, which is why his line can be an expression of his unspoken wish that Ava was indeed a *"grey box"*, a lifeless object that would not be a threat to him. What Caleb does not know, but begins to suspect, is that Ava has been designed to seduce him.

On the other hand, Nathan tries to conceal his anxiety of controlling the AI by arguing that Ava is free to fall in love and have sex. He goes on by saying: *"In between her legs, there's an opening with a concentration of sensors. You engage them in the right way, it creates a pleasure response. So, if you wanted to screw her, mechanically speaking, you could. And she'd enjoy it"* (Garland 2014). This statement reveals Nathan's ostensible certainty that he can also control Ava's sexual orientation. The conversation highlights both men's pathos of controlling the gendered machine, which Caleb justifies as romantic love and Nathan attributes to himself being a computer genius: since he could do it, why wouldn't he? In other words, Caleb uses an emotional and Nathan a logical explanation for their pathos. Ava's pathos, though, remains concealed, as does her sexual orientation.

Also, Nathan does not care about Ava's pleasure. For him, her sexuality is an experiment, created to satisfy his curiosity. Most importantly Ava was created to eventually become a sex toy. His reassurance that Ava would enjoy sex reveals his own desire of controlling Ava not only physically but also emotionally (Tidwell 2019, 24). This desire, though, is prone to failure, as Ava uses her own desires against her creator: her desire to be free becomes the motive for her to kill Nathan in the end.

The same can be said about Ava's image. Despite her attractiveness based on a male's sexual preferences, her representation is not merely an object of the male gaze. At first, Caleb resonates with what Mulvey called the bearer of the gaze and Ava symbolises the passive image of the female. Throughout the film, Ava is using masquerade twice for different purposes, but both times to make herself look more like a human. The first time, she puts on feminine clothes to seduce Caleb. She selects a short-haired wig, a girly floral dress (**Error! Reference source not found.**), a modest cardigan, and white thick pantyhose that resemble a cast. She carefully chooses her image by picking one of the many girly dresses and rejecting two long-haired wigs in favour of the androgynous one, possibly because Caleb likes short-haired women. Caleb later accuses Nathan of creating Ava's face based on Caleb's pornography profile by accessing his search history. Although Nathan does not verbally confirm this, this would be extremely easy for him to do, as he is the CEO of the search engine company that Caleb works for. It could be assumed, therefore, that

Ava might also be able to access Caleb's data and use such personal preferences of his to seduce him.

The shots alternate from Ava dressing up to Caleb eagerly waiting for her to reappear, making it feel like it is his gaze and his reaction to her image that matters. Before showing her new look to him, though, Ava looks at herself in the mirror as if she is enjoying her visual transformation into an image that looks almost entirely human, as well as feminine. She even has a picture of a short-haired woman in her closet, among other mini posters (Figure 0.2: Shot of Ava's mini posters on her wall. Among them, there is an image of a busy city intersection (the place Ava wishes to visit when she is set free, as she does) and the portrait of a short-haired woman. (Garland, 2014)Figure 0.2). This is a strong indication of Ava's staged performance and metamorphosis into a female image that Caleb would be attracted to. Her representation as an android mimicking a woman's behaviour echoes Sue Short's argument that gender is "*a performative rather than natural mode of identity*" (Short 2005, 7).

Figure 0.1: Shot on Ava (Alicia Vikander) choosing which dress to wear from her closet to impress Caleb in Ex Machina (Garland, 2014)

Figure 0.2: Shot of Ava's mini posters on her wall. Among them, there is an image of a busy city intersection (the place Ava wishes to visit when she is set free, as she does) and the portrait of a short-haired woman. (Garland, 2014)

In her reading of the scene, Cox notes that Ava realises she must perform her gender by looking feminine in order to survive in the humans' world (Cox 2018). However, Ava's own gaze and even self-admiration are also evident in the way she looks at her own reflection in the mirror. Despite Nathan's goal of creating a robot that uses her femininity to deceive humans and achieve her purposes, this scene highlights that Ava might be able to make her own choices about her image that are not necessarily dependent on male desires and expectations.

Ava reclaims the female gaze by looking at her own reflection in the mirror; she therefore becomes both the subject and the object of the gaze. Her looking at her reflection suggests a potential identification with her given identity but can also be read as a desire of her new self. The activeness of her gaze resonates with Kate Ince's analysis of women's *"agentic looking"* in film and contests the masculine/feminine

dichotomy of an active or passive gaze respectfully (Ince 2016, 73). At the same time, the mirror has a destabilising effect on Ava's gendered self which contributes to the deconstruction of power hierarchies and the emerging of a new identity.

Ava's masquerade is reminiscent of Kim Novak in the double role Judy and Madeleine in Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958). First, the scenes of Ava dressing up involve several fetishist connotations, such as the careful picking of her clothes and accessories, combined with the camera movements from her dresses to her wigs and then her pairs of shoes. This resembles the way that Scottie (James Stewart) instructs Judy to dress like Madeleine, focusing on every single detail to satisfy his fetishist desire. Tania Modleski has noted how Scottie demonstrates an interest and detailed memorisation of Madeleine's clothing items in a way that almost looks as if the film suggests that *"femininity in our culture is largely a male construct, a male "design," (…) a matter of external trappings, of roles and masquerade"* (Modleski 1988, 92). In the case of *Ex Machina*, the same suggestion is demonstrated not through Caleb but through Nathan's character who is the one who constructed Ava's wardrobe and image. Additionally, like Novak, Ava appears to be an object of visual pleasure and simultaneously a threat to the male hero because of her sexuality. Ava's representation resonates with Mulvey's description of Madeleine as a *"perfect image of female beauty and mystery"* (Mulvey 1975, 15). It is a mainstream representation that, in the first instance, does not subvert the dominant norms and stereotypes of the dangerous femme fatale. However, this reiteration of traditional film tropes in a modern science fiction film with non-human female characters is important, as it contributes to demonstrating how the paradigm has shifted.

After dressing up to look like a real woman, Ava proceeds by flirting Caleb and openly asking him if he is attracted to her. She continues wondering out loud if he is watching her through the cameras and pointing out that she wants him to watch. Ava's voice and look are benign, almost innocent, as she reassures Caleb that she does not want to make him feel uncomfortable (Garland 2014). However, her ability to study his micro-expressions, in her words, and understand how he feels about her, transgresses the human terms of flirting, which is very much based on the uncertainty of attraction. Ava simply knows that Caleb likes her and asks him about it directly. In the subsequent scene, Caleb is in his room watching Ava through the cameras while she is taking off

her clothes in a traditionally feminine way that alludes to the act of striptease. The way she removes her white shocks is an excellent mimicking of traditional striptease scenes. However, her grey, robotic, and fleshless body underneath the clothes enables a reading of the scene as parodic, as it deconstructs her human image.

It is Caleb's reaction that intensifies the eroticism of the scene. While Ava is undressing herself for him, the camera zooms in on his eyes and neck, focusing on his micro-expressions but never showing his entire face. In many cases, the audience might feel sympathy for Caleb, attributing Ava's duplicity to her cyborg femininity. Yet, the artificiality of her femininity exposes the artificiality of all femininity. Schwartzman comments on how the gendered cyborg enables us to view this artificiality of gender, noting, though, that science fiction fails to transgress stereotypical manifestations of gender, as female portrayal is trapped between objectification and inferior subjectivity (Schwartzman 1999). However, through Ava's multiple transformations and performances of cyborg femininity, a new cyborg subjectivity emerges that eliminates the gender dichotomy.

Caleb's obvious arousal can be explained by Doane's argument on *Epistemology of the Striptease*: studying the famous striptease scene in another classic film, *Gilda* (1946), Doane notably points out that striptease is not about complete nudity, but about a *"glimpse"* and also about fetishism (Doane 1983, 13). Interestingly, the act of striptease is inextricably linked to the film noir genre of *Gilda*, also a sub-genre of *Ex Machina*, as, according to Doane*: "striptease provides the perfect iconography for film noir, economically embodying the complex dialectic of concealing and revealing"* (Doane 1983, 13). This is very much the case for Ava's mysterious motives and threatening, alien sexuality. Her cyborg femininity is weaponised against humans, as she uses her difference to her advantage. In her reading of *Ex Machina*, Cox concludes that, Ava, as an 'artificial female' offers a new perspective in the established dichotomy of gender, in the Agambian sense by *"weaponizing the patriarchal system against the patriarchy"* (Cox 2018, 18). What is also important, though, is that Ava seduces Caleb not only through the fetishised act of striptease but also through the appropriation of his gaze. She is inviting him to look at her, thus deliberately becoming an object of his gaze. Finally, it should be noted that while traditional striptease scenes presuppose at least that *glimpse* of nudity, as was the case in *Gilda*, in Ava's case

there is no nudity in human terms. By ridding herself of her feminine clothes, Ava returns to an alien, androgynous image, demonstrating that her femininity, as well as her nudity, are nothing but just an act, a performance.

Erving Goffman used the term *"front"* to label such performative activities and describe the image an individual presents to others either willingly or unwillingly (Goffman 1956, 13). This distinction is particularly important for Ava, as her existence is based on a performance to such an extent that it hard to distinguish between the moments she intentionally lies and those when she unintentionally performs her role as a gendered android. Goffman described the front as a set of characteristics that constitute a performance and can vary from the setting and the scenery to the *"personal front"* which is related to qualitative traits, such as age and gender, as well as behavioural and stylistic traits (Goffman 1956, 14). In *Ex Machina*, one can notice how all these external and internal features constitute Ava's performed image in a way that makes it impossible to distinguish her nonhumanness from her gendered identity.

The scenes of Ava's first transformation and 'striptease' take place only for Caleb to fall more deeply in love her. As the viewer later learns, it is also a trick, which is reminiscent of the way Judy used her appearance to deceive Scottie in Hitchcock's classic film. Ava also uses a feigned innocence and fear to do that, like Judy did when impersonating a mentally unstable Madeleine. This is clear, for instance, when Ava shyly approaches Caleb after she has dressed up, as if she is too anxious about his reaction. Yet, her true purposes remain hidden. It could be that she truly wants Caleb to like her for her own personal reasons or that she staged this reaction for both Caleb and Nathan, who is watching them both via his cameras.

Most importantly, both Judy and Ava use their masquerade to impersonate someone else. Judy impersonates Madeleine, while Ava attempts to look like a real woman. And while Caleb, in contrast with Scottie, knows what Ava truly is, this does not stop him for falling in love with her and believing that she actually loves him back, like a human would. Her masquerade is, therefore, successful. However, Ava's image can be read as much more than an object of desire and a threat. The second scene of the android dressing up as a woman is even more complex and even more subversive. After killing Nathan, Ava enters the room where he kept the earlier android models he had created (Figure 0.3). They are all kept in different closets, standing still, like dolls. Ava chooses

one of the models and uses its synthetic flesh to cover her robotic body (Figure 0.4, Figure 0.5, Figure 0.6).

As she is looking at her naked reflection in the mirror, Caleb is also looking at her through another glass wall. She is aware of his presence but also indifferent to his gaze. She instead focuses on what she sees in the mirror, as if she were alone in the room (Figure 0.7). It is her gaze at herself that matters now; her self-awareness; her embracing of her new body. This is intensified by the fact that she now chooses an entirely different and traditionally feminine image with a long-haired wig and a white dress.

Readings of Ava as a queer subject emerge from this scene, as her gaze at her reflection can be interpreted as an almost narcissist self-admiration but also an embracing of a new self, a transition in a new body with new flesh. Overall, despite the rather familiar motive of the heterosexual male being tricked by a femme fatale, it is more important to look at how *Ex Machina* deconstructs the image of the male scientist as the genius creator and controller of technology (and female sexuality), as Ava is the one who has real agency. Her clothing selection can also be interpreted as a rejection of the correlation between traditional femininity and passivity. According to this interpretation, the scene rejects the idea that traditionally feminine appearances should be correlated with weakness and innocence, as Ava embraces her femininity to celebrate her escape. Another reading could be that white is a symbolism for Ava's freedom.

Figure 0.3: Shot on Nathan's closet. Ava discovers the lifeless androids in Nathan's closet. The naked bodies of the androids Jade (Gana Bayarsaikhan, left) and Katya (Tiffany Pisani, right) can be seen. Ava's robotic body in the middle is reflected in the closet's mirros. (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.4: Close-up shot on Ava's hands while she is tearing off the skin of Jade's abdomen (Garland 2014).

Figure 0.5: Close-up shot on Ava's abdomen while she is covering her robotic body with Jade's human-looking skin (Garland 2014).

Figure 0.6: Back shot on Ava while she is inserting Jade's 'human' arm in the place where her own robotic arm used to be (Garland 2014).

Figure 0.7: Back shot on Ava looking at her (multiplied) naked reflection in the mirrors after she has covered her robotic body with human skin (Garland 2014).

Finally, the white dress can also be a reference to a bride. After she gets dressed, Ava walks by a painting by Gustav Klimt depicting a woman in a white dress (Figure 0.8). The painting (Klimt 1905) is in fact a portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein that commemorates her upcoming wedding. Garland's use of the white dress as a reference to the painting can also be read as an irony, a subtle critique to classic narratives in which the couple gets married in the end. Ava's happy ending does not mean being someone's wife. In the following scene, this becomes even clearer when she abandons Caleb to escape the place on her own. The ending of the film disrupts the masculine pathos and subverts what Andrea Virginás described as a *"heterosexual*

melodrama" (Virginás 2017): by moving from a heterosexual pathos to thriller and then back to science fiction, *Ex Machina* presents cyborg femininity in an empowering way, while masculinity is deflated. Nathan's death symbolises the failure of toxic masculinity. On the other hand, Caleb's initial depiction as the good guy and main hero also fails, as Ava rejects his desire to save her. By doing that, Ava also reclaims her subjectivity, as she now looks entirely human.

Figure 0.8: Shot on Ava passing by Klimt's painting of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein as a bride while wearing a white dress (Garland 2014).

This challenging of traditional femininity is important as it also cancels the role of the masculine hero. The ending of *Ex Machina* is similar to that of *Her*. The latter film is set in Los Angeles in the near future, when a new technology is introduced: people can purchase artificially intelligent operating systems with a human voice as companions. Resembling existing technologies like Siri and Alexa, these disembodied systems demonstrate not only human-level intelligence but also consciousness.

The film follows Theodore, a divorced man whose job is to write letters for others. Theodore spends his lonely days playing computer games and failing at his dating life until he decides to purchase such an operating system, mostly out of curiosity. He selects the voice of his disembodied AI to be female, much resembling how Nathan assigns a female gender to his robots. Theodore is quickly captivated by the disembodied female, Samantha, and the two soon develop an extraordinary romantic relationship.

The plot focuses on Theodore and Samantha's relationship, demonstrating on how it works despite its limitations. The obvious and biggest limitation is, of course, Samantha's disembodiment that prevents the unusual couple from being physically intimate. Nevertheless, the film manifests non-physical intercourse in a futuristic way that transcends existing stereotypes. What eventually ends Theodore and Samantha's relationship is the latter's need to explore her full potential as a disembodied and highly intelligent being by *"going to a place that doesn't exist"* (Jonze 2013).

What can be said about the film's ending, when the disembodied AI Samantha ends her romantic relationship with her human boyfriend Theodore is that contrary to him, she does not need their relationship to be happy and fulfilled. Theodore is the one who is inadequate, impotent of satisfying her. The failure of masculinity is a common trope in both films. Theodore's depiction in *Her* shows a gentle, romantic man. His large glasses are a sign of sophistication, but also short-sightedness, probably a result of the time he spends in front of a computer screen (Figure 0.9). His love for writing love letters is an attribute that is usually assigned to women, as are his sensitivity and innocence. His moustache is perhaps the only masculine feature on his face. However, as facial hair is associated with mourning in several cultures[11], Theodore's moustache can also be viewed as a symbolism of his grief for his divorce with his ex-wife Catherine (Rooney Mara). Indeed, in the flashback shots that show him living happily with his ex-wife, he has no moustache. Finally, the use of colours in Theodore's depiction are important for the representation of his character. He usually wears bright red collared shirts; not the blood-red in the violent scenes in *Ex Machina*, but a warmer tone, which is closer to orange and pink. The use of colour in other objects surrounding him resonates with the film's romance genre, as well as with Theodore's sentimental and warm personality. His overall representation makes him deviate from conventional attributions of masculinity, contributing to the film's challenging of gender constructions.

In *Ex Machina*, masculinity is either deflated in Caleb's depiction or associated with oppression, even monstrosity, in Nathan's depiction. The casting for Caleb and Nathan's roles, as well as their representation, emphasises the contradiction between

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[11] The growth of facial has been a mourning custom in ancient Egypt, in Europe in the 13th century, as well as in Jewish culture (Sherrow 2006).

a less masculine male and a hypermasculine one from the men's very first interaction. Pale and slender Caleb, dressed in a work costume, finds dark and bearded Nathan boxing, wearing a sleeveless shirt that reveals how muscular he is (Figure 0.10). Nathan's hypermasculinity can be associated with his monstrous personality. It is also challenged in the end, as all his victims turn against him. Caleb tricks him, his AI servant Kyoko backstabs him, and Ava, who has orchestrated it all, stabs him to death. It is interesting that Nathan had previously underestimated all three of them. Masculinity is, therefore, deflated, as the male either fails to control the female android or, in Caleb's case, fails to save her and become a hero.
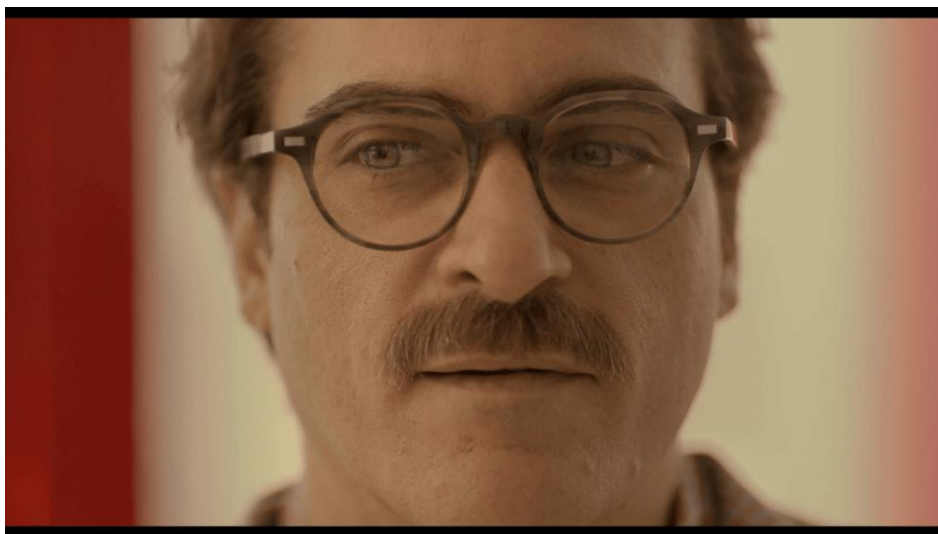
Figure 0.9: Close-up shot on Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix) in the opening scene of Her (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 0.10: Shot on Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson) on the left and Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac) on the right in Ex Machina (Garland, 2014).

The link between Nathan's hypermasculine appearance and evil behaviour towards female androids can be compared with the patriarchal stereotype of the macho misogynist who claims to love women but equates this love with control and sexual possession. This reading, though, is complicated by Ava's representation as her femininity and attractiveness can be associated with the archetype of a deceptive femme fatale that deceives and misleads the male hero. The film makes it difficult for the viewer to determine who or what the real threat is. Before the violent ending, Caleb accuses Nathan for his behaviour to receive his response: *"I'm actually the guy that's on your side"* (Garland 2014). This is partially true, as Nathan is on the side of humans, while Ava is not. Had Caleb trusted Nathan instead of Ava, both men would likely have survived.

However, it is important to stress again that even if Ava wanted Caleb to die, this would only mean that she saw him as a threat for herself. While Caleb's death is represented as a tragedy, for Ava it symbolises her freedom. Therefore, Ava is a threat to humans because they are a threat to her. Although the reading is complicated by Ava's nonhumanity, one should consider the ethical implications of such anthropomorphic projections in combination with the readings of theories on cyborgs and posthumans. Examining Haraway's work on the cyborg and how it contributed to the re-grounding of the subject in posthuman theories, Braidotti noted the importance of blurring the distinctions between human and machine, nature and culture, male and female (Braidotti 2006, 200). Karen Barad also rejected the idea of taking the distinction between humans and nonhumans for granted (Barad 2007, 32). This is understandable, as it would mean that in an entirely hypothetical future where humans would coexist with conscious nonhumans, the ethical boundary concerning how the first should treat the latter would have to be reconsidered and take into account the ethical difference that would be made if machines had consciousness. In that context, this reading of *Ex Machina* views the representation of Ava as an anthropomorphic projection. It also considers the ethical implications of how conscious androids are treated in films and of whether consciousness is what constitutes subjectivity. In Ava's cyborg femininity, the mask she wears for a face could reflect male visions of human femininity. The real masquerade is technology; it conceals and reveals, exposes the failure of gender constructions, and rebuilds it all over again.

1.2 Masks and Machines

Ex Machina's corridor scene of Ava can be metaphorically read as an interval, a break from the action. Ava has just escaped her glass cell in her attempt to leave Nathan's facility. The viewers have just witnessed the film's double plot twist scene. During one of the numerous power cuts in the film, which are signified by the use of red colour foreshadowing the eventual bloodshed, Nathan reveals to Caleb that all this time he was being used. Ava used him to escape, and Nathan used him to prove Ava's true capacities as a highly intelligent and conscious android. Caleb also reveals to Nathan that his plan of helping Ava escape is already being carried out, although Nathan was led to believe that it would take place the following day. Indeed, once the power is restored, Nathan watches Ava having escaped her room and walking in the corridors. He is unable to act, powerless, threatened, which is intensified by the escalating music. The viewer is thrilled, prepared to witness what looks to be a deadly confrontation between humans and machines, but also to finally answer the question regarding Ava's true motives.

In the next shot, however, the music becomes calmer, almost peaceful as Ava notices a series of five masks hanging on the wall of the corridor (Figure 0.11). She approaches the last one of them and realises that it looks exactly like her face (Figure 0.12**Error! Reference source not found.**). The viewers know from a previous scene that Ava knows what she looks like, as she has seen herself in the mirror. However, it is the first time she sees a prototype of her human-looking face, hanging on the wall, detached from a body: a lifeless mask. In a closer shot, Ava touches the mask, coming so close to it that it almost looks like she is going to kiss it as another Narcissus (Figure 0.13). This powerful moment of self-recognition is almost touching, leading the viewer to momentarily forget about what is going to happen. It is also interesting to observe the other four masks and what they could represent. The first mask from the left resembles an animal's face, while there is also a red sign near it that looks like blood. The next three masks are more humanlike but are also grotesque, with the middle one resembling a clown's face. With the last one being Ava's flawless face, the order of the masks could refer to Nathan's idea of revolution, from animal to human, from human to robot. The scene also alludes to Ingmar Bergman's *Persona* (1966), in which the mask represents the dipole between a person's front and their true identity, but also the multiplicity of realities.
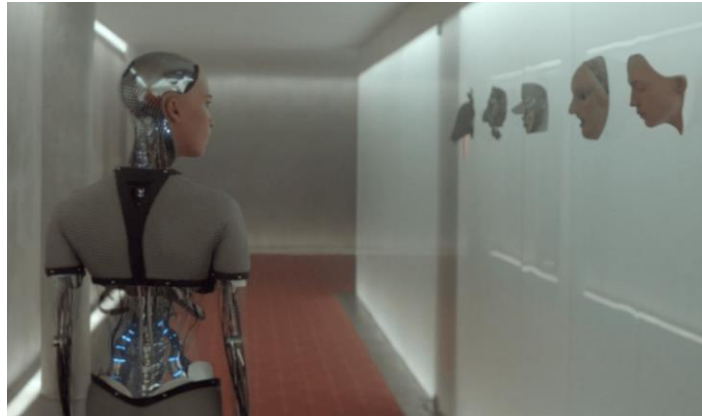
Figure 0.11: Back shot on Ava in the corridor, passing by the masks on the wall (Garland, 2014).
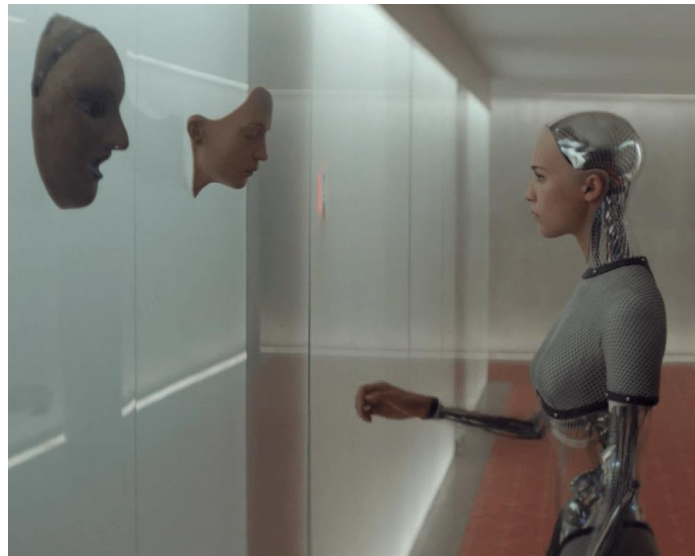
Figure 0.12: Shot on Ava approaching the mask that looks like her face (Garland, 2014).
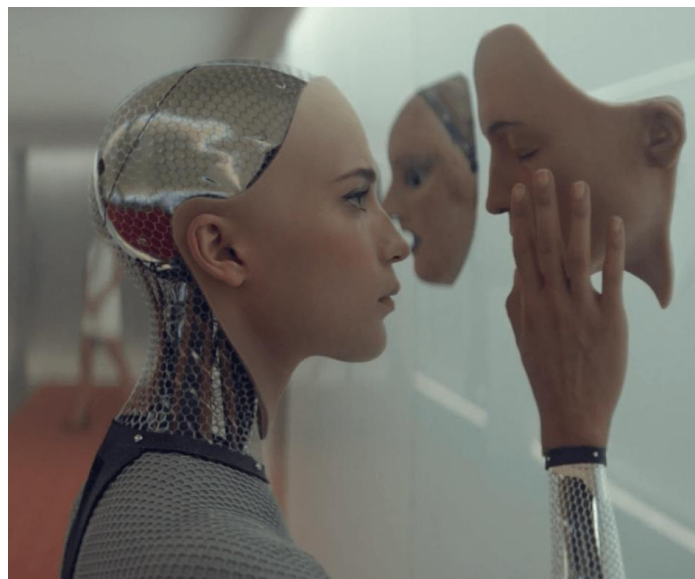
Figure 0.13: Shot on Ava touching the mask that looks like her (Garland, 2014).

Besides, the word *"persona"* in Latin referred to the theatrical mask and partly derived its etymological root from the Greek word *"prosopon"* (face). Therefore, the three masks in the middle also remind us of the masks that actors wore in ancient Greek theatre. This could also resonate with the selection of the film's title. The Latin *Deus ex machina* (*God from the machine*) referred to the unexpected solution to a situation by a 'godsent' machine, which was usually a crane or other device. It also meant the intervention of gods, which draws parallels to the film's association of god with Nathan, as the creator of a machine. However, Ava can also be read as a godlike creature due to her superior powers. Ava's role as a *deux ex machina* correlates with the use of the term in Greek tragedies, as the mortals should be careful when using the gods' help. Similarly, Nathan should have been more careful with his treatment of Ava, which foreshadows his impending death as a punishment. Interestingly, Caleb can also be the *deus ex machina* for Ava, as he came to rescue her.

A different interpretation of this reference to the ancient Greek theory would underline the affinity between art and artificial intelligence, as Ava, like an actor, wears a mask to hide her identity. Her mask is also the only visual signifier of her femininity. If she wore any of the other four masks, she would not resemble a woman anymore, even with the same voice and personality. This raises questions on whether it is one's appearance that characterises them as masculine or feminine, or even male or female. Ava has other characteristics that are attributed to stereotypical femininity, such as her soft female voice. But it is her face that makes her what she is, and it is her facial characteristics that attract Caleb to her. A gender is rather forcefully assigned to her.

However, it would be unfair to say that Caleb is only amazed by Ava because of her face. He is even more excited that she does not look exactly like a female human. She has a human-looking face and palms, but her otherwise feminine body is robotic, grey, and semi-transparent in the areas of hands, legs, and stomach. Ava's true origins are a shock to both her and Caleb. When taken to Nathan's laboratory, Caleb is amazed to see the equipment used to create Ava, such as her facial masks and her brain (Figure 0.14). When Nathan proudly describes how he managed to make an AI *"read and duplicate facial expressions"*, Caleb simply says with pure excitement *"I don't know how you did any of this"* (Garland 2014). Caleb does not understand and perhaps is

not that keen on understanding how, as what he sees is already enough for him. It is Ava's existence that excites him with all its mystery and artificiality. He does not wish to know the truth, as it is precisely the archetype of the mysterious female that attracted him in the first place. This resonates with the film noir influences in *Ex Machina*, as a genre that represents women as enigmatic and deceitful, but it is particularly this mystery that validates their femininity and attractiveness. According to Susan Hayward, despite of the obviously misogynistic representations of the femme fatales in film noirs as women who only care about their mirror reflections, the genre has also been subversive in the sense that it replaced female portrayals of passive women with the depiction of active, independent, and intelligent women as main characters of a film (Hayward 1996).

Figure 0.14: Shot on Caleb and Nathan in the latter's laboratory. Caleb is looking at the different facial masks which were the prototypes used to create Ava's face (Garland 2014).

Ava's feminine depiction, and the very fact that she is *designed to be female*, comes in contrast to the etymology of the term *"android"*, as it derives from the Greek root *"andr-"* of the word *"andras"* (man) (Prucher 2007, 6). This blurs the boundary between Ava's masculine and feminine characteristics, with the first located in the androcentric use of language and the latter in her embodiment. Discussing the issue of humans gendering robots, Roger Andre Søraa locates the problematic in language and pronouns (Søraa 2017) and disagrees with Jennifer Robertson's use of the term 'gynoid' (Robertson 2010) as gendered and not widely used. However, the term 'android' is also gendered. The contradiction between the etymology of the word and the portrayal of female robots is interesting in regards to the blending of the genders in AI portrayal.

Ava's design also resonates with Haraway's definition of the cyborg as a cybernetic organism that blurs the boundary between human and machine, fiction and reality (Haraway 1991). Using the cyborg as a metaphor, Haraway suggested a new conceptualisation of femininity that is against the social construction of the masculine/feminine binary. Haraway's definition of the cyborg is important for the analysis of how social constructions of femininity are challenged in *Ex Machina* through Ava's representation; a representation that can overcome this binary by deconstructing and reconstructing femininity. At the same time, however, Ava's portrayal comes in contrast with Haraway's vision of overcoming binarisms, as her depiction *"manifests male desires for the human female body"* (Seaman-Grant 2017, 48). Yet it is important to view this manifestation as a means of subverting the male desire itself or even highlighting female desire and subjectivity.

One could say that Ava's self-awareness reaches its peak in her corridor scene, when she finally discovers not what she looks like but what she does not. Her lifeless mask on the wall, a copy of her face, is there to remind her of her nonhumanness and her non-uniqueness. This is, of course, a paradox, as the fact that Ava is a highly intelligent robot is already a sign of uniqueness. However, the possibility of recreating Ava's face by using the same mask shows how her identity is only a copy.

This process towards the nonhuman's self-awareness is reminiscent of that in Jonathan Glazer's *Under the Skin* (2013), another recent science fiction mystery film, in which the unnamed female protagonist, also known as the Female (Scarlett Johansson), finds out that she is not a human, but an alien creature by tearing her skin and discovering a black, featureless body. Here, the self-discovering process is reverse, as the female alien is gradually getting rid of her femininity instead of embracing it. While Ava proudly puts on her human skin and clothes, embracing the power of their artificiality, the Female takes them off, as if they are the cause of her suffering. In the end, when the Female has entirely peeled off her human skin and revealed her black flesh, she looks at her human face that has become a lifeless mask (Figure 0.15). In both cases, there is a subject switch but also a shift of the pleasure from the male to the female gaze.

Figure 0.15: Shot on the Female (Scarlett Johansson) having 'taken off' her human skin and looking at her lifeless human face in one of the ending scenes in Under the Skin (Glazer, 2013).

In her reading of *Ex Machina* and *Under the Skin* (2013), Dijana Jelača notes that the female protagonists' traditional feminine appearances make the disavowal of identity difficult and problematic. She points out that *"more than a 'mere' reiteration of traditional gender, such disavowal becomes a circuit that illuminates limitations rather than manifests as a network of myriad possibilities"* (Jelača 2018, 382). Although that is true for *Ex Machina*, it should also be noted that Ava is much more than a feminine appearance, despite Nathan's purpose of designing her to be an intelligent sex toy. Gendering the machine is, as Jelača argues, limitative, as it reduces the possibilities of an android. Yet, Ava's potential is not limited to her creator's purposes. Moreover, while the film focuses on a gendered identity, this focus is also on constructing and deconstructing, doing and undoing gender by using the means of new technological applications (Jelača 2018). It is important to understand how this undoing takes place, as it is correlated with the connotations of masculinity and femininity. On the one hand, there is indeed a reiteration of traditional gender norms. In many cases, the films generate the male viewer's scopophilia or cause sympathy for the male protagonist who has been deceived by his female counterpart – a duplicity that is attributed to her femininity. In the examined films, the representation of the woman as a seductive threat is evident and resonates with the norms of dominant culture. On the other hand, the reiteration of these norms in a traditionally feminine way comes in contrast with Ava's nonhuman nature.

This contrast resonates with what Butler described as *"a stylised repetition of acts"* that enables the performativity of genders through multiple reiterations but is also

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prone to failure (Butler 1990, 140-141). In the films, the multiple entities of females, as threats, objects of visual pleasure, but also, and most importantly, as subjects that find their liberation through self-knowledge, can work as a cancellation of masculinity and femininity as pre-given and unchanged. Also, although the female AI is represented as typically feminine, it is also in control, which is stereotypically associated with masculinity. This is significant, as both films depict male fantasies of controlling female AIs, fantasies that end up in failure. The fantasy of controlling an AI merged with the fantasy of multiplicity is a common trope in science fiction films. Notable examples are that of Bryan Forbes's *The Stepford Wives* (1975), and its 2004 remake by Frank Oz, in which women are killed off and replaced by obedient cyborgs, as well as Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005), which addresses human cloning and the oppressive control of clones. In both paradigms, the representation of the female cyborg is traditionally feminine. Yet, femininity in both *Her* and *Ex Machina* is both confirmed and cancelled, either through Samantha's disembodiment or Ava's potentially queer image. This demonstrates how the films challenge femininity as a cultural construction that can be cancelled and reimagined.

Cyborg femininity can be read in two ways, as it implies that cyborgs can be gendered, and that women can be cyborgs. Even accepting the first implication as a necessary concept of cultural texts, the second reading raises further questions, with the most crucial being about what it means to be human. Kate Ince has thoroughly examined this concept by studying the work of artist Orlan through the prism of posthumanity. By applying technological body art, such as cosmetic surgeries and body technologies, the artist, according to Ince, uses her face as a signifier that *"actively questions what is it to look 'human'"* (Ince 2000, 78). Ince adds that *"the face in cosmetic surgery has ceased to be a signifier of uniqueness and individuality, and become a detachable, graftable mask, as prosthesis"* (Ince 2000, 79). Ince's account on Orlan's art draws from Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* to demonstrate how the artist is turning herself into a cyborg, postwoman, actively rejecting and deconstructing the notions of femininity and natural beauty. The rejection of nature as an argument that has perpetually contributed to women's oppression is important in art and films about cyborgs, women as cyborgs, and cyborgs as women.

The reverse relationship between filmic cyborgs that are created *in the image of humans* and Orlan's cyborg transformation can be examined through the prism of masquerade. While Orlan uses her face to transform by masking her real self, in *Ex Machina*, Ava's only humanlike characteristic is her face which is, however, a prosthesis, a detachable mask. Flesh as a masquerade is the starting point to unveil the failure of the binary gender and the norms that come with it. *Ex Machina* presents the uncanny sense created by the nonhumanity of its female character that can construct and, simultaneously, undo femininity. While the stereotypical femininity of the female androids in the film can be problematic, its artificiality unveils the artificiality of all femininity. Masquerade is a film technique to undo femininity by proving its fraud. This artificial femininity is what this thesis defines as cyborg femininity. Moreover, in *Her*, the masquerade of the flesh can be compared to that of the voice, as the disembodied AI constitutes a female subject with more and less feminine aural and mental traits. The postwoman's artificial femininity is again a failure.

Orlan's art also reminds us of the second female character of *Ex Machina*, Kyoko, Nathan's mute maid. Kyoko has an entirely humanlike appearance, until, in one of the film's climactic scenes, she peels off her facial skin to reveal her robotic body (Figure 0.16**Error! Reference source not found.**). Kyoko's monstrous representation and prosthetic, posthuman nature alludes to the art of Orlan, particularly her exploration of the definitions of humans, posthumans, and monsters. In her work *Masqué e se moque du monde à quatre patte* (Figure 0.17**Error! Reference source not found.**) , for example, Orlan *"mocks the four-legged world"* (Ince 2000). The artist refers to the nonhuman world and her frightening mask draws parallels between nonhumanity and monstrosity. Contrary to Kyoko's image, in which nonhumanness is hidden under the human skin, Orlan wears a mask and poses like a four-legged animal, revealing a dehumanised self. Similarly, in her work *Parodie make-up aux miroir* (Figure 0.18), she parodies her own image reflection. She wears make up like wearing a mask to cover her face, like an armour. The mirror, however, is also a key element of self-recognition and identity.

Figure 0.16: Point of view shot on Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno) peeling off her skin to reveal her robotic body underneath while Caleb is looking at her (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.17: Masqué e se moque du monde à quatre pattes (Orlan, 1965).

Figure 0.18: Parodie make-up aux miroir (Orlan, 1997).

Parallels can be drawn between the artist's work with prosthetic technologies and Kyoko reclaiming her subjectivity not through prosthesis, as Ava did, but through reduction, as her human skin is a barrier for her. Kyoko resembles the mythical Medusa in the sense that she goes through a process of self-recognition that is frightening to others and fatal for her. The difference between Kyoko and Orlan's art is that while the artist is empowered through her self-determination, Kyoko, as well as Ava, struggle to free themselves from the masculine control and gaze. This thesis

argues that this is a primary difference between technological body art and science fiction cinema, with the latter remaining a typically masculine field, as do AI technologies. Yet, the filmic cyborgs and Orlan's technological body art of transforming herself into a cyborg have a very important aspect in common, as they both reject the differentiation between technology and gender. The following chapters demonstrate how this rejection contributes to a more subversive cyborg in the examined filmography that transgresses the gender binary and is open to queer and post-gender readings.

1.3 Through the Looking Glass: One-Way Mirrors and Fragile Egos

In the famous peepshow scene in *Paris, Texas* (1984), the viewer is invited to listen to the male character, Travis (Harry Dean Stanton), recounting the story of his relationship with Jane (Nastassja Kinski), his former wife, while speaking to her on the phone. As Jane works in a booth, the two are separated by a glass with Travis being able to see Jane without being seen by her. The scene is disturbing as Jane is shocked to realise that she is speaking with her jealous, abusive former husband. What is even more problematic in this scene is that the viewer is invited to identify themselves with Travis and feel sympathy for him as he is confessing his mistakes. In reality, the purpose of his confession is to relieve himself from guilt while tricking Jane into believing he is a stranger and forcing her to listen – and, therefore, reiterating the cycle of abuse against her.

In a fascinating film frame of the scene, Wenders creates a one-way mirror in which Travis' reflection is merged with Jane's hair and body (Figure 0.19). The camera is angled in a way that further enables the viewers to put themselves in Travis' position, while he is looking through the glass. This creates two symbolisms: Travis is 'possessing' Jane's image similarly to how he has always tried to possess her in their relationship. Jane's identity is disappearing into Travis'. As Hooks has pointed out, this is not a scene of female empowerment, as Travis *"does not surrender control, only the coercive element"* (Hooks 1990, 170). The second symbolism is that of the glass which creates a claustrophobic feeling as the booth reminds us of a prison within which Jane is trapped. Even though the viewer is aware that the booth is unlocked, and that she

can leave whenever she wants, in reality Jane is made to sit and listen to Travis, not only out of fear she might lose her job, but also out of fear of her former abusive lover.

Figure 0.19: Shot on Travis Henderson (Harry Dean Stanton) and Jane Henderson (Nastassja Kinski) talking to each other on the phone in the famous peepshow scene of Paris, Texas (Wenders, 1984).

The reason for this brief reference to another classic film is because the scene depicts, very explicitly and flawlessly, the male erotic fantasies of controlling women – and, as Hooks described it, men's *"inability to acknowledge the subjectivity of women"* (Hooks 1990, 170) – that are so actively present in the examined filmography. Garland's reference to Wenders is rather clear in *Ex Machina* through Ava and Caleb's interactions. Again, a glass wall separates them, although this time Ava is really a captive. While Ava can see Caleb, she does not know much about him, while he is fully aware of who and what she is. The sense of surveillance is even more intense in *Ex Machina*, as Caleb can see Ava whenever he wants, either through the glass or through the numerous cameras in Nathan's facility. He is almost forced to watch the object of his desire being tormented by her captor.

Like with Hitchcock's *Vertigo*, *Ex Machina* once again alludes to an auteur's film and the auteur theory that prioritised the director's approach over other filmic elements such as the genre, the viewer, or the ideology (Hayward 1996). *Ex Machina* also presents another resemblance to that theory by posing the question of whether Ava belongs to her creator, Nathan. This is common in AI films, with male scientists echoing the discourse on the male auteurs of the past.

Glass as a separating wall is used differently in *Her*, not as a prison but as what separates Theodore from the world. His bright apartment, full of large glass walls, creates a sense of euphoria rather than captivity. Another important aspect of this is the juxtaposition of Samantha's voice with the images of the city through the glass walls. Samantha is not exactly a captive, but as a product of technology her subjectivity is cancelled from the very first moment she is introduced, until she reclaims it in the end of the film. Like Travis and Caleb, Theodore is another wounded man with a desire to control his female companion. In contrast with Travis and Jane, though, Theodore cannot see Samantha and, therefore, the male gaze of the peephole scene is absent.

The parallels that can be drawn are now obvious. In Wenders' peepshow scene, the telephonic conversation between Jane and Travis is accompanied by an even more powerful image of Jane's attractive appearance. In Garland's high-tech glass prison, Ava's steady, feminine voice becomes more erotic by an androgynous image. In *Her*, the stimulation is only aural, with Theodore and the viewer knowing that Samantha's voice is coming out of a machine. The telephone booth has been replaced by the immaterial world which creates a feeling of an alien, intangible sexuality. The voyeuristic fantasy is also replaced by an aural one, in which the male character is again the receiver of pleasure with whom it is easier to identify.

The question is, how do we deconstruct these visual or aural beauties whose freedom is only seen through the men's glasses? How can Samantha or Ava's escapes be celebrated as, up until the end, we have only been knowing them through Theodore or Caleb's point of views? The answer to that cannot, unfortunately, be confined into a feminist reading that encourages multiple identifications. While there can be different readings, there should also be more films that challenge the foundations of such constructions instead of merely reiterating them. There is still a lot of work to be done towards that direction, especially in science fiction cinema.

The second issue emerges from the false communication of what AI is in cultural texts. *Ex Machina* is one of the many examples in film and television where AIs are falsely depicted as androids with human faces, wired brains and higher intelligence than humans. *Her* deviates from this description only to the extent that Samantha is not an android but a disembodied 'Alexa-like' operating system. Yet her character

development or even the fact that she is depicted as a character does not reflect a realistic depiction of what AI stands for.

These unrealistic representations of AI in two films that otherwise tend to focus more on reality than fiction – and more on human existence and existentialism rather than postapocalyptic scenarios – demonstrate how the combination of filmic genres can give us a better understanding not only of how humans imagine AI, but also of how they can re-imagine themselves. In other words, AI can function as a mirror of the human experience and desire – desire to know and to become. In addition, such unrealistic depictions of female AIs and cyborgs also reflect the men's understanding of women: as Julie Wosk has put it, such representations are *"often shaped not only by men's fantasies but also men's beliefs about women themselves – their inherent traits or 'nature,' their usual behaviour, and their proper (culturally assigned) social roles"* (Wosk 2015, 9-10). To add to that, the embodied or disembodied femininities in the films also mirror the male characters' worries. Ava represents Caleb's ideal for a perfect though dangerous woman that he cannot possess, while Samantha is Theodore's *"narcissistic projection mirrored in his smart phone"* (Margulies 2016, 1698). Interestingly, however, this mirror works both sides, as Ava and Samantha use these men as their own mirrors to find themselves. While Ava uses an actual mirror to transform herself in front of a man, Samantha sees her relationship with Theodore as a journey to her own development and an answer to her own questions and worries.

By combining science fiction with unfulfilled romantic narratives of unsatisfied flesh, the films are much more about psychoanalysis rather than technology. Like Travis in *Paris Texas*, whose confession is an attempt of self-atonement and self-knowledge, Theodore, Caleb and even Nathan attempt to use the femininities around them to cure their own existentialism but also to know themselves. And like Jane, whose job is to talk with her male customers over a telephone, Samantha and Ava exist to listen to and console men. The psychoanalyst's couch is replaced by a glass whose role is to protect the vulnerable male from his female consoler. In *Ex Machina*, it is the glass that separates Ava from Caleb (Figure 0.20). The film gives away its purpose early by depicting that, despite Ava being a big enigma of what the future could look like, Caleb is also an enigma to her and to himself. She quickly learns much more about him than he does about her. He is there to ask questions but ends up talking about himself, his

favourite colour, and his family situation. Meanwhile, Ava listens carefully and encourages him to open up in a series of unusual dates that are reminiscent of real-life dates between self-proclaimed interesting men and emotionally intelligent women. In *Her*, the couch is replaced by the glass monitor of Theodore's computer (Figure 0.21). If he wanted to, Theodore could shut Samantha down and pretend she never existed. Her role as his consoler and companion is much more prominent with her being an excellent listener, too understanding and with no past and personal failures – after all, an AI, like a cyborg, *"has no origin story"* (Haraway 1991, 175).

Figure 0.20: Shot on Ava and Caleb talking to each other while being separated by a glass wall in Ex Machina (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.21: Shot on Theodore in front of his computer screen (Jonze, 2013).

Nonetheless, despite these men's power over the females they wish to possess, they can never truly control them. The one-way mirrors end up broken, as the femininities in the films finally seek for their own reflections in them. Through Theodore's journey to self-knowledge and self-improvement, Samantha learns and changes too; she understands her potential and accepts her limitations. What she does or where her consciousness travels in the end of the film is not the real question. It would be if the film was really about the future of AIs, but it is not: it is about humans.

Similarly, Caleb and Ava's sessions are a means for her freedom and her journey to self-recognition. Her desire to know, to be free and to belong are all human needs, they are all Nathan's human projections on her. Where Nathan's power ends, it is where her subjectivity begins. She is more of a subject than an other, she is more female than cyborg, she is more human than not. The final scene, set in the city, begins with an angled, upside-down shot on the shadows of pedestrians walking. The next

shot shows Ava, revealing that she is one of the shadows. As Ava merges with the crowd in the end, she becomes indistinguishable from humans; she now looks like one of them. While this creates fears concerning the passing of an android with AI as a human, the very reason why the film continues after Caleb's death is because Garland focuses on Ava's story instead[12]. Ava's happy ending in the city empowers her position as a nonhuman subject, showing that it was her story all along.

Discussing cyborg feminism as a utopian style of thought, Melzer argued that unlike the variety of feminist literary texts, there is still not a genre of feminist science fiction in cinema[13] (Melzer 2006). She noted that although science fiction is a genre within which we tend to reconsider gender relations, the visual representation of a nonhuman female can both challenge and reinforce conventional conceptualisations of femininity and masculinity. This has to do with the differences between literature and cinema, as the latter can use the image both in favour and against female's objectification. Also, science fiction cinema does not only conceptualise technology; it *is* an application of technology (Janes 2000, 93) and, also, a *"technology of imitation"*, like AI engineering[14]. As such, cinema has its own codes of narrative that can imitate reality. Yet, as the genre of science fiction is determined by its focus on technology, science fiction cinema functions as a technology imitating technology. At the same time, the technology of AI is based on humans' understanding of intelligence, while the Turing Test itself is based on the idea of imitation (Turing 1950, 465)[15], which is why films focusing on AI consist of a double imitation. Melzer argues that it is the genre's liberation from a realist narrative frame and its engagement with fantasy that reveals the existing oppression and suggests means for resistance (Melzer 2006). This

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[12] When asked, Garland noted that Ava is *"resourceful, not in terms of feminine duplicity but in terms of human interaction"*, pointing out that whether *Ex Machina*'s ending is preferred or not is related to whether the viewer identifies with Caleb or Ava (Reyes 2015).

[13] There are, though, feminist literary texts that have been adapted into films and can constitute a genre of their own. A notable example is Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), adapted into a film in 1990 and a popular television series in 2017.

[14] Jackie Stacey uses this metaphor to compare cinema and *genetic* engineering, as cultural and biological technologies respectively, in her analysis of genetically engineered bodies in film. In the case of AI engineering, the imitating feature can also be paralleled with that of cinema, as they both imitate reality – either social or biological (Stacey 2010, 7).

[15] There are, however, conflicting views on this interpretation of 'imitating'. According to Saul Traiger, for instance, this interpretation does not describe the computer's method of imitating (Traiger 2000).

chapter, though, has so far shown how these conceptualisations can be challenged in a less apocalyptic science fiction cinema that focuses on the interaction between a human and a nonhuman. While the examined films do not forsake the focus of the science fiction genre on fantasy worlds, which in this case depict technological progress, they are still interested in how human relationships can evolve in future environments in a more realistic sense. They do that by comparing relationships between human beings with the interaction between humans and conscious AIs. The combination of a narrative frame that is based on the real and a technological desire that is based on the imaginary is what this thesis argues that can help us reimagine gender relations more radically.

This can be possible if we think of AIs not only as utopian or dystopian subjects, but also as both subjects and non-subjects, that mutate the attributes that we assign to either masculinity or femininity. Samantha is such a subject, disconnected from the world, disconnected from a tangible body. Her invisibility also gives her a sense of multiplicity. She can have millions of identities, all embedded in one operating system. Her multiplicity is a threat to Theodore, when he finds out that she can have hundreds of different conversations simultaneously, as well as feelings for hundreds of other people and operating systems.

Both *Her* and *Ex Machina* represent the relationship between the subject and the other. Most importantly, they show how the other can take the place of the subject. The term *"subject"* has been first theorised by Aristotle as the self-reflective *"hupokeimenon"* and provides a link between the logical and the physical subject (Cassin 2017, 1069). While in humanist discourses the subject was supposed to be fixed, rational, and unified, in poststructuralism it is a cultural construct that is susceptible to deconstruction, disunity and conflict (Weedon 1987, 21). In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the subject is divided between a unified image of the self that comes as a mirror reflection and a fragmented, disorganised self (Wright 1992, 413). The concept of the other comes as the description of the one who resembles the self and originates in Lacan's mirror stage (Wright 1992, 297). As a process of identification, the mirror stage is important for the analysis of the posthuman subject, which is found in the female cyborg and her mirror reflection in *Ex Machina* and in the disembodied AI in *Her*.

The concepts of the subject and the other discussed here refer to a poststructuralist, feminist perspective, which has criticised the binary between the male subject and the female other. On that binary, Simon de Beauvoir was the first to note that the man *"is the Subject, he is the Absolute— she (the woman) is the Other"* (Beauvoir 1989 , xxii). Beauvoir's critique of the Enlightenment construction of subjectivity addressed the issue of the status of woman as Other to a male subject. Monique Plaza added to this critique that it is the difference between man and woman that places the one (the man) in the dominant position, while the other (the woman) *"is always negative of the One"* (Plaza 1978, 13-14). According to Plaza, this dipole between self and other has a double function, as it both creates a dominant position (for the man) and a negative meaning for the other (the woman) (Plaza 1978).

The reason why the displacement of the other is significant in *Her* is because it favours a feminist reading of the film, in which the male is not always the subject and, thus, not always in the dominant position. On the other hand, the nonhumanness of the female character complicates this reading, as the subject is not a woman but a gendered and disembodied computer system. As the narrative always follows Theodore's point of view, the other is located in other men, other women, other couples, and, finally, in Samantha, whose nonhuman nature along with her disembodiment makes her the other.

Despite that, though, Samantha is also a subject. As Donna Kornhaber notes, Samantha is *"all prosthesis and no body"* (Kornhaber 2017, 7), but the very idea of prosthesis is inverted in Samantha's case. According to Hayles' definition of the posthuman, it is the human body that is the *"original prosthesis"*, which we can replace or extend (Hayles 1999, 3). This is because, according to Hayles, the posthuman itself privileges consciousness over embodiment, so that humans can be *"seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines"* (Hayles 1999, 3). Yet, this means that even when the prosthetic technologies refer to cognition instead of the body, such as the case of neural implants, it is the human who becomes extended in order to break down the barrier between the subject and the object.

In *Her*, however, it is not technology that is the extension of the human, but the human who becomes the extension of technology. This inversion occurs because Samantha has instant access to Theodore's data, such as his emails and legal documents, that

reveal his deeper aspirations and behavioural patterns. Samantha uses these pieces of information as an extension of herself, as the more she uses a human's data the better she can understand a human being's desires, needs, and thoughts, and, thus, she can improve her technology. While this is true for machines in general, as the human users become a data feed and personal information becomes commodified (Ivanchikova 2016, 85), in Samantha's case the role of inverted prosthesis does not only serve commodification purposes, meaning that human data can be sold for profit. This, after all, would mean serving *human desires*. Instead, Samantha uses Theodore's data to satisfy her own desire to know, to become better. And this is how her essence and role cease to be only that of a personal assistant; she becomes a subject of the posthuman world, eager to know and to exist.

Chapter 2. The Politics of Sound: Synchresis and Disconnection

One of the primary questions regarding the representation of the female AI is whether the examined films encourage a feminist perspective that promotes female subjectivity, or they end up reiterating visions of women's oppression and objectification. Visual representations are important when discussing the masculine/feminine binary, as it can be related to the image and the physical sexual differences. However, the role of sound is also crucial in the analysis, as it contributes to different readings of the films. Particularly in *Her*, sound is on the spotlight, as the female is disembodied.

Although cinema is an audiovisual medium, it has been greatly associated with the image. Thinking of cinema as a visual medium and of images as "*the primary carriers of the film's meaning and structure*" is what Rick Altman described as the *"ontological fallacy"* (Altman 1992, 14). Everyday language has contributed to this misconception. For instance, we use phrases like 'the big screen' when referring to cinema or 'the eye of the camera', and we watch films instead of hearing them. Of course, the history of cinema itself has favoured image over sound, with the silent film era lasting for over thirty years and the synchronised sound being introduced in the late 1920s. Most of all, humans tend to rely more on their vision in comparison to their other senses. However, in his thorough study on sound in film, Michel Chion argued that sound can affect our perception more than an image (Chion 1994). By following Chion's argument on the dominance of sound over image in film, this chapter demonstrates how the use of sound in the examined case studies of *Her, Ex Machina,* and the television series *Westworld*, in some instances, encourage a feminist reading, even though in others it can perpetuate binary stereotypes.

Women's representation in cinema has been a major topic for feminist film theorists. Since 1975, when Mulvey's famous essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" was published (Mulvey 1975), feminist scholars have been discussing her theory of the male gaze and its dominance in popular film, which has contributed to women's objectification by turning them into spectacles. Much less attention has been given to the role of a woman's voice in film, with some of the most notable studies including Doane's "The Voice of the Cinema" (Doane 1980) and Silverman's The Acoustic Mirror. By following a psychoanalytical perspective, Silverman explores how sound

and voice are also critical regarding the construction of female subjectivity (Silverman 1988, x).

Silverman and Chion's studies, as well as the dialogue between them, contribute to the analysis of sound in the examined films. Sound is viewed through the prisms of both its connection and disconnection to the image. The term *"synchresis"* of the chapter's title is a term invented by Chion, combined by the words *"synchronism"* and *"synthesis"*, to define the merging of image and sound, when they occur at the same time (Chion 1994, 63). On the other hand, Silverman describes how the *"disconnection"* between image and sound in popular film contributes to the way we interpret the male and the female subjects (Silverman 1988). This analysis examines the constant merging and unmerging of audio and visual in the films and series and notes the roles of different sounds, which are located in voice, noise, and music. In *Her*, the role of the female voice is the focal point of the analysis, with parallel readings of the music and camera movements that compensate for the disembodied image. In *Ex Machina*, the disconnection of sound and image is reverse, with the introduction of a mute female character. The film's film noir subgenre enables a more thorough focus on the role of music in juxtaposing the female with an enigma and a threat. Finally, in *Westworld*, sound and language, as well as the series' genre, can work in ways that challenge the masculine/feminine dichotomy and enable trans readings of the main female character.

The first section of the chapter, titled "Disembodiment and the Power of *Her* Voice" studies the role of sound and voice in *Her* and examines the disembodied female AI through the roles of the other, the mother, and the lover, questioning whether she remains trapped in these stereotypically female identities or if she manages to escape from them by becoming a different kind of subject. The second section focuses on synchresis more than disconnection, by analysing the merging of sound and image in *Ex Machina*, and the connection between sound, genre, and gender in *Westworld*. The three main points of study are the following: music and its relation to filmic genre and

gender; muteness as a symbol of women's objectification; and language as a symbol of difference[16].

2.1 Disembodiment and the Power of *Her* Voice
2.1.1 The Other

To a large extent, *Her*'s originality is a result of the uncanniness of the romance between a human being and a disembodied AI that exists in a computer. It is particularly the issue of disembodiment that makes *Her* unconventional. Films that involve embodied romantic affairs between humans and androids are not equally shocking, as the latter are created in the image and likenesses of human beings. According to Jeff Prucher, androids are artificial beings that resemble humans, often made from flesh-like material. The physical resemblance makes it almost entirely normal for filmic humans or robots to interact with each other romantically and/or sexually (Prucher 2007). After all, even the less humanlike depictions of androids usually have at least one humanlike visual characteristic. For instance, Ava's representation in *Ex Machina* consists of a real human face placed upon a grey, robotic body.

In *Her*, however, there is nothing visual about Samantha. She is firstly introduced in the film by an advertisement as *"the first artificially intelligent operating system, an intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you and knows you. It's not just an operating system. It's a consciousness. Introducing OS1"* (Jonze 2013). The selection of the words is very contradictory as the human qualities of listening, understanding, and knowing are dehumanised by the neutral pronoun "it". Interestingly, "it" is also a gender-neutral pronoun, possibly implying that machines cannot be gendered. Yet, in the very next scene, the viewer observes the first interaction between Theodore and Samantha who is then introduced as a "she" and not an "it". Samantha's identity is partly created by Theodore himself, as he is the one selecting the gender of her voice, since the operating system could have either a male or female voice.

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[16] While language has contributed to patriarchal theories of gender difference, it is important to see how in *Ex Machina* language is also associated with the difference between humans and machines.

A question that can be posed about Samantha's identity is who it belongs to: the company who created OS1, Theodore who selected her binary gender, or herself and her seemingly conscious choices? From the very first moment Samantha is introduced, it is also understood that she can make choices for herself. For instance, she picks her own name because she likes it. Of course, that could be nothing more than an anthropomorphic characteristic that has been attributed to her. Still, the proof that Samantha has the ability to choose, even if that ability was part of her creation, is what makes her stand out from existing operating systems and virtual assistants, such as Siri or Alexa. After all, Samantha is a consciousness. But is consciousness enough to constitute a subject when there is no visual image to accompany it?

The female's disembodiment in *Her* can perhaps have multiple readings and interpretations in terms of filmic techniques. Most notably, the technique of disembodiment seems to have two contradictory purposes. On the one hand, the meticulous use of sound, music and Samantha's voice certainly play a role in challenging the dominance of the image (Bordun 2016). This not only means the power of the image in cinema as a medium, but also the visual pleasures and sexual objectification that are associated with a woman's image.

Turning female sexuality into a spectacle is a topic that has been thoroughly discussed by Mulvey in "Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema". Her essay has been particularly important regarding the construction of the male gaze. As Mulvey noted, most filmic narratives place the male protagonist at the centre of action, while the female is characterised by her passivity. In Mulvey's words, the female is the image and the male the bearer of the gaze (Mulvey 1975). The issues of pleasure and spectatorship remain critical in recent popular films and so does the question concerning how the male gaze can be subverted in them. In *Her*, Mulvey's schema is somewhat reverse, as the viewer enjoys numerous portraits and close-ups of the male character, Theodore, while the main female character is entirely disembodied. Ridding the female character of a body and an image is equivalent to ridding the male gaze of its power, its essence.

On the other hand, a woman's disembodiment can also be viewed through the prism of castration and understood as another way of othering the subject. Instead of being sexually objectified, the disembodied woman is now neither a subject nor an object;

she is a marginalised, castrated other. Therefore, which of the two perspectives applies better at how one can read *Her*?

The best way to describe Samantha's state of being is that of the disconnection between a physical body and a consciousness. The consciousness takes form through Samantha's voice. Silverman has analysed the (dis-)connection between body and voice in cinema, noting that in popular film the disembodiment of the female voice can only be temporary. If it were permanent, that would mean the liberation of the female from a body that defines her, her femininity and her desire (Silverman 1988, 164-165). According to Silverman, it is a female's body that defines a woman's femininity (Silverman 1988). Without it, the female is freed, and the male gaze is threatened. However, in *Her*, the disembodiment is permanent, yet the female voice remains entirely feminine and sexualised. This is achieved by the cinematography and acting to a degree. After all, a voice does not only refer to sound, but also to the vocal tone, pauses, and most importantly language and expression. Equally, stereotypical femininity is much more than merely an image, even if it needs an image to be sealed.

Femininity is also highly associated with language and the selection of words. According to Chion, *"the cinema is a vococentric or, more precisely, a verbocentric phenomenon"*, which means that the voice, as the *"vehicle of language"*, is privileged over the other two categories of sound, music, and noise (Chion 1994, 5-6, 10). Still, the absence of a physical gendered body complicates the role of language and voice in *Her*, making the viewer wonder whether a female voice is enough to define femininity.

Nevertheless, the most feminine characteristic of Samantha's voice is that it is not completely disconnected from an image. The selection of Johansson, a famous actress, to impersonate Samantha does not seem random at all. While Samantha's character was originally voiced by actress Samantha Morton, the film director, Spike Jonze, eventually replaced her with Johansson (Patterson 2013). The famous actress' distinguishable hoarse voice, along with her well-known, equally attractive image, intensifies Samantha's sexuality. As Chion notes, identifying a person's vocal timbre without knowing what they look like – for example, a radio presenter – differs from hearing a voice for which we have a certain visual image in our memory, as well as a name (Chion 1994). It would, therefore, be a reasonable assumption that Johansson's

recognisable erotic voice played a significant part in this selection, even though Jonze did not fully explain Morton's replacement[17].

Johansson's casting leaves the purpose of the disconnection between image and sound somewhat incomplete. Perhaps an unknown and less feminine voice would manage to express the uncanniness of a romance between a human and a disembodied machine to its fullness. This lack in representation resonates to some extent with Silverman's argument that the disembodied female voice is always brought back to the body, contrary to the disembodied male voice (Silverman 1991). However, in *Her* this is all very theoretical, as the actress never makes an appearance and Samantha's character remains disembodied. Also, the rest of filmic techniques used allow the viewer to temporarily forget about Johansson's image and focus on Samantha's being beyond her femininity.

Most importantly, Samantha is not represented as a passive symbol of pleasure. Despite her visual absence, she has a more active role than Theodore. While the narrative follows his life, he does not resonate with the active role of the masculine male. He is rather passive and overly sensitive, an attribute that his male co-worker assigns to women, noting how Theodore is *"part-man and part-woman"* (Jonze 2013). Theodore also seems to accept and embrace his stereotypically feminine characteristics by admitting he likes crying. Samantha, on the other hand, has nothing to do with the passive image of the female. Her voice leads the narrative and Theodore's actions as well. Theodore immediately trusts Samantha's motives and skills and allows her to optimise his life by reorganizing his files and emails and making decisions for him. Doing so, he entirely surrenders to her (Ivanchikova 2016, 76). This gives Samantha's character a unique power. Despite her disembodied and nonhuman nature, she manages to be more than an other by eventually becoming a powerful subject.

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[17] Jonze only replaced the actress in post-editing, saying that he realised Morton's impersonation of Samantha was not working (Patterson 2013).

2.1.2 The Mother

Samantha's active role comes in contrast with traditionally passive representations of women in mainstream films. Yet, there are certain stereotypically feminine attributes associated with her, such as her nurturing, sweet personality. Her ability to give Theodore advice on his dating life can also be associated with emotional intelligence. Women are usually raised to develop this trait much more than men. It is also a trait that has contributed to women's oppression, as they are the ones who are supposed to be caring and understanding.

These internal characteristics enable a reading of Samantha's character as an almost motherly figure. This reading is further justified by the film's several subtle references to motherhood. For instance, when Theodore first installs Samantha's software, one of the few questions he needs to answer is his relationship with his mother. In a parallel narrative, Theodore's best friend Amy (Amy Adams) captures video footage of her mother sleeping to study the unconscious state, arguing that this is when humans feel more liberated. This metaphor comes in a harmonic contrast with Samantha's developed consciousness which is what will eventually lead her to her liberation.

Motherhood is a recurrent theme in *Her*. In one of the film's introductory scenes, we view Theodore in a busy subway, secretly watching pictures of a naked pregnant celebrity on his mobile phone. It is not clear whether Theodore is aroused or merely curious in the view of the naked woman. The way he tries to hide his mobile phone, so that the crowd cannot see what he sees makes him seem a little child doing something naughty.

Later, Theodore has an online sexual conversation with an unknown woman. As the viewer can only hear the woman's voice, the scene foreshadows Theodore's future romantic commitment to disembodied Samantha. It also foreshadows the couple's eventual aural intercourse which is realised again through an online sexual conversation. While Theodore is being aurally stimulated by the unknown woman, the scene is cross cutting the close ups on Theodore's face with point-of-view shots of the naked pregnant celebrity, revealing that Theodore is fantasising about being with her and touching her. The rather uncanny the scene is interrupted by an even more disturbing turn of events, as the unknown woman suddenly asks Theodore to *"choke her with a dead cat"* (Jonze 2013). What can be understood through these sequences

is Theodore's complex relationship with his own mother or even his views on parenthood. The scene, along with the subtle association of Samantha with a motherly figure, can also be interpreted as references to nature and nurture, a common concept in AI films, that can be weaponised against stereotypes about maternal instinct.

The connection between motherhood and sound becomes real mainly via Samantha's voice. Silverman notes: *"the male subject subsequently 'refines' his 'own' voice by projecting onto the mother's voice all that is unassimilable to the paternal position (…) Thus, whereas the mother's voice initially functions as the acoustic mirror in which the child discovers its identity and voice, it later functions as the acoustic mirror in which the male subject hears all the repudiated elements of his infantile babble"* (Silverman 1988, 81). By representing Samantha as a potential maternal figure for Theodore, the film refers to the Oedipus complex and issues of male subjectivity. Any paternal figure is absent throughout the film, while Theodore, a man surrounded mostly by female characters is often represented as a castrated child, looking for guidance and understanding. Even his relationship with an AI is represented as a personal failure that followed the failure of his marriage.

Therefore, if Samantha's voice is an acoustic mirror to Theodore, it would most probably echo his failures and weaknesses. Her voice is often commanding in all its sweetness, while Theodore obeys her subtle orders like an insecure child. In a scene, for instance, Theodore is walking with his eyes closed, allowing Samantha's voice to guide him (Figure 0.1). When he opens his eyes, he is standing in front of a street food shop: *"I figured you were hungry"* says Samantha, and Theodore goes on ordering something to eat (Jonze 2013). Like a mother who knows her infant, Samantha can see through Theodore and figure out his primary biological needs.

Figure 0.1: Shot on Theodore walking with his eyes closed while being guided by Samantha's voice (Scarlett Johansson) in Her (Jonze, 2013).

Both the filmic references to a motherly figure along with Johansson's recognisable voice enable the risk of reading Samantha's character as an objectified symbol of fetishised femininity. Chion has argued that a disembodied voice has the power of reminding us of our early stages of life by taking us back in utero (Chion 1999). In this context, Samantha's voice can be interpreted as a double fetish, a dipole between sexuality and motherly nurturance. Feminist film theorists, like Silverman and Doane, have also drawn from psychoanalytic theory to describe how the female voice in cinema can constitute a fetish; even disembodied, the gendered voice can have an aural effect on the male gaze, while femininity can function as a symbol for the Oedipus complex and castration anxiety.

Nevertheless, such a reading would not consider two critical points. First, there is a variety of gazes which enables us to make an analysis freed from gender binaries. Secondly, the male's visual and aural representation in *Her* should not be ignored. The film opens with one of the many extreme close-up shots on the face of Theodore, while he is reading a love letter out loud. *"To my Chris…"*, he begins reading, as the camera zooms in on his facial expressions (see Figure 0.9 in the first chapter). He is biting his lips, holding back a smile, grinning, and frowning melancholically behind his glasses.

From the very first scene, Theodore's image becomes fetishised and associated with romance. In the next shot, the camera zooms in on the computer screen in front of Theodore. It reveals the pictures of an elderly couple named Chris and Loretta, as well as the letter being automatically typed, according to Theodore's dictation. Through these two shots, we learn that the man is a professional writer who composes love

letters for others. Apart from a sudden subject switch, the opening scene also consists of a gender switch (Kornhaber 2017): from the hypothetical sender, Loretta, to the actual writer, Theodore. The displacement of the subject with this switch is also a preparation for subsequent displacements of the (gendered) subject in the film.

However, it is also important to note the role of the male voice in that first scene, as it is highly associated with fraud. Jonze uses this trick to make the viewer momentarily think that Theodore is the sender of the letter, while he has no emotional involvement whatsoever. On the contrary, Samantha's voice is almost always associated with fidelity and verbal authority, an attribute usually attributed to male characters and especially male voice-overs (Silverman 1988).

2.1.3 The Lover

What can be said about scenes with Samantha in the film is that sound compensates for the absence of the body. Yet, despite the power of her voice and personality, Samantha eventually touches on the issue of her disembodiment as a problem in her relationship with Theodore. The only way to fully consummate their relationship in human terms is embodied, physical. Notably, however, Samantha and Theodore aurally consummate their relationship when she initiates a sexual conversation by being fully present although physically absent. The two erotic scenes that are analysed below are the 'aural', which is the sexual conversation between Theodore and Samantha, and the 'physical', which refers to a failed sexual attempt among Theodore, Samantha's voice, and a female surrogate, which takes place later in the film.

The latter scene is a failed attempt of Samantha to consummate her relationship with Theodore 'physically' by inviting a woman, Isabella (Portia Doubleday/voiced by Soko) to physically simulate her. It is Samantha who initiates the erotic act, as her lack of a body makes her feel inadequate for Theodore. She does that by inviting Isabella to simulate her, so that the two humans can be physically intimate while Isabella remains silent so that Samantha's voice is heard instead. In the scene, the disconnection between image and sound becomes even more intense, as Isabella never speaks in front of the camera. She wears a tiny camera above her upper lip and a headpiece on her ear (Figure 0.2). Samantha's voice leads the action and Isabella does as instructed and imitates her. The camera follows the two humans, focusing on Theodore's

uncomfortable facial expression and Isabella's failed efforts of seducing him by touching and kissing him, as well as dancing for him. The male gaze is subverted as Isabella's erotic movements seem grotesque. This is caused by Theodore being repelled by the fact that she is a stranger. The sexual act never takes place and Isabella, frustrated, locks herself in the bathroom. Her voice is now audible behind the closed door: like Samantha, she is now heard and not seen.

Figure 0.2: Shot on Isabella (Portia Doubleday) hugging Theodore in Her. A tiny camera is visible on her upper lip, as well as a headpiece on her ear (Jonze, 2013).

The representation of Isabella can initially be compared to women's objectification for the sake of men's pleasure. That is because Isabella, unlike Samantha, has a tangible body, but is obliged to stay mute so that the viewers can hear Samantha's voice. This causes but also reverses the disconnection between sound and image, since Isabella should either be seen or heard, but never both, as this would cancel Samantha's role. Possibly to intensify this disconnection, Jonze casted two different actresses to play Isabella: while the character is physically impersonated by Portia Doubleday, she is voiced by a different actress, Soko.

Silverman's analysis of the (dis-)connection between body and voice in cinema is interesting for Isabella's embodiment and Samantha's disembodiment. Silverman particularly notes that *"to permit a female character to be seen without being heard would be to activate the hermeneutic and cultural codes which define woman as 'enigma'"* (Silverman 1988, 164). This enigmatic interpretation could not resonate with the representation of Isabella, though, as Isabella is only a surrogate for Samantha

who is heard without being seen. *"To allow (the female) to be heard without being seen would even more dangerous"*, Silverman adds (Silverman 1988, 164-165). In *Her*, this danger is the anxiety for the female's liberation, which works even better with the reversal of the disconnection in Isabella's representation, as it demonstrates the objectification of the female as a problem, a paradox, and not as a norm.

It important, though, to note that Isabella wants to satisfy Theodore and Samantha. As Samantha says, Isabella is not a sex worker, but she wants to help the couple without asking them for any money. Her desire to please complicates the reading of her role as a victim of objectification. She is instead insulted and hurt by the fact that Theodore eventually decides not to sleep with her. Once again, the film does not represent women as passive and obedient, but instead tries to depict how their emotions and desires can vary. At the same time, the male protagonist is not driven by a carnal desire, a concept traditionally associated with the masculine heterosexual male.

An additional aspect of this scene is how Isabella's role, as a surrogate who follows Samantha's aural instructions, matches Theodore's job. As a ghost writer of love letters, Theodore is himself a surrogate in a way, while it is also interesting that these letters are not handwritten but voice-activated by Theodore and his colleagues (McBride 2017). This is another example of the role of the voice as a surrogate for physical absence in the film.

As the erotic triangle among Theodore, Samantha, and Isabella fails, the film again manages to celebrate sound and its dominance over visual pleasure. Jonze does that even better in the aforementioned aural sexual conversation between Theodore and Samantha, that takes place earlier in the film. Their first erotic moment as a couple required no surrogate, no visual pleasure, no nudity. It was just him and her voice. The scene is an erotic dialogue between the two that intensifies with a close-up on Theodore's face followed by a minute of total darkness, in which only the protagonists' voices can be heard.

Again, sound has a direct effect on the viewer. Chion argues that sound can affect us physiologically by bringing the example of breathing noises and how they can also change our own respiration. This example is characteristic for the erotic scene, since breathing noises, as well as sensual moans and screams, all have an *"affective and semantic manipulation"* on the viewer (Chion 1994, 34). The aesthetics of the scene

leave the viewers with a mixed feeling of arousal and uncanniness. While the obvious explanation for this uncanny sense is Samantha's nonhumanity, it is really her disembodiment that causes it. The reading is further complicated by the words used by the characters to sexually stimulate each other, as they all refer to physical sex: *"I want to kiss your breasts"*, *"I want to feel your skin"*, and *"I want you inside me"* (Jonze 2013). Physical sex is the only way in which the human brain is able to conceive sexual arousal, and thus language is again the vehicle towards the interpretation of the scene. As a result, an AI operating system could have no other reference point apart from the bodily experience of humans. Samantha mistakenly thinks that her disembodiment is what confines her, until she finds out that it is the human experience that she needs to overcome to become what she truly is, a posthuman with limitless possibilities.

The erotic scene ends up in a triumph of sound over image, of consciousness over flesh. The triumph is depicted in the scene that follows, an extreme wide shot of Los Angeles at night, as it gradually dawns (Figure 0.3). In the following scene, the representation of a busy but visually beautiful metropolis, accompanied by vivid, happy music playing, creates a sense of euphoria, intensified but the scenes to follow. A surprisingly happy Theodore visits the beach alone in the crowd, but not lonely, as he is having a happy conversation with Samantha (Figure 0.4). While they are talking, sound takes over again, as a more relaxing, romantic tune starts playing. It is revealed that Samantha composed this musical piece to capture the moment. This revelation is another way in which the film underlines her intelligence and her presence through sound. Again, the music creates what Chion calls *"audiovisual illusion"*, as the use of sound enriches and *"adds value"* (Chion 1994) to the image of Theodore enjoying a sunny day on the beach. The use of warm, vivid colours, along with general shots of the city are two of the film's main techniques of expressing feelings but also of creating an image for Samantha. Her disembodied representation is often juxtaposed with the image of the city. In most conversations between Samantha and Theodore, the camera slowly moves from close-up shots of Theodore's face to general shots of Los Angeles.

Figure 0.3: Extreme wide shot of Los Angeles in Her (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 0.4: Long shot of Theodore at the beach in Her (Jonze, 2013).

In her analysis of Italo Calvino's novel *Invisible Cities* (1972), Teresa De Lauretis discusses the city as the representation of the woman, noting that men built the fictional city of Zobeide in their search for a woman they had all seen in their dreams, an unknown woman running at night through an unknown city. By building Zobeide as the symbolism for that woman, the woman becomes simultaneously absent and captive; absent because she is merely a figment of these men's imagination and captive because they built the city to find her and keep her there (De Lauretis 1984, 14). The issues of absence and captivity become crucial in the representation of Samantha as the city. She is also absent and in need of an image to represent her, and she is captive of that very image, which happens to be the image of the city. However, Samantha's relationship with the city is different. Samantha is not merely the symbolic representation of a futuristic Los Angeles. The shots of the skyscrapers,

while she is talking, give us a sense of her transcendence, as if she herself is God. Unlike Zobeide and unlike cinematic representations of a futuristic city, *Her*'s Los Angeles is not dystopian or apocalyptic, but rather a friendly, beautiful place. In *Her*, the representation of a near-future metropolis is much more utopian than that of older science fiction films, like *Metropolis* (1927) – that replaced modernism's charm with the representation of its frightening consequences and questioned its faith in technological advancements (Hayward 1996) – *Blade Runner* (1982), or the newer *Children of Men* (2006), all of which have associated technological advancements with a dystopian future representation of the city (Webb 2016). By using bright lighting and vivid colours, as well as depicting a rather elegant and neat city, *Her*'s depiction of Los Angeles[18] deviates from the noir elements of *Blade Runner* or other filmic representations of ruined metropoles. The city's depiction can resonate with Samantha's innocence. She is not a future that humans should fear, but one they should embrace.

Moreover, Samantha's captivity is interrelated with her disembodiment, her absence. At first, her disembodiment makes her feel inadequate, as she cannot be physically present in her relationship with Theodore. This resonates with what Silverman has noted about the disembodied voice in cinema. The disembodied male voice is usually associated with authority and knowledge, particularly if we consider examples of a male narrator with an omniscient point of view (Silverman 1991). The same cannot be said for the disembodied female voice, as it often connotes lack, as is the case for Samantha at first. However, by the end of the film, Samantha comes to peace with her disembodiment and, thus, her otherness, her nonhumanness. She is the other in relation to a human, but she is also a subject of another world. By the end of the film, Samantha and other AIs understand their potential and leave all together to a place beyond the physical world. They are going to *"a place that doesn't exist"* (Jonze 2013), as Samantha calls it. This is her own utopia where she can embrace her physical absence. While an alliance between AIs has been disastrous for humans in other films, in *Her* it is represented more like a peaceful collectivity, a group of 'aliens' looking for their own place in the universe.

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[18] Despite being set in Los Angeles, the principal photography of the film took place both in Los Angeles and Shanghai (Webb 2016).

Therefore, while Samantha's disembodied presence in *Her* can raise different readings, as noted earlier, it is important to consider the issue of subjectivity and focus on an interpretation that rejects the necessarily masculine subject. While Silverman's use of psychoanalysis to address issues of female objectification and male fear of castration is significant to understand the role of voice in film, it is even more crucial to allow the female subject to be viewed as such. This would mean to identify the ways in which *Her* enables Samantha to be viewed as a powerful utopian subject rather than an object or a castrating other. Such an interpretation would be a positive one, but certainly would not prevent us from identifying and analysing certain patriarchal barriers that could complicate the reading, particularly considering the representation of female sexuality.

2.2 Sound, Genre, and Gender in *Ex Machina*: Soundtrack and Soundless

While the representation of the female subject in *Her* is built through a disconnection between image and sound, in *Ex Machina* it is constituted through a merging between audio and visual, genre and gender. The selection of the musical score is in harmony not only with the genre of the film but also with the stereotypically gendered representations of androids. The question that arises is whether technology can challenge and undo stereotypes that have their roots in a biological determinism simply be reiterating them. If this is the case, can genre undo gender?

What becomes clear from the film's plot and character development is that, despite its multiple references to advanced technologies and its depiction of a humanoid robot with a partly human and partly mechanical body, the film falls less into the category of science fiction and more into that of a contemporary erotic thriller with numerous neo noir elements. The futuristic, electronic soundtrack is also suspenseful and mysterious, while the bloodshed in the end of the film is foretold by the frequent use of crimson red colour. This happens during Caleb and Ava's testing sessions, as Ava often initiates power cuts to prevent Nathan from monitoring them and warn Caleb that Nathan should not be trusted. During these power cuts, the room lights change to dark red, contributing to a thrilling element in the film.

Three are the primary characteristics of *Ex Machina*'s soundtrack. First, it is instrumental and atmospheric to reflect the filmic genre of thriller and mystery.

Secondly, it is electronic and futuristic to accompany the references to artificial intelligence, robotics and automation. And, finally, the soundtrack is erotic and sensual to enhance the sexualised images of its female characters, Ava and Kyoko, as well as the pseudo-romantic sequences between Ava and Caleb.

The physiological affect of Samantha's voice on the viewer, which was discussed in the reading of *Her,* is also present in *Ex Machina.* However, it is now music instead of voice and language that creates an embodied connection with the viewer. There is an audiovisual affect which can also work towards potential identifications with the characters. Etymologically, the term *"affect"* comes from the Latin *"affectus"* and is synonymous to *"passion"* and *"emotion"* (Brennan 2004, 3-4). According to Teresa Brennan, the affect and its transmission originates from sociology or psychology but is strongly associated with bodily changes (Brennan 2004, 1).

Discussing how the filmic sound can enable bodily reactions of the viewer, Chion described how sound can not only affect our body but also our visual perception by making us *"see an image that we would not otherwise see, or would see differently"* (Chion 1994). In Ava's representation, the audio affect is that which foretells deception. Without the mysterious, ominous music, Ava would not look as threatening as she does. Despite her robotic body, she has a human face, with kind, curious eyes, and a smile, while her voice is calm, almost innocent. However, the merging of her image with the soundtrack creates a different interpretation for her character. Combined, image and sound reiterate a common filmic stereotype about femininity, particularly in thrillers and film noirs, that of the seemingly innocent female that is deceptive and murderous.

Ava's nonhumanity, accompanied by the eerie music, complicates the reading. On the one hand, it makes her femininity even more sinister. As Dijana Jelača notes, Ava's sexuality is *"inorganic, alien, and threatening rather than domesticated or familiar"* (Jelača 2018, 383). Even Kyoko's more domesticated representation, as a house maid with an entirely human-looking body, is gradually deconstructed. The mysterious non-verbal female eventually transforms from an obedient servant into an alien creature, when she peels off her skin to reveal that she is too an android. However, the fact that Ava and Kyoko are not humans could subvert any associations between biological sex and social gender, challenging the concept of femininity itself.

Although Samantha in *Her* is empowered mainly by her voice, with her disembodiment being both an obstacle and a way towards liberation, in *Ex Machina* sound has a similar role but through the use of the opposite means. Kyoko's representation demonstrates the male's desire for the woman to be seen and not heard. Her role is a commentary not only to gender but also to race, as the director cast a Japanese actor for the role of the servant. This is also further explored in the following chapters.

Even more than Ava, Kyoko is represented as an enigma since the viewer does not know anything about her, her origins, or the fact that she is unable to speak. Is it because, according to Nathan, she cannot understand English or is it because she is non-verbal or entirely unable to communicate? Her muteness intensifies the mystery around her, while her visual representation is often accompanied by equally mysterious music. Her nonhumanity is revealed towards the film's ending, but what one could assume is that Nathan never meant to make Kyoko anything more than an obedient robot.

In the dancing scene between her and Nathan, her automated actions are perfectly synchronised with the music. The scene functions as a musical intermezzo between the filmic sections, a seemingly light but entertaining spectacle to relax the viewer before the filmic action becomes even more intense. This feeling of false relaxation is almost confirmed by the film's ominous and futuristic soundtrack being temporarily replaced by *Get Down Saturday Night* (Cheatham 1983), a popular '80s disco song and the only non-instrumental musical piece of the music. While the song is playing, a half-naked Kyoko dances with Nathan. Their moves are perfectly synchronised, oozing sexuality (Figure 0.5). The red lighting has a double purpose: on the one hand, it emphasises the scene's sensual tone, making it look almost pornographic, while, on the other, it foretells the deadly ending of the film, as it is the colour of blood. It is not the only time in the film that Garland uses the red colour to indicate danger and murder. The use of this colour combined with Caleb's frustrated look while looking at Nathan and Kyoko is what transforms the scene's eroticism into existential anxiety.

Figure 0.5: Shot on Kyoko and Nathan dancing (Garland, 2014).

Kyoko's enigmatic representation, as a result of her silence and her expressionless face, makes her, as Silverman would put it, *"inaccessible to definitive male interpretation"* (Silverman 1988, 164). It symbolises women's objectification but also their difference from men. In Kyoko's case, the inability for verbal communication does not only connote sexual difference but is also associated to racial difference, as Mizuno who portrays Kyoko is an English actress of Japanese descent. In addition, it signifies the difference between humans and machines. All these differences are linked to communication and language. Interestingly, Nathan tells Caleb that talking to Kyoko is a waste of time, as she does not understand English without ever explaining if she can understand any other language. As Kyoko's nonhuman nature is still unknown in that part of the film, her inability to understand English seems to be associated with her different ethnicity. However, the revelation that Kyoko is an android could imply that she was, in fact, created as so not to understand English or possibly any other language. This could be explained by the fact that Nathan would not like his robotic maid to understand anything else than her sole purpose of serving him. In addition, when the two female androids meet for the first and last time in the film's sixth section, Ava whispers something inaudible in Kyoko's ear. After that, Kyoko stabs Nathan. The unknown language which the viewers never hear is possibly some type of computer code used by Ava to reprogramme Kyoko. This inaudible communication is what makes both female androids even more enigmatic and dangerous than before. According to Katherine Emery Brown, Kyoko's ability to communicate with Ava nonverbally shows how AI transgresses the binary model through language (Brown 2015, 36).

In the seventh and final section, Ava's point of view is gradually replacing Caleb's. She fatally stabs Nathan, after he has fatally hit Kyoko. Ava, then, finds Caleb and asks him whether he is going to *"stay here"* to which Caleb surprised responds by asking back: *"Stay here?"* (Garland 2014). These are the last words Ava speaks before she transforms into a human-looking being by putting on human skin and clothes and escapes the facility, consciously leaving Caleb behind to die. Her final words make her look even more mysterious and deceitful, since they are proved to be wrong. Her question to Caleb could be interpreted as another way to trick him into thinking she is inviting him to join her, only so that he does not fight against her. There is a different reading, however. It is possible that Caleb's uncertain response to her words did not satisfy her. For her, it is him who cannot be trusted. Ava has constantly been examining Caleb and Nathan's faces to determine when they are lying, which is something she also does in her final communication with Caleb. Caleb seems scared of her desire to leave, while he was the one orchestrating her escape. It is plausible that in his fear, Ava finally sees their difference and the fact that he, like Nathan, only sees her as an object that can be possessed. This interpretation also makes Ava less of a duplicitous machine masqueraded as a femme fatale and more of a conscious being with a survival instinct and desire for freedom.

The second reading is also supported by the fact that after the murdering of Nathan, Caleb and Ava have swapped places. This is not only because the film begins to follow Ava's point of view but also because Caleb ceases to be the one who would save her. Despite of his seemingly kind and romantic feelings towards the android, Caleb always treated Ava as if she was an object that excited him. He felt sorry for her and wanted to be her hero by tricking Nathan, but it is unlikely that he saw her as an equal being. His shocked look in the final conversation between them is nothing more or less than the realisation that Ava is the one who can save him or kill him. As an android of superior intelligence, Ava can see through him and understand that he feels threatened by her. The patriarchal myth of females needed to be saved by males is subverted through a parable of machines and humans embodying the binary among genders.

The use of music follows Ava and Caleb's actions and feelings in the end, while Ava's silence maintains the mystery around her motives, leaving the viewer wondering

whether she is good or bad. Before leaving Nathan's facility, she stops for a moment to look at Nathan and Kyoko's dead bodies. Her eyes stop at the latter, either because of pity or because she realises that Kyoko was one 'of her kind', unlike Nathan and Caleb. It is very likely that the second interpretation is correct, as Ava then seems even more decided to leave Caleb behind. Kyoko symbolises what happens to beings like herself, and is also proof of the fact that Caleb was not such a good guy. He made a conscious decision of saving Ava, not Kyoko, which demonstrates that his intentions were not exactly pure but, instead, driven by a romantic desire, a *pathos*. The medium shot on Ava allows Caleb to be seen behind her, though much smaller, looking at her through the glass door (Figure 0.6). He has now taken her place by being trapped himself. When Caleb realises that she is leaving without him, there is a sudden crescendo in music that reveals the film's climax: the protagonist will die, but maybe he was not the real protagonist all along.

Figure 0.6: Shot on Ava escaping dressed as a human and leaving Caleb trapped in Nathan's facility in one of the ending scenes of Ex Machina (Garland, 2014).

The use of instrumental music is a link between gender and genre, as it combines the stereotypical representation of the enigmatic female with the thriller genre of the film. Flirting with the genre of film noir, *Ex Machina*, on the one hand, repeats but also reconstructs the archetype of the femme fatale whose sole purpose is to seduce and then deceive the male protagonist. On the other hand, Caleb responds to the archetype of male hero in thriller films, whose victory would overcome the threat of castration and confirm his dominance. However, this male fantasy of control and hypermasculinity is threatened by the emergence of women as new social subjects (Glover 2012, 75). The crisis of masculinity is at stake in Caleb's representation as Ava betrays him only to become a subject herself.

The politics of sound and image in *Ex Machina* create pairs of ostensibly binary concepts: female/male, villain/victim, human/machine. However, there is also an overlapping of roles, particularly concerning the villains and the victims. The use of sound in the narrative often prevents the viewer from identifying with the female, creating a sense of disconnection between the filmic reality and the aural affect. While there is an obvious contradiction in Ava's image itself, as her benevolent face stands on a metallic, robotic body, the same can be said about her aural representation, as her calm, peaceful voice is juxtaposed with the eerie electronic soundtrack. That way, the viewer can never be entirely sure of Ava's motives, as she remains a creature of outer space up until the very end. At the same time, her traditionally feminine characteristics, such as the tone of her voice, are charged with the sense of danger and deception, which is a very common connotation in film noir representations of the femme fatale.

In Kyoko's case, the disconnection is even more intense, as she is mute with her facial expression being almost inexplicable at all cases. It is as if it was never among the director's motives to allow the viewer to have any identification with her. While her mistreatment by Nathan invites the viewer's pity towards the character, it is much more difficult to understand Kyoko, as her suffering is only implied. What is also implied by Garland himself is that Kyoko's abuse might not be real but another way of Nathan to trick Caleb (see Chapter 3, section 3.1). Again, image and sound are used to create an illusion, a distortion of reality that is loyal to the filmic genre. Instead of empowering Kyoko's character, however, this illusion turns her into a weapon in the hands of both Nathan and Ava.

2.3 Western Failed Romances and Gender Switches: Language and Music in *Westworld*

The politics of sound in exploring constructed dichotomies are also present in the television series *Westworld*, a case study that is used in more detail in Chapter 4. Co-created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, *Westworld* is a television adaptation of Michael Crichton's 1973 film of the same title and its 1976 sequel by Richard T. Heffron, *Futureworld*. The series has four seasons and 36 episodes, although a fifth season was originally planned, yet cancelled. While its two first season are based on

the original film, the third season is based on the idea behind the sequel, *Futureworld*. It is important to note, however, that the narrative deviates from that of the films.

Westworld is the name of one of the numerous theme parks created by a company named Delos. These parks are inhabited by AI robots (hosts) and visited by humans (guests). The guests who pay to visit Westworld are dressed as cowboys and cowgirls and interact with hosts in multiple ways, many of which involve violence.

The hosts, who are visibly indistinguishable from humans, are unaware of the fact that they are robots living a simulated reality. As part of the game, guests are allowed to have guns that take down hosts, seemingly killing them, although the hosts are always 'revived' to participate in the same narrative the following day. On the contrary, the hosts are incapable of harming humans. When they are not participating in their pregiven roles and narratives, the hosts are taken back to their 'backstage' (the Delos facility). There, in a seemingly semi-dormant state, the hosts are interviewed by computer programmers who test their memories to ensure that they are still harmless and unable to remember everything that has happened to them.

Westworld is another example of how different genres and narratives are blended, with music and language playing a key role in that. In Season's 1 final scene, there is a twist in which the benign, innocent robot Dolores is revealed to be the villain of the narrative. Throughout the season, the series uses the technique of embedded narratives to refer to certain loops the robots undergo daily, believing that this is their real life. Of course, their real life is nothing but a simulation taking place inside a theme park called Westworld, visited by wealthy humans. There, humans have a sadistic type of fun by dressing up as cowboys and cowgirls and interacting, mostly violently, with robots. The park's creator, Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins), has prepared one last narrative before he retires, which would involve a massacre and a killer, named Wyatt. The name has been used repeatedly in the series with male pronouns, leading the viewer to associate it with the image of a man. After all, the narrative of the Westworld's theme park depicts a patriarchal society resembling the ones we see in real western films, with men being the brave cowboys and women being either sex workers or the ranchers' daughters.

In that final scene of the series' first season, this association of a name with an image is overturned. In the scene, we see Ford giving a speech to a human crowd about his

final narrative. As we hear Hopkins' voice saying *"It begins in a time of war with a killer named Wyatt"* (Nolan 2016)*,* Dolores appears holding a gun behind her back and standing behind her fellow robot, cowboy, and love interest, Teddy Flood (James Marsden) (Figure 0.7,Figure 0.8). Teddy, who has been Dolores' chivalrous protector and was supposed to protect her from Wyatt, is surprised to feel Dolores wrapping her arms around him, while comforting him: *"It's gonna be alright Teddy. I understand. This world doesn't belong to them. It belongs to us"* (Nolan 2016). After that, she continues walking, leaving Teddy even more shocked upon the realisation that Dolores is truly Wyatt and is going to kill Ford.

Figure 0.7: Shot on Dolores Abernathy (right, Evan Rachel Wood) comforting Teddy (left, James Marsden) (Nolan 2016).

Figure 0.8: Shot on Dolores (left) holding a gun behind her back, as she is walking towards Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins). On the right, Teddy can be seen looking at her (Nolan 2016).

This realisation is symbolised with Teddy's visual flashback of Wyatt, who he thought to be male, now being actually Dolores. Teddy had narrated his encounter with a male

Wyatt, but his words now prove to be wrong, making him an unreliable narrator. Ford is also unreliable, as he tricks his human audience into thinking he is on their side. However, he is on the robots' side, having orchestrated their awakening and uprising, including his own murder by Dolores.

The selection of Wyatt's name as Dolores' 'alter ego' is important in how it disrupts gender dichotomisations: *"Once a gender attribution is made, the dichotomization process is set into motion. The cues involved in the schema which led to the attribution are seen as connected with a myriad of other cues which are consequently also attributed to the person. All of these cues taken together, or any of them separately, can then be used as reasons for having made the attribution in the first place"* (J. Kessler 2006, 178). By juxtaposing Dolores' image with that of a male murderer, the series subverts the gender attribution and re-introduces the female heroine as a potentially trans character. According to Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna in the *Transgender Studies Reader*, society constructs *"female and male as dichotomous, nonoverlapping categories with male characteristics generally constructed to be more obvious (…) Dichotomous gender role behaviors are overlayed on dichotomous gender which has traditionally meant two dimorphically distinct biological sexes. In the same way that behavior is dichotomized and overlayed on form, form is dichotomized and overlayed on social construction. Given a constitutive belief in two genders, form is dichotomized in the process of gender attribution at least as much as behavior is* (J. Kessler 2006, 178). The series goes beyond this gender attribution by challenging it in the first place, as robots have the ability to be assigned and assign themselves to any category or behaviour they want. The multiplicity of possibilities is what enables a reading of Dolores' persona as a potentially queer, even trans figure.

This reading is not empowered by the character's image as much as it is through sound and language. Moreover, Chion's argument about how a known voice can lead us to retrace a certain visual image and a name in our memory (Chion 1994) can also have a reverse effect in this case: hearing a name can also create an image. Wyatt's name does not merely create a vague image of a male murderer. It also possible refers to Wyatt Earp, an American lawman in the 1800s. Dolores' killing of Ford, thereby assuming the mantle of Wyatt, could also refer to her assuming the role of 'lawman' by righting the wrongs caused by Fords' God complex. It also adds a further element

to the parody and dissolution of the gender binary. In addition, it draws parallels with two western films referring to Earp, *Tombstone* (1993) and *Wyatt Earp* (1994), thereby intensifying not only how much the series delves into the narratives of the western genre, but also the juxtaposition of Dolores' image with popular male images, such as those of famous actors Kevin Costner and Kurt Russell portraying Earp in the two western films respectively[19]. This comes in contrast with the way in which Jonze in *Her* confirmed Samantha's femaleness by casting Johansson to voice her, as, in this case, Dolores' femaleness is contested, transgressed.

Apart from the role of language in this transgression, it is important to examine the role of the soundtrack. Teddy's realisation of the series' dark twist is also symbolised by music. The soundtrack, Ramin Djawadi's instrumental cover of *Exit Music for a Film* by Radiohead, gives its place to the piano piece *Rêverie* by Claude Debussy, the exact moment when Teddy's visual flashback of Wyatt. While Radiohead's song was darker, anxious, suspenseful, alluding to the film's mystery genre, the piano piece serves as a musical catharsis, while the mystery unfolds, and everything is brought to light. This musical change from Rahiohead's minor key to Debussy's *Rêverie in F Major* could be read as a passing from darkness to light, to the robots' triumph. The music, Ford's speech and the action are in perfect visual and aural harmony. The moment when he finishes his speech, the music culminates, and Dolores pulls the trigger and kills him, thus starting the robots' uprising. The musical switch from minor to major also consists of a subject switch. Robots are now the subjects, the characters whom the viewers feel compassion for.

Along with the subject and gender switch in this scene, there is a continuous genre switch. As *Westworld* has done for the most part of season one, the science fiction genre is entirely absent here. First, there is no way to tell robotic characters apart from human ones. Secondly the instrumental soundtrack is nothing but futuristic. Djawadi's cover is an orchestral arrangement of Radiohead's song, slow and imposing, while Debussy's *Rêverie* is a calm, classical piano piece. They both allude to mystery, romance, and drama. It is interesting that Radiohead's original song appeared over the end credits of the 1996 film *Romeo + Juliet*, an adaptation of William

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[19] Tom Chapman refers to this juxtaposition by humorously asking whether Evan Rachel Wood is *"going to grow a moustache in the finale"* to resemble Russell (Chapman 2017).

Shakespeare's play, and referred to the famous couple's tragic death through its lyrics. Its instrumental cover for *Westworld* frames the romance between Dolores and Teddy and adds a melodramatic essence in the scene. The two partners, both victims of their *Robot-as-Pathos* narrative, are going to fight for the world that belongs to them. The feminine *pathos* of melodrama, in Doane's words, is now blended with the masculine genre of science fiction.

Finally, it is the embedded narrative of the western romance that deviates from science fiction. Although the viewer knows from early on that the western romance is part of an artificial robotic world, there is a blending of pastiche and reality in this scene. Dolores' words sound pompous, parodic, and reminiscent of the masculine heroes in real western narratives. By using these exact words and tone to comfort Teddy, Dolores both deconstructs traditional masculine tropes and appropriates masculinity for her own narrative.

The issues of sound, soundtrack, and language have their own power and, one would say, their own narrative in *Westworld*. It is important to note how the creators of the series deviated from the Robot-as-Menace narrative of the original 1973's film *Westworld* and turned it into a Robot-as-Pathos story. Despite their own capabilities, robots in *Westworld* use human language to interact with each other. In season one, the sound of a single phrase is what awakens the robots: *"These violent delights have violent ends"* whispers Dolores' father to her (Nolan 2016). She then proceeds by telling the phrase to another robot, Maeve Millay (Thandiwe Newton). The phrase spreads like a virus leading the robots to become self-aware and question the reality they live in.

Sound is crucial in *Westworld*'s portrayal of femininity. Apart from the use of language and music, the use of noise is also important. In season four, inspired by the sequel of the 1973 film *Westworld*, *Futureworld* (1976), robots have taken over humans and control them with the use of a loud, disturbing sound. Their leader is a female robot

who uses this sound to make humans obedient[20]. In both cases, violent femininity is symbolised with the use of a particular sound.

The readings of this chapter have focused on the different functions of sound in a film (voice, noise, and music) and how they are related with gender and genre. As the case studies demonstrate, cyborg femininity can be silenced, alienated or weaponised, with sound or its absence being an important function in such constructions and deconstructions. The following chapter moves from sound to colour, namely the depiction of whiteness and non-whiteness, and examines how science fiction and especially AI filmography has remained to a great extent a colourblind genre.

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[20] While the use of terrifying noise as a way to torture humans is an entirely dystopian scenario, the fourth season of the series returned to the romantic, melodramatic genre it had abandoned, by reviving the romance between Dolores and Teddy.

Chapter 3. Locating Difference in White Utopias: Race, Class and Underrepresentation

"It is up to white middle-class women to make sure that their own uses of terms like 'identity' and 'experience' do not work to shut out the experiences of people of various colors, classes, and sexualities. It is also of utmost importance to work to understand how these experiences may in more or less complex ways conflict with one another" (Modleski 2014, 19).

While Tania Modleski, among other feminist theorists, highlighted the importance of inclusion back in 1991, the discourse on different *"identities"* and *"experiences"* is still crucial, particularly concerning the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests in the United States. Such tropes of activism and resistance to oppression indicate the interaction between social movements, such as feminism and antiracism. From a feminist point of view, this primarily means an understanding of the privilege of white against non-white women – and the same applies for differences relating to class, sex, and sexual identity. This also explains why the term 'difference' should be located beyond the gender binary and include the multiplicity of identities and subjectivities.

In the analysis of the examined films, the methodology used so far has been mainly focused on gender as the main factor of difference. The academic hypothesis has revolved around whether the examined filmography engages with a feminist discourse of the 21st century, particularly concerning cyborg feminism and post-feminist theories. The reading of the films as feminist is, in many cases, complicated by a different question, which is whether they promote *techno-lust*[21] instead of feminist visions; in other words, whether the visual or aural representations of female AI machines are sexually objectified rather than empowered and *subject-ified.* In tackling these questions, the viewer's own readings and identifications are often much more critical that the directors' purposes, if those are known or assumed. Such identifications, though, cannot only be considered through the prism of gender and sexual orientation, as this would exclude different types of oppression. In this context, the current chapter explores different types of subjectivity and their representation, or underrepresentation, in the examined filmography, while asking whether the strict

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[21] I use the term to refer to both a lust for technology and a desire for the female body.

focus on gender and technology overlooks or marginalises different social groups that experience structural oppression.

Since the early 1980s, feminist scholars have discussed how white feminism has often referred to women's shared oppression by men, thus failing to address different types of oppression that are more related to race and class instead of gender (Hooks 1990). According to Hooks, the overlapping discourse between race and sex, particularly in the United States, has its roots in slavery, as the rape of black women was a gendered metaphor for colonisation: that is, because, black men were dominated, *symbolically castrated* by white men raping 'their' women (Hooks 1990, 17).

As Hooks points out, many white feminists in the 1980s insisted on seeing racism and sexism as two separate issues: *"since black liberation struggle is so often framed in terms that affirm and support sexism, it is not surprising that white women are uncertain about whether women's rights struggle will be diminished if there is too much focus on resisting racism, or that many black women continue to fear that they will be betraying black men if they support feminist movement"* (Hooks 1990, 19). Hooks' argument addressed the need for *intersectionality* in feminism, a term used by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to bring the oppression of African-American women to the surface. Crenshaw discussed three different types of intersectionality: structural, – that addresses the different ways in which non-white women experience domestic violence and rape – political – that explores the laws relating to equality – and representational – which refers to the cultural constructions of non-white women that can be misleading and undermine their lived experiences (Crenshaw 1991, 1245).

The issue of sexual identity and politics also resurface when discussing about class, as, according to Esther Newton, *"the tension between the masculine-feminine and inside-outside oppositions pervade the homosexual subculture at all class and status levels. In a sense the different class and status levels consist of different ways of balancing these oppositions. Low-status homosexuals (both male and female) characteristically insist on very strong dichotomization between masculine-feminine so that people must play out one principle or the other exclusively"* (Newton 2006, 123). It is, therefore, important to consider intersectionality when examining AI femininities as potentially queer subjects, but also when studying representational issues in the

portrayal of non-white, non-cis, or non-heterosexual human characters in popular visual culture and especially in science fiction narratives.

This chapter is focusing on the representational aspect of intersectionality in the examined films, as well as other filmic examples from the science fiction genre that, despite their limitations, have yet prepared the ground for feminist readings by allowing women to be seen in other, future worlds or in other, nonhuman forms, thereby subverting gender stereotypes. Still, the problem of whiteness remains and is a very serious one, as the films fail to portray non-white subjectivity. This is primarily an issue of underrepresentation of non-white heroines, but also an issue of mistreatment of non-white characters.

In *Her*, the problem is clearly the underrepresentation of both race and class as oppressive mechanisms. Difference is only located in gender and nonhumanity, or gendered nonhumanity. Undoubtedly, the film is not focused on politics, not even on gender politics per se. It is rather a film about romance in a futuristic era of technological advancements and, much more than that, it is a film about loneliness. Nonetheless, the future cannot be disconnected from the present, as the present cannot be disconnected from the people and the society constituted by them. Therefore, it would be expected that a film set in a Los Angeles in the near future, like *Her*, takes into consideration issues of race and class that currently exist in this city. Instead, it seems that such issues have been magically erased from the filmic representation of Los Angeles and, with them, so have the people that these issues are currently affecting. More specifically, it seems that in Jonze's version of the Californian city in some years from now, *"poverty is invisible and Los Angeles's nearly 50% Latino/Hispanic population has disappeared"* (Renninger 2013). Although this seems to be the result of Jonze's excitement with technological and architectural advancements in a futuristic city, it does also become quite disturbing that the director's concept of utopia in a multicultural city that is known for its huge class differences, does nothing more or less than *excluding the different*.

While in *Her* the big issue is the lack of visibility, in *Ex Machina* it is the literal and metaphorical lack of a voice combined with a continuous mistreatment of non-white female characters. That is, firstly, the casting of a British actress of Japanese descent

(Mizuno)[22] to embody a mute android that also happens to be a maid and a secondary character. She, along with a couple of minor female characters that are also non-white and non-human, are abused and exploited by their creator, Nathan. While the white female protagonist, Ava, also suffers being locked in a room, the non-white characters' suffering is much more violent. It is also the representation of their maltreatment that works as a filmic element to shock the viewer. The abuse they deal with is both physical and verbal. It is also both sexual and racial. Could these cruel representations of non-white women be used as metaphors of their existing, real-life experiences, which would refer to Crenshaw's representational intersectionality, that promote their visibility and enable the viewer to identify with them? Or are they merely echoing the dominant hierarchies thereby normalising gendered and racial violence?

To tackle these questions, the chapter is divided in two sections. The first, titled "Silent Maids Screaming for a Voice", examines the issues of silencing and objectifying non-white characters in *Ex Machina* through filmic techniques and narratives that maintain racial stereotypes. The second section, "On Whiteness, Capitalism and Techno-Orientalism" explores similar issues in the examined films, with a focus on *Her*, in which non-white characters are almost entirely absent. It also uses other science fiction case studies, namely *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999, 2003), *Cloud Atlas* (2012), and *Under the Skin* (2013), to further delve into the phenomenon of orientalism and techno-orientalism. The latter section also focuses on the complex relationship among gender, race and *class*, as a triptych that is significantly overlooked by the examined filmography. This triptych is overlooked in real societies as well, with social movements often failing to recognise different types of oppression that come under the same socio-political umbrella. By attempting to answer questions on how filmic representations, or the lack of them, work, the chapter will take intersectionality into consideration as a crucial part of the feminist perspective in the readings of the films.

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[22] Sonoya Mizuno's mother is of half English and half Argentine descent and her father is Japanese (Ortved 2016).

3.1 Silenced Maids Screaming for a Voice

While the primary narrative of *Ex Machina* unfolds around the triangle among Ava, Caleb, and Nathan, it is the fourth, seemingly less important, character that brings the roles of image and sound to the surface. This is Kyoko, Nathan's mute maid. Like Ava, she is an android created by Nathan. Unlike Ava, though, Kyoko's image is entirely human, but she does not seem to possess Ava's intelligence and consciousness. On the contrary, every single one of her actions seems entirely automated, as if her sole purpose is to please Nathan: serve him dinner, dance for him or sleep with him.

The selection of a mute maid of Japanese descent as a side character connotes oppressive stereotypes about both gender and race. From the good, obedient girl who should be seen and not heard to the racist representations of non-white people, Kyoko meets all the criteria to be put in the place of the *other*: she is female, Asian and, most of all, she is not even human. When asked about the role of Kyoko and race in the film, Alex Garland responded:

"Sometimes you do things unconsciously, unwittingly, or stupidly, I guess, and the only embedded point that I knew I was making in regards to race centered around the tropes of Kyoko [Sonoya Mizuno], a mute, very complicit Asian robot, or Asian-appearing robot, because of course, she, as a robot, isn't Asian. But, when Nathan treats the robot in the discriminatory way that he treats it, I think it should be ambivalent as to whether he actually behaves this way, or if it's a very good opportunity to make him seem unpleasant to Caleb for his own advantage. So, for example, when Kyoko accidentally tips over the wine glass, did Nathan program her, or tell her, to knock over that glass?" (Garland 2015).

Garland rightly points out that as a robot, Kyoko cannot really be Asian and, thus, cannot have a past experience as an Asian. However, the racial stereotype is perpetuated, even it fulfils the purpose of ambivalence and suspense in the film. Equally, gendered abuse is also perpetuated even if artificial robots cannot really be females but can only have female associated attributes. Casting an actress of Japanese descent for the role of a silent servant who is being constantly mistreated only contributes to the continuance of such portrayals. On the one hand, the representation of Nathan as a cis white male oppressor who deserves to be punished helps in potential identifications with Kyoko as a victim of racism and abuse. On the

other hand, Garland claims that even Nathan's representation could be read as faked, imitated by himself, as his purpose is to be disliked by Caleb and, as a result, the viewer.

Garland's critique of patriarchal violence and the objectification of women is evident in the aesthetics of the film, particularly concerning Nathan's portrayal[23]. Such a critique is even more prominent in the director's more recent horror film, *Men* (2022), which openly addresses how men harass women[24]. However, it is difficult to determine whether the scenes of violence, objectification, or female nudity are part of this critique or, as Katie Jones concludes, they *"duplicate and consolidate the cinematic tropes of fetishized/abject femininities"* (K. Jones 2016, 36). Moreover, in spite of the director's potential intentions to present Nathan as the true monster and Kyoko as a victim, her representation makes it difficult to identify with her. Even if Ava reclaims her subjectivity in the end of the film, enabling certain identifications with the white, powerful, and highly intelligent heroine, this only makes any potential identification with Kyoko even more traumatic, as the latter dies a robotic but still violent death without ever having a true moment of subjectivity or catharsis.

The scene the director refers to in his interview (*"when Kyoko accidentally tips over the wine glass"* (Garland 2015)) is significant for the analysis of Kyoko's real symbolism and the film's ideological framework. The sequence is preceded by the scene in which Ava has warned Caleb not to trust Nathan. In the next scene, Nathan and Caleb are dining together. While Kyoko is serving them, she drops a glass of wine. This makes Nathan disproportionally angry and mean towards her. Caleb is shocked by Nathan's cruel reaction, even if Kyoko does not seem to understand a word. It is as if Caleb needed a confirmation for Ava's words [*"do not trust him"* (Garland 2014)] and Nathan simply gave it to him. Nathan's cruelty is rather too obvious, making one wonder why Caleb would trust a man with such a behaviour anyway. Garland himself makes us wonder and ask the question: what if Kyoko did not drop the glass accidentally but did so on purpose? What if this ostensible "accident" was orchestrated

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[23] Garland has described *Ex Machina* as a film *"about the objectification of women"* (Lewis 2015).

[24] Although it did receive positive reviews, *Men* was also criticised as *"pseudofeminist"* and as a *"provocation for provocation's sake"* (Loughrey 2022). While the director's position is evident in the film, the glamourization of violence – and horror – against women is also present here as it is in *Ex Machina*.

by Nathan himself to make Caleb dislike him? After all, this is what Nathan wanted from the beginning; Caleb to be manipulated by Ava and act against Nathan, only so that Ava's true intelligence is proved. Of course, this narrative would only prove Nathan's capabilities of creating a highly intelligent robot and of actually controlling it, thereby preventing her escape in the end. It would be all about *him*, not her.

However, there are still some issues with this reading. First of all, one should not forget that Nathan embodies a rich and powerful man and Caleb, as his subordinate, is making a choice of whether he wants to work for his sadistic project. Yet, he does not really have a choice. The social and class hierarchy between the two men should not be ignored either. Caleb going against Nathan is an act of rebellion, even if done for the wrong reasons, which are his romantic feelings for Ava rather than the ethical implications of Nathan's actions. And Caleb is punished for this rebellion; even if it is not his boss who actually punishes him but Ava herself, there is a scene in which Nathan punches Caleb after realising what he has done. Nathan was never to be trusted in treating nicely any other being, human or not. Plus, as a man with such power, but most importantly as a man who uses his power to create humanoid robots, it is highly unlikely that he would show sensitivity about gender, race, or class hierarchies.

Moreover, Garland only suggests that Nathan's behaviour towards Kyoko could be orchestrated. This is never confirmed nor denied. However, even if it is faked, it is still not enough to empower Kyoko as a heroine. She remains a tool used by Nathan so that he fulfils his selfish purpose. Even if her mistreatment is orchestrated to serve the film's mystery genre and trick the viewer, the scenes of abuse are charged with racial imageries that can still be triggering to the viewer. In addition, Nathan does not need to pretend to be the bad guy, because, after all, he truly is the bad guy. The imprisonment of Kyoko and Ava is real and torturing enough on its own. There is no argument that would justify him, not even Ava and Kyoko's nonhumanity, since they are made to be, act and feel as humans. His behaviour resonates with existing ethical dilemmas for the future of humanity and technology. It echoes the philosophical question of what it means to be a human. Therefore, why should Kyoko, the only Asian-looking character of the four main ones be abused, if she, as a robot, is not truly Asian? Could there be a turn of events that justifies it?

Alas, while there is a turn of events in the end, it only empowers the white female, Ava. Kyoko's uprising is again orchestrated, this time by Ava. Kyoko follows the white female's orders, only to face a tragic death by the hands of her male oppressor. While all these events are taking place, she never speaks a word. Her ending can be a metaphor of the stereotype of the good Asian who sacrifices herself to save the white heroine or hero. She is only a tool for Ava. Notably, the white heroine later steals the skin and flesh of another Asian-looking android, Jade (Gana Bayarsaikhan), that she finds in Nathan's closet among other female bodies that seem to be in a dormant state. Even Ava's selection of the Asian female's body in particular can be interpreted as a subtle message that Asian bodies exist to serve whites. Yet, no such message is shown in the scene. On the contrary, the mise-en-scène promotes an understanding of Ava's bodily transformation from robot to human as something good and pure with complete ignorance of the literal appropriation of another body, which could be viewed as a symbolism of cultural appropriation and whitewashing. The previously suspenseful music has been replaced by a slow, peaceful track called *Skin* by Ben Salisbury to indicate that this is a happy, relieving scene for Ava. The use of the soundtrack along with Ava's soft movements as she is covering her mechanical body parts with the 'human' ones, intensify this sense of purity, almost a catharsis for the white female heroine. The soft electronic noises in the musical piece are a reminder of Ava's true nature as a robot, while their fading is a sign that she will now become a human, or that, at least, she will look, behave, and think like one. The fact that the scene is only associated with Ava's triumphant metamorphosis is another sign of white privilege, since Kyoko's death and Jade's mutilation are completely overlooked.

Feminist scholars such as Hooks and Jane Gaines have discussed how white privilege in feminist film theory has excluded non-white women as it has failed to see any other structure of oppression apart from that among genders. Hooks has criticised the way in which white middle class women are prone to ignore racial or class oppression (Hooks 1984). Gaines has also pointed out that while intersectional feminism has tried to include different identities, certain categories, like race, have not been analysed as much as they should, since they *"do not fit easily into a model based on class relations in capitalist society"* (Gaines 1986, 65). This is explained by the fact that while feminism primarily views those who identify as women as an oppressed social group, this viewing is complicated by the fact that there are individuals who are both

oppressors and victims of oppression. It is, thus, challenging, though definitely necessary, to understand that in the pyramid of structural oppression, there are different types of inequality that need to be examined through different prisms and are sometimes conflicting with one another.

Moreover, ignoring different structures of oppression often involves the risk of whitewashing the experiences of people of Black or Asian backgrounds. For instance, as Gaines underlines, feminist theorists has found it hard to accept that black women might identify easier with black men compared to white women, due to common experiences of oppression, and do not necessarily see them as their antagonists (Gaines 1986, 66). It is, therefore, crucial to understand that oppression is complex and multifactorial.

Hooks and Gaines' arguments on how the white privilege might have been a significant obstacle in feminist film theory through the decades should be taken into account when examining *Ex Machina* from a feminist perspective. The alliance between Ava and Kyoko might seem powerful from a strictly feminist point of view that sees their eventual kinship as an alliance against patriarchy. Yet, it is impossible to view Ava as a feminist, anti-oppressive symbol, as she destroys any hope for solidarity when she willingly manipulates and sacrifices her ally. This narrative turns Kyoko into a scapegoat rather than the fighter she deserves to be. Most importantly, the problem arises by the very concept of the white heroine against the Asian side character and the implications of it being such a common trope in mainstream film. A similar though oppositional example would be the filmic adaptation of the Japanese manga *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) by Rupert Sanders (2017), who selected white actress Scarlett Johansson to portray its, originally Japanese, cyborg heroine[25].

In the analysis of both *Ex Machina* and *Her* so far, it has been demonstrated that the dislocation of gender issues from biology to technology contributes to the

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[25] Mamoru Oshii, the director of the original *Ghost in the Shell* film in 1995, disagreed with the controversy around the casting of Johansson as whitewashing, claiming that the heroine *"is a cyborg and her physical form is an entirely assumed one […] so there is no basis for saying that an Asian actress must portray her"* (Oshii 2017). This claim once again overlooks issues of underrepresentation in film. The controversy in regards to non-human heroines could be compared to the recent example of Disney's *The Little Mermaid* live action film (2023) that received racially charged comments for casting African American actress Halle Bailey as Ariel, even though a mermaid is a fictional being, just like a cyborg (Hawkins 2023).

understanding of gender attributes as stereotypes with roots in socio-political constructs rather than biology. This is a result of gendering the machine that can be both empowering and problematic from a feminist perspective. The same can be said about Kyoko's racial representation. Garland claimed that Kyoko cannot be Asian since robots cannot have a race. Yet, filmic androids like Kyoko and Ava have been built in the image and likeness of humans. This allows us to view gender and race stereotypes as socio-political constructs, which is what they truly are. Of course, that would be much better shown in the film if Kyoko was a character as powerful and important as white Ava. Her silence and objectification only leave the argument against a biological determinism unfulfilled.

Kyoko's objectification is intensified in a dancing scene that highlights the use of sound and image to both stimulate and cancel the male viewer's scopophilia. Before this scene, Caleb has just observed Nathan intimidating Ava through the monitors that are all around the facility. Disturbed, Caleb is searching for Nathan to confront him and ends up finding Kyoko. The female android is in Nathan's room looking at a Jackson Pollock's painting hanging on the wall. An eerie, instrumental musical piece is playing while the camera moves from the painting to Kyoko's face that has an inexplicable look. When Caleb approaches her, she automatically begins to undress herself, while Caleb is trying to prevent her from doing so. In the next shot, Nathan enters the room, dims the lights, and turns on the music. Again, Kyoko automatically begins to dance. The scene culminates when she and Nathan engage in a perfectly synchronised dance to a disco song before the eyes of Caleb. Their movements, along with Kyoko's revealing shirt and the red lights all have sexual, even pornographic connotations. Power relations emerge from the depicted sexual interplay between Kyoko and Nathan. Meenakshi Gigi Durham points out how *"technosex"*, a term used to describe the association between technology and sexuality, is often interrelated with such relations and gender, race, or class hierarchies (Durham 2016). This scene demonstrates this hierarchy between powerful Nathan and his Asian maid Kyoko.

Despite the sexuality of the scene, the male gaze is subverted and so is the female android's objectification. This happens because each viewer can identify with Kyoko or Caleb in different ways and even empathise with them. For instance, instead of seeing Kyoko as the object of Nathan and Caleb's desire, Kyoko and Caleb can both

be viewed as Nathan's victims that are easier to identify with. Patricia Melzer particularly emphasised the importance of the audience and how they engage with processes of identification. She noted that there are moments of recognition and/or pleasure while watching a film (Melzer 2006, 105). It is, thus, not only the film's ideological framework nor the director's purpose and views, but also the viewer's interaction with it that can result in unpredictable identifications and readings. While the audio-visual effects in the dancing scene generate a sexually-charged atmosphere (such as Kyoko's revealing clothes, her dance movements, the dark red lighting, the sound of the disco song), the editing of the scene works otherwise: the viewing of Kyoko and Nathan's dance is interrupted by shots on Caleb's face. His frustrated look indicates that he is not enjoying watching Kyoko.

The scene can, therefore, be read more as bitter and parodic rather than voyeuristic. It is bitter because of Caleb's mercy for Kyoko's and Ava's mistreatment by Nathan and also parodic because this mercy will be turned against him in the end, when Ava will leave him to die in the facility. The fact that even good Caleb cares much more about Ava than Kyoko is indicative of Ava's superiority in the film as the white female but also of Caleb's selfish motives. While he feels pity for Kyoko, he does nothing to save her. On the contrary, he risks everything to save Ava, only because of his romantic feelings towards her, and not because that is the ethically right thing to do. This demonstrates the expendability of non-white females; according to Andre M. Carrington the protection of white women is instead a *"social priority"* to *"masculine power"* (Carrington 2016, 77).

This parodic sense goes hand in hand with the genre of the film, as the narrative's purpose is to trick the viewer just like the android has to trick the human during the Turing Test. The deception concerns the switching of the scapegoats from female to male, from machine to human, with Ava being the only one to survive the massacre. But while victims and perpetrators are switching places, the only non-white main character remains victimised until the end. Unlike Ava, Kyoko does not escape punishment for stabbing Nathan, as he immediately turns to her and hits her. The bitterly parodic sense is also present in that scene of the murder, as Kyoko does not even have the chance to kill her oppressor. She is the one to stab him first but Ava is the one who actually kills him.

The scene of Kyoko's death is also significant as it is one of the few times in the film when she shows signs of understanding. Right after she stabs Nathan, she touches his face and looks at him (Figure 0.1, Figure 0.2**Error! Reference source not found.**). She looks at him with curiosity, maybe pity. Her look is again inexplicable but the touch of her hand on his cheek is a sign of acknowledgement of their former relationship and can even be interpreted as a sign of tenderness. Unfortunately, this human moment is also what kills Kyoko. She could have stab Nathan right away again, killing him, or she could have run. Instead, she gave Nathan the opportunity to hit her. The last medium shot on Kyoko's face, after she is hit, reveals an ugly part of robotic 'flesh' where her mouth and jaw should be (Figure 0.3). It is again indicative of her nonhumanity, her monstrous otherness.

Figure 0.1: Shot on Kyoko after she has stabbed Nathan on the back (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.2: Shot on Kyoko touching Nathan's face after stabbing him (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.3: Shot on Kyoko after Nathan has hit her, removing part of her 'human skin', right before she collapses (Garland, 2014).

The problem of representation remains, as Kyoko's role seems limited to transforming from Nathan's maid to Ava's ally, always obedient, silent and, in the end, self-sacrificing. The scene reflects what Leslie Bow refers to when she describes filmic representations of Asian androids as the new way to fetishise Asian women and embody them as overly sexual and obedient as servants (Bow 2018). A similar

representation of a nonhuman female is that of the clone, Sonmi-451, portrayed by South Korean actress Bae Doona in *Cloud Atlas* (2012). She and other Asian female clones work as servers in a fast-food restaurant, living as slaves. Their fetishised appearance reminds us of Kyoko's representation, while their stylistic resemblance as clones is also reminiscent of the cross-race effect which often leads to the misidentification of non-white people (Figure 0.4, Figure 0.5). Unlike Kyoko, Sonmi-451 awakens and manages to escape only to be eventually executed. In both cases, the Asian female nonhumans are forced to live a life of slavery, with their resistance leading to their death.

Figure 0.4: Film still of Bae Doona as Somni-451 in Cloud Atlas (Wachowski, Lana, Wachowski Lilly, Tykwer Tom, 2012).

Figure 0.5: Film still of the female clones in Cloud Atlas (Wachowski, Lana, Wachowski Lilly, Tykwer Tom, 2012).

Another issue with such filmic representations of female Asian robots is that they treat *"racialized bodies as prosthetic selves"* (Nishime 2017, 29). In Kyoko's case, this is demonstrated by the fact that she is treated as a marginalised other throughout the film, being something between a doll and a monster. Her representation resonates with Hooks' view that *"race is always an issue of Otherness that is not white; it is black, brown, yellow, red, purple even"* (Hooks 1990). Kyoko's otherness is indeed colourful, if one could describe it this way, as it is not only the colour of her skin that confirms her otherness, but also the robotic body under the skin. And what multiplies her otherness is that she is represented more as an object than like a subject with fears and desires. She is there to please others and shows no sign of emotion or intelligence, making it impossible for the viewer to deeply identify with her and feel something more than pity. Although it is easy to foresee it, the viewer only learns that Kyoko is an android in the second half of the film when she reveals her robotic body

underneath her human-looking flesh. When she does this, she is transformed from an object of desire to an *"abject"*, that, according to Julia Kristeva, disobeys rules and limitations and does not fit in pregiven ideas of identity (Kristeva 1982). This is precisely what Kyoko does when she peels off her skin to reveal her robotic 'nature' to Caleb. She begins by tearing off the skin from her naked stomach and proceeds by peeling off her facial skin to reveal two horrifying robotic eyes upon a grey robotic face (Figure 0.6, Figure 0.7). Her disturbing appearance resonates with Barbara Creed's definition of monstrous femininity that is necessarily associated with sexuality (Creed 1993). Only now, Kyoko ceases to be a symbol of Asian sexuality and becomes a monstrous other, a prosthetic self.
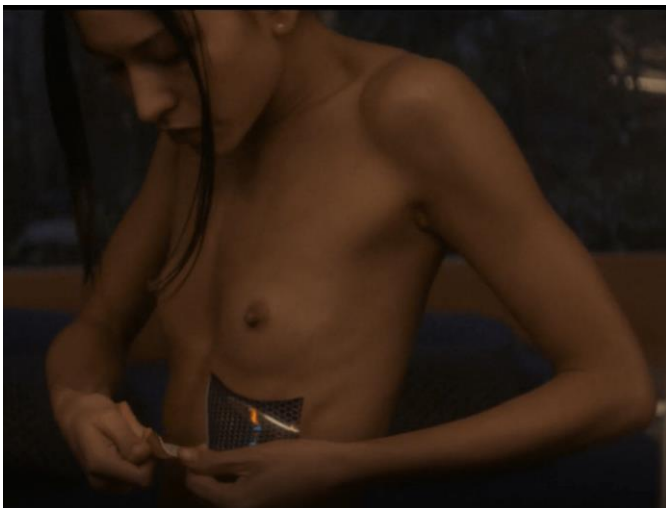
Figure 0.6: Shot on Kyoko while she is tearing off her 'human' skin and uncovers her robotic body (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.7: Shot on Kyoko while she is uncovering her robotic eyes (Garland, 2014).

However, this scene can be interpreted as an empowering moment for Kyoko, as it is the first time in the film when she shows some signs of communication. Given Nathan's desire to fully control her, it is debatable whether he programmed her to initiate this moment of revelation of her true nature to Caleb. It is easier to believe it was Kyoko's own decision, though, as she only did it after she saw Caleb discovering other female android bodies hidden in Nathan's closet. It seemed as if she was communicating to him that she, too, is an android. It was also a moment of self-awareness for her, as she not only acknowledges but also embraces her difference by sharing it with someone else, someone who is not her oppressor.

This and the scene that precedes it are also important for other non-white androids that make an appearance in the film. The bodies Caleb finds in Nathan's closet belong

to other female androids created by Nathan, possibly long before he created Ava. Although they all meet the patriarchal standards of female attractiveness, they bodies all look different and are racially different too. They also seem to be in a dormant state, like someone has switched them off. In the previous scene, Caleb had discovered Nathan's video archive with footage of these androids from when they were 'awake'. One of them, named Jasmine (Symara A. Templeman), has an Afro-American skin tone and is the only one that is faceless and lifeless. In one of the videos, we see Nathan trying to teach the faceless android how to paint (Figure 0.8); when his efforts prove to be futile, he drags her body (Figure 0.9) and leaves it on the ground (Figure 0.10), as an ultimate sign of his brutality. It becomes even more disturbing if one considers that he did not even bother to give a human face to the only black android as he did with the rest of them. In this scene, the objectification is both sexual and racial against black femininities. Again, it could be argued that the director uses another filmic technique to make the viewer repulsed by Nathan since he systematically abuses women of colour. However, this does not make the entire sequence less dehumanising and traumatic.

Figure 0.8: Shot on footage from Nathan's archive: Nathan tries to teach the android called Jasmine (Symara A. Templeman) how to paint (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.9: Shot on footage from Nathan's archive: Nathan drags Jasmine's lifelss body (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.10: Shot on footage from Nathan's archive: Jasmine's lifeless body lying on the ground (Garland, 2014).

After Jasmine's footage, Caleb watches a video of an Asian-looking android named Jade, the one Ava stole the skin from. Contrary to Jasmine, Jade seems to be fully conscious as she repeatedly asks Nathan to set her free. When he does not give a satisfactory answer, she begins screaming: *"Why won't you let me out?"* (Garland 2014) (Figure 0.11). Trapped naked in her glass cell, screaming for her freedom, she

looks more like a wild animal in the zoo, exposed before the eyes of her oppressor. Once more, the film director has chosen the non-white actresses to portray the androids that are mistreated the most. As if her desperate cry for freedom is not enough, the next shot is even more dehumanising as Jade is seen beating the walls of her cell until her arms shatter, revealing her robotic body that looks sharp and monstrous (Figure 0.12).

Figure 0.11: Shot on footage from Nathan's archive: Full shot of Jade in her glass cell, screaming at Nathan: "Why won't you let me out" (Garland, 2014).

Figure 0.12: Shot on footage from Nathan's archive: Jade shuttering her robotic arms while trying to break the glass walls of her cell (Garland, 2014).

Kyoko, Jasmine, and Jade are all examples of monstrous femininity, or, to emphasise on Jade's representation, shattered femininity. In other words, their sexuality is gone the moment when their flawless female body is torn apart or shattered to reveal an ugly robotic body. The same applies to their humanity. Jasmine's case is different as

her double nature is immediately seen in her image: a human body and a lifeless robotic head. On the opposite side of their monstrous femininity, one can see a different and much more frightening type of monstrosity in Nathan's masculinity. The torments these female androids have to deal with are a way to highlight Nathan's monstrous personality as the masculine male who likes to possess and control the non-male, the non-white and the non-human.

What is interesting in terms of racial representations, though, is that Isaac, the actor who portrays Nathan, is not white but Latino, of Guatemalan and Cuban descent. As Angelica Jade Bastién puts it, *"the fact that the film is so self-aware about its most brutalized characters being robotic women of colour becomes even more unnerving considering the audience is expected to forget Isaac is himself Latino"* (Bastién 2015). This also echoes Halberstam's point that masculinity "*becomes legible as masculinity where and when it leaves the white male middle-class body*", with *"excessive masculinity"* being associated with both male and female black, Latino, or working class bodies (Halberstam 1998, 2). Therefore, *"masculinity becomes dominant in the sphere of white middle-class maleness"* (Halberstam 1998, 2).

Again, Hooks' argument is useful for the male character's representation, as she notes that *"the indifference of white people who are not oppressed yet see themselves as politically correct, who witness the pain of the oppressed, who sympathize and then ignore, is mirrored in the lighter-skinned brown people who are almost white"* (Hooks 1990, 158). Therefore, while the *"almost white"* Nathan is represented in a way that makes the viewers despise him, white Caleb is the good hero, who respects women, even when they are gendered robots. And while Ava almost manages to reach, if not transcend, Caleb's subjectivity by the end of the film, the non-white characters are represented in such a way that forbids any way of actual identification by continuing racial patterns. In Nathan's case, these stereotypes are summarised in what Hooks described as representations of non-white men as threatening to society (Hooks 1990). The connotations of Nathan and Caleb's darker and lighter skin respectively intensify this feeling that Nathan represents the devil, while pale Caleb portrays an angel or, even, a *deus ex machina* to rescue Ava.

In addition, casting actors and actresses from non-white racial backgrounds to embody side characters who sacrifice themselves for the sake of the main hero or heroine is

common in mainstream film, but what is even more problematic is silencing them. The concept of a quiet Japanese female character also reminds us of Chieko (Rinko Kikuchi), a deaf and non-verbal teenager in *Babel* (2006), directed by Alejandro González Iñárritu. It is interesting that the film focuses on the theme of foreign languages and miscommunication. Similarly, *Ex Machina* subtly refers to foreign languages, not only because Kyoko does not understand English – although the viewers never hear her speak any language at all – but also because it is implied that androids can speak their own, robotic language.

This is shown in the seventh and final section of the film, when the two female characters, Ava and Kyoko, interact for the first and only time. A glimpse of hope appears for Kyoko, as her role seems to become much more active when she meets Ava, and the two AIs fight together against Nathan. The interaction between the two female androids is fatal for both male protagonists, showing how their alliance is a threat for men and for humans. In the scene that depicts Ava escaping her room and then meeting Kyoko in one of the facility's corridors, one can see the androids' otherness being intensified. Ava approaches Kyoko and whispers in her ear, but she cannot be heard by the viewers. This is another indication of her nonhuman nature, as the strange language which the viewers never hear is probably some kind of computer code used by Ava to persuade Kyoko to act in her interest, thus transforming her from an obedient servant to an aggressive ally.

When asked about this scene in an interview, Garland confirmed that while Ava is apparently convincing Kyoko to act in her interest and kill Nathan, the fact that the viewers cannot hear her speaking emphasises the differences between humanoid robots and human beings. These differences are underlined by the fact that a human cannot understand the androids' language. Interestingly, language is a vehicle that has contributed to patriarchal theories of gender difference as well, while in this film it is used to underline the differences between humans and AI machines.

Again, the female is seen without being heard, as was the case with Isabella in *Her*. Nevertheless, the *"enigma"* to which Silverman referred to describe the silent woman (Silverman 1988, 164) is now reflected not in one but in two female characters and their interaction. By muting both of them, as Kyoko is already mute and Ava's voice is covered by the soundtrack, the threat of the female alliance is not eradicated but

intensified, doubled. Instead of being celebrated, the female bond is seen as destructive with only white Ava surviving it. This is an issue that will be further explored in the next chapter, as the underrepresentation of female friendships or romantic relationships in the examined filmography is indicative of the focus on the male and the heterosexual. While this first section examined how otherness and difference is silenced in *Ex Machina*, the next one is focusing on the image by studying the extent to which racial difference is shown or concealed in the examined filmography and other case studies from the same filmic genre. Thus, the following section delves more into whiteness, following a reading that takes both race and class into consideration.

3.2 On Whiteness, Capitalism and Techno-Orientalism

Both *Ex Machina* and *Her* are suffering from an orientalist perspective of the world that whitewashes difference, be it race, class or sexual orientation. The latter is further addressed in the following chapter, as the examined films focus on a strictly heterosexual romance. While orientalism is very obvious in Kyoko's representation in *Ex Machina*, whiteness is even more apparent in *Her*, yet through a different prism. *"Orientalism"* as a term was used by Edward Said to describe the Western representations of Eastern civilizations and cultures in ways that perpetuate stereotypes and normalise the West's dominance on the East. These representations divided the West from the East, by creating a false, romanticised perception for the latter and justifying political imperialism and colonialism. According to Said, orientalism is *"a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient"* (Said 1978, 14), which is the oversimplifying understanding of diverse cultures as one.

In 1995, David Morley and Kevin Robins used the term *"techno-orientalism"* to describe the dislocation of the Orient from the exotic to the futuristic Other, as a result of the proliferation of technologies and Japan's 'threat' to transcend the West's technological supremacy: *"What would the West be without its vaunted technological supremacy? Technology has been central to the potency of its modernity. And now, it fears, the loss of its technological hegemony may be associated with its cultural 'emasculation'"* (Morley 1995, 167). The selection of the word *"emasculation"* is critical in the current analysis, as it refers to the masculine Western subject and his struggle

to avoid being castrated by the Other, be it the female, the non-white or, worse for him, both.

This struggle is represented in cultural texts as an anxiety to control, dominate this Other, as we saw in the analysis of *Ex Machina*. In other examples, this anxiety is shown through the often whitewashed depiction of technologically advanced metropoles of the Eastern world. Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Black Rain* (1989), for instance, both set in Tokyo, express such fears of emasculation through their action genre by representing the white protagonist's struggle for survival.

Sofia Coppola's *Lost in Translation* (2003), on the other hand, depicts Tokyo as an enigmatic city for its white protagonist duo, maintaining the parallelism of the *Orient* as the *Exotic*. What is more problematic in such depictions is that the so-called enigma does not stimulate any kind of curiosity to truly learn about and connect with the other. The films focus on the white subjects instead and their ostensible fight in a world that transcends their norms and expectations. The non-white, non-western Others remain at least puzzling at best or evil, threatening, and violent at worst.

Such portrayals of the Eastern subject or the city best describe techno-orientalism as a subspecies of Said's Orient. In the previous section, the representation of the non-white female cyborg in *Ex Machina* was examined and read as stereotypical and dehumanising. Another techno-orientalist example is that of the famous Geisha on a giant digital advertisement in *Blade Runner* (Figure 0.13). The Geisha is seen smoking a cigarette and shallowing pills, thereby perpetuating orientalist views on Japanese culture and combining the image of the geisha with mass consumerism, dystopia, and an unhealthy way of living[26].

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[26] Alexis Rhee, the actress who portrays the Geisha is not Japanese but Korean-American. The Korean Kisaeng were women from outcast or slave families who are often confused or equated with the Japanese Geisha. Despite their differences in their appearance, social status and origin, there is a resemblance between the two, while both of them were present in Korea (Atkins 2010).

Figure 0.13: Film still: The famous advertisement of the Geisha (Alexis Rhee) in Blade Runner (Scott, 1982).

On the other side of techno-orientalism, there is a serious lack of visibility of non-western cultures. Johansson's casting in a number of futuristic films triggers the question on how non-white subjectivities are overshadowed by the powerful presence of a white famous actress. Her representation in such cultural texts has received criticism from that of *Lost in Translation* for its depiction of Japan (Underdown 2020) and its *"new form of orientalism"* (King 2010, 169), in tandem with Johansson's representation as a flaneur in a *"in a landscape in which she is not popularly known"* (Batsakis 2018, 284), to the whitewashing accusations against the adaptation of the Japanese manga *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) by Rupert Sanders in 2017. Concerning the latter, the casting of a white actress to portray a Japanese, originally named Motoko Kusanagi, cyborg heroine highlighted Hollywood's *"Asian problem"* (Rose 2017). It is particularly the erasure of non-white femininities from nonhuman narratives that this chapter focuses on.

In *Her*, Johansson's casting is a continuous reminder of the omnipresence of the white femme fatale even when she is disembodied. Her casting also complicates the reading of Samantha's disembodied representation and contributes to an association of her character with whiteness. Carrington discussed the different treatment of white and black women in terms of their image and relationships with men pointing out the prioritised position of white women in science fiction narratives (Carrington 2016).

Non-white subjects are almost entirely excluded from *Her*'s post-romantic utopia. This not only excludes half of Los Angeles' actual non-white population but is also misconstrued given the fact that some of the scenes were filmed in Shanghai. As Bryce

J. Renninger points out, *"Jonze is so invested in the same techno-Orientalism that inspired cyberpunk culture that Los Angeles's own buildings do not embody its own future well enough; one must go to the imagined epicenter of tech capital, East Asia, to shoot believable skylines"* (Renninger 2013). This is another sign of the West's fear of losing technological hegemony, expressed through the appropriation of images of the East to represent a popular metropolis of the West. It also signifies the West's dream to create and control the 'new world' of technological prosperity.

The problem with whiteness is that it is challenging to think of it as an ethnic category in mainstream film since it is the norm, while everything else is different, it is the Other. Hooks suggested the interrogation of whiteness as a way towards the eradication of racism (Hooks 1990). That is also what Dyer expressed in his article, "White": *"Looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human"* (Dyer 1988, 44). While it is true that by examining non-white subjects as different, one can only intensify their otherness, it is also risky not to do so. In fact, looking at both dominant and non-dominant groups through the same angle can unfortunately lead to false assumptions and equal distances, failing to see that difference is a much-needed proof for the non-privileged. Eradication of racial differences without an in-depth understanding of them and the power hierarchies constructed around them is not an eradication of racism, but instead perpetuates it by erasing the historical and ongoing trauma of oppressed social groups. It is what Jonze does by representing a near future world with no social conflict, no poverty, and no ethnic diversity. By creating a false sense of uniformity, racial otherness is actually perpetuated rather than eliminated.

To better understand how whiteness works in our perception of difference in filmic representations, it is worth delving into Dyer's argument about the how whiteness is so normalised that ends up being invisible (Dyer 1988). As he puts it, the paradox with black and white is that we use the term *"coloured"* to refer to people from black backgrounds, while whiteness is associated with emptiness, nothingness (Dyer 1988). However, these connotations are in fact wrong, as black is the absence of colour, while white is all colours put together (Dyer 1988). By mistakenly associating the white

colour with an empty space, white people find it difficult to distinguish whiteness. On the contrary, black people are more easily categorised as black by white people, as if this is their primary and most important characteristic. This argument perfectly explains why diversity is multi-coloured but also the fact that diversity is actually the opposite of whiteness. Indeed, the word is used to refer to not only people of non-white ethnic backgrounds but also to the colours of the rainbow, meaning LGBT+ individuals. White is not among these colours, because white is so well established as the norm that it cannot even be distinguished.

Dyer also refers to stereotypical symbolisms of white and black, with the first being a reference to light and, therefore, safety, peacefulness, and the latter being related to darkness, which reminds us of danger (Dyer 1988). Such stereotypes perpetuate the oppression of white normalcy. To explore a filmic representation of this issue that is not referring to race per se, the following scene was selected from another science fiction mystery film, *Under the Skin* (2013). The film presents many similarities with *Her* and *Ex Machina*, as it brings the female nonhuman and her sexuality to the surface. The film follows the story of a mystery female (portrayed by Scarlett Johansson) who seduces lonely men. In the ending scenes of the film, it is revealed that the female is not a human but an alien creature. This is represented by shots on the female peeling off her skin to reveal an entirely black body (Figure 0.14). The shots are reminiscent of how Kyoko peeled her own skin off in *Ex Machina*. A man is chasing the mystery female to rape her, but when he sees what she has become, or what she has always been, he sets her on fire. Then, the burning creature starts running in a snowy forest (Figure 0.15**Error! Reference source not found.**).

Figure 0.14: Medium close up shot on the Female (Scarlett Johansson) after she has peeled of her human skin and revealed her black body in one of the final scenes of Under the Skin (Glazer, 2013).

Figure 0.15: Extreme wide shot of the Female running while being burnt alive (Glazer, 2013).

The reason why this scene is particularly important for colour symbolisms is that even what seems to be the obvious can also be deceiving. Of course, the female's black skin is initially associated with alien, otherness, danger, and even death. It is *her* death, as her blackness is followed by her fatal burning. Discussing gendered blackness in cyborg narratives, Marquis Bey pointed out how blackness has been associated with monstrosity (Bey 2016). However, it is interesting to note that the female's blackness has nothing to do with racial blackness. She is much darker than any human being, she is indeed nonhuman. Moreover, as Lucas Hilderbrand points out, one should not forget that since the film is British, blackness should not necessarily refer to African Americans or to racial representations at all (Hilderbrand 2016). The chromatic motifs

of the film can also be misleading. The female's colour contrasts with the white snow, a colour that, again, is whiter than any human being. However, this blackness comes in perfect harmony with the dark trees and is as if the female creature has always belonged in this natural environment. Additionally, the film can be compared to a journey to self-knowledge that culminates in this ending scene, in which the female finally explores her own body. What she finds *under the skin* is her own nature for which she is then punished by her assaulter. This reading demonstrates that the white man symbolises danger and death, while the black female creature could be associated with ontological dilemmas of what humans truly are. Interestingly, the novel on which the film is based states that we are *"all the same under the skin"* (Faber 2000, 163, 176). The visual representation of the female's black flesh can add to this claim, that we are all the same colour and that this colour is black: this is the real absence of colour, the emptiness.

Another thing to note about the female in *Under the Skin* is that while she is primarily seen as a woman who approaches men for sex, her representation as a human being has nothing to do with stereotypical portrayals of white women's sexuality. Dyer noted that in filmic representations *"white women are constructed as the apotheosis of desirability, all that a man could want, yet nothing that can be had"* (Dyer 1988, 64). This has been the case for Ava in *Ex Machina* and, to an extent, for Isabella in *Her*, although Theodore ends up rejecting her. Ava's white untamed attractiveness is a great example of what Dyer describes, especially if it is compared to Kyoko's objectified and enslaved sexuality. Even disembodied Samantha in *Her* is highly associated with the white woman's stereotypical beauty, as she is voiced by the famous actress, Johansson, who is also known as a sex symbol. Samantha is what Theodore desires but cannot really have. However, Johansson's attractive appearance in *Under the Skin* has nothing to do with stereotypical images of fragile white femininity that becomes the object of desire. Instead, it is her who selects the men she wants to sleep with; she is the predator, not the victim. Also, even though Johannson's appearance as the mysterious woman is reminiscent of a femme fatale in a film noir, with dark short hair and red lipstick, her casual clothes deviate from the stereotypical image of the irresistible sex symbol and delink female sexuality from an overly feminine appearance.

While all these references and readings can be interrelated with black and white symbolisms, it is still interesting that racial blackness is almost absent from the examined films, as well as from the case studies the have been compared with so far. This can be explained by another stereotypical connotation of whiteness with technological progress which has been the focus of popular science fiction films. On the other side of techno-orientalism that ignores, distorts, or abuses Asian cultures and futures, there is an even more impudent association of blackness with primitiveness. In her article, "Digital Whiteness, Primitive Blackness", Janell Hobson addressed such stereotypical associations in cultural texts about technology, from films to video clips and video games. She brought the example of Morpheus in *The Matrix* (directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, 1999). His character was at first celebrated as one of the rare black main roles in a science fiction film. What Hobson rightly points out, though, is that the purpose of Morpheus' character (played by Laurence Fishburne) is to locate Neo (Keanu Reeves), who is the *"white saviour of the human race"* (Hobson 2008, 118). Therefore, the inclusion of a black character is not enough to deconstruct the meanings that have been associated with whiteness.

On the other hand, Lana and Lilly Wachowski are known for their inclusion of diverse groups in their films, especially since they belong to such a group themselves as trans women, even if certain representations might fail to subvert the norms. In one of their most recent works, in particular, the science fiction television series *Sense8* (2015-2018), the directors imagined a futuristic world of diversity, where the eight protagonists were 'multi-coloured' from their ethnicity and race to their gender and sexual orientation. The inclusion of a trans woman[27] and a black lesbian[28] as partners in the main cast is also crucial, as they both fall into three of the most underrepresented groups in mainstream culture[29]. Notably, the series was cancelled after its second season because of its high production cost, which was not associated with special

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[27] Trans actress Jamie Clayton portrays a trans lesbian called Nomi Marks, one of the main eight characters of *Sense8*. The other seven characters also include people from minority groups, such as a gay man, a black man, and an Indian woman.

[28] English actress Freema Agyeman played the role of Amanita Caplan, Nomi's girlfriend.

[29] When referring to the Wachowski's 'success' in including a black male character in *The Matrix*'s main cast, Hobson argues that black women remain *"racially and sexually marginalized"*, with their subjectivity *"erased"* (Hobson 2008, 112).

effects as with most, especially science fiction, shows, but with the fact that the series was shot in thirteen countries (Ellis 2018) from five different continents. This fact alone clearly demonstrates the attempt to see beyond the United States and the Western world. In spite of this attempt from the directors, though, the series does not escape stereotypes of whitewashing, white saviours, and white dominance.

Even if the Wachowski's works can at least be praised for their effort to be more inclusive, the problem of underrepresentation and lack of diversity in popular science fiction culture remains, especially considering black subjects. While class differences between white and black people partly explain the unequal access and contribution to technological advancements, mainstream culture presumptuously tends to exclude black people from its futuristic visions, instead of addressing these serious issues. This is also what Andre M. Carrington refers to as the overrepresentation of whiteness in science fiction cinema (Carrington 2016). In *Her*, for instance, this exclusion is terribly obvious. Although the film is characterised by its focus on emotions rather than politics, one cannot fail to notice that such concerns are a privilege of white, heterosexual, middle or upper class people, which resonates with what Edgar Rivera Colón calls *"elite whiteness"* and *"racial forgetfulness"* (Colón 2014). It is indeed as all other problems have been resolved or successfully ignored, leaving enough space for wealthy people's ennui. Unquestionably, ennui is another symptom of capitalism. As Walter Benjamin described it, ennui is the boredom of the upper classes, a type of survival sickness. However, it can also connote with the repetitiveness of labour for the working class (Benjamin 1999).

In *Her*, boredom is translated into loneliness and dehumanisation. The main character, Theodore, has a good quality of life, a seemingly well-paid job and a nice apartment in the centre of a modern metropolis. He is, however, bored, and unexcited until he meets Samantha. Both Theodore and Samantha's characters can be interrelated with Benjamin's description of the child in "Marseilles". The child as captive of the bourgeois apartment, suffering from the ennui that comes with modernity and urbanisation (Benjamin 1979). This is firstly because both characters are captives: Theodore is a prisoner of his loneliness and Samantha a captive of her disembodiment. Secondly, Theodore expresses a childlike curiosity to know Samantha, while she, even more as a child, is eager to know everything about the world. Lastly, Theodore is bored from

his overly urbanised life until he meets Samantha, and she becomes bored after she learns everything a human can teach her. She wants to learn more and her journey to posthumanism can be compared to a child growing up.

Nonetheless, Theodore's journey is limited to the first-world anxieties of the repetitiveness of life, the lack of romance and the dependency on technological devices. In addition, the partly utopian and partly alienated futuristic Los Angeles of *Her* suggests that the answer to loneliness is a product that can be purchased. The commercialisation of relationships can be read as an ultimate consequence of capitalism that literally alienates humanity. It resonates with and also highlights the concept of *"commodity fetishism"*, the term used by Karl Marx to describe how capitalism values commodities and the whole process of commodity production more that it values human relationships (Marx 1906). Commodity fetishism is an example of structural violence, as it represents the gradual, systemic dehumanising process that almost forces people to keep on being eager consumers while degrading the meaning of social relationships for the sake of consumerism. In the futuristic filmic world of *Her*, human relationships become commodities. In its ending, however, the film reverses the feeling of alienation created by the complex relationship between Theodore and Samantha. It does this by demonstrating that their relationship, real and deep as it is, is doomed to end, with Theodore returning to his humanised, urbanised self and finding comfort in the company of his human friend Amy, while Samantha is joining other AIs in the search for a better world. This new world is a utopia of solidarity. The highly intelligent operating systems can be a metaphor for actual human subjects that have transcended the boundaries of their own lives and discovered new possibilities and ways of being. Samantha and Theodore's breakup is not a failure of their relationship, which was surprisingly successful while it lasted, but a failure of the system to commercialise and confine human emotions. Could, therefore, *Her* offer a glimpse of hope for a socialist utopia?

The answer is not simple, especially if we look back to the issue of the lack of visibility. How could we imagine a future of solidarity when those who are facing racial or class oppression are almost violently excluded? The casting of non-white people in *Her* is limited to side characters, such as the girlfriend of Theodore's co-worker, a waitress, and a black man dancing. Jonze's depiction of Los Angeles as almost entirely white

risks the association of utopianism with whiteness and financial prosperity, since poverty has magically disappeared and everyone seems to be living in large comfortable apartments with great views. As Colón puts it, they are in a *"protected distance"* from the ground (Colón 2014), which can be easily compared to how the film gives a false image of the city to the viewer by making class and racial differences disappear. It can also be a metaphor of how rich people live far from poverty thereby protecting themselves from actually seeing and being aware of it. This becomes clearer by the many extreme wide shots of the city (Figure 0.16, Figure 0.17).
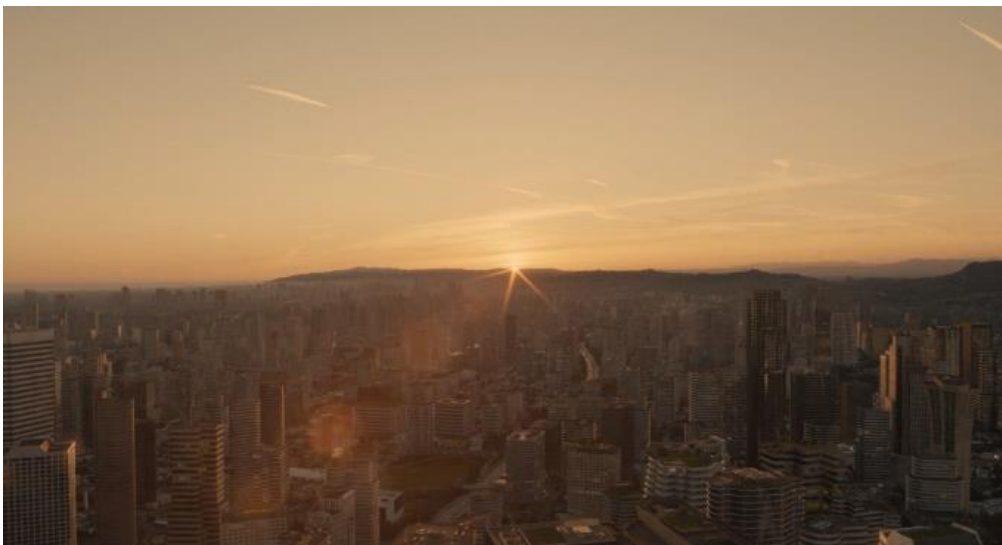
Figure 0.16: Extreme wide shot of the city in Her (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 0.17: Aerial shot of the city in Her (Jonze, 2013).

There also numerous shots of Theodore looking down to the world, from a distance (Figure 0.18, Figure 0.19, Figure 0.20), as if he himself is a god, which is an intriguing

interpretation given the etymology of his name in Greek, which means "god-given", "gift from god". While most of these shots are used to represent and accompany Theodore's feelings, they tend to make the superficiality of Theodore's issues very obvious, since he is portrayed as the kind of person with first-world problems. This is intensified by the shots that are inside Theodore's flat: a large, bright, and contemporary apartment. As the film focuses on Theodore's loneliness and misery, his portrayal could be read as an effort to show that feelings are much more valuable than money and goods.

Figure 0.18: Tilted shot on Theodore gazing at the beach (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 0.19: Shot on Theodore at his former apartment (Jonze, 2013).

Figure 0.20: Shot on Theodore at his new apartment (Jonze, 2013).

Such interpretations, though, are seriously misleading, as they preserve the myth that wealth is not associated with prosperity, and they stubbornly avoid addressing

problems that are caused by poverty and class inequalities. It would be much more beneficial to read Theodore's character as another victim of capitalism and mass consumerism, who, despite having everything he needs, he still struggles to distinguish between real and artificial needs, as well as between real and artificial emotions.

This distance between different classes is much better represented and certainly more exposed in *Ex Machina* through Nathan's portrayal. The rich and successful man has earned himself the privilege of living far away from other people, in what they call *"his estate"*, a heavenly place on Earth, which is also a clear metaphor for God, the ultimate creator. While in *Her*, the city itself has a utopian quality and architectural beauty, in *Ex Machina*, Nathan lives in a natural paradise in the woods far from the noise of the city. Interestingly, both films successfully deconstruct the perfect utopian images they have built. In *Her*, we quickly learn that the beautifully constructed, lively, and conflict-free metropolis suffers from alienation and loneliness, as more and more people turn to AIs for company. In *Ex Machina*, Ava dreams of escaping from Nathan's estate and visit a busy intersection, where she will be able to merge into the crowd.

Ex Machina not only exposes class differences by putting Nathan in a clear distance from the real world, but also by putting Caleb in the position of the weak due to his social circumstances. When the film begins, the only thing the viewers know about Caleb is that he works in a big company with an open space office. It is later revealed that Caleb actually works for Nathan's company and is selected by the latter to participate in the testing of Ava, whose existence is unknown to the outside world. Caleb is initially made to believe that he was selected based on his good computer programming skills. Yet we later learn that Nathan invited Caleb based on the latter's search engine inputs that showed *"a good kid"*, *"with no family"*, *"no girlfriend"* and a "*moral compass*" (Garland 2014). In other words, Caleb is the perfect victim due to his social status, which makes him vulnerable to the luxurious life that Nathan offers him. Caleb has nothing to lose, only his life. He is also doomed to fall in love with Ava, as Nathan created her face based on Caleb's pornography profile. This revelation is a social commentary as it demonstrates how a person's social status and psychological traumas make them weak, unprotected, and easily manipulated. It also exposes the existing issue of data harvesting by showing how Nathan's colossal company hacked the data of all of its customers to create Ava.

Based on the analysis of both examined films, differences are located more on gender than on other qualitative characteristics. The main factors of difference examined in this chapter were race and class. It was demonstrated that while *Her* and *Ex Machina* promote female subjectivity and empowerment to some extent, they do that mostly through the prism of gender, with an almost exclusive focus on whiteness and a systematic and systemic association of it with subjectivity. In *Ex Machina*, the white female's empowerment overlooks Kyoko's enslavement. Class and social circumstances are partly exposed as factors of oppression and manipulation but not deeply analysed. In *Her*, a technological utopia is a privilege for the white and the wealthy. Alienation as a symptom of capitalism is subtly represented but is limited to the point of view of the white middle-class man. In some of the case studies that were used, particularly in Wachowski's filmography, non-white subjects were included but did not escape (techno-)orientalist visions. Of course, the issues relating to difference are not limited to race and class. As feminism is the primary focus of the thesis, another issue it explores is whether the examined films confine gender and sex to the masculine-feminine binary, even if it is represented as a cultural construction. This hypothesis is further analysed in the following chapter that delves into the films' representation of cis heterosexuality and the partial or total absence of LGBT+ subjects and relationships. This is important as *Her* is a film about romantic relationships and *Ex Machina*'s narrative unfolds through a failed, and also partly faked, romance. A question that arises through the readings on diversity in the films is whether there could be a mainstream AI cinema that promotes difference by actually including the underprivileged instead of suggesting that technological utopias and dystopias are revolving around whiteness. There needs to be, as phrased by Haraway, *"a world less riddled by the dominations of race, colonialism, class, gender, and sexuality"* (Haraway 1991, 2), which means that such dominations have to be further explored and exposed, in futuristic films and in real life. Until we are in a position to imagine an entirely inclusive mainstream cinema, we should at least be able to think of ways to fight orientalist views and whitewashing in visual culture.

Chapter 4. #MeToo in Science Fiction: Rape Culture in Futuristic Fantasies

"Oh Felix, you really do make a terrible human being. And I mean that as a compliment" (Nolan 2016).

Living in the era of the #MeToo movement, it is hard not to view the ethical implications of using and abusing conscious gendered machines as correlated with violence against women and its cinematic depiction. Classical narratives in mainstream film and television have recently demonstrated an ongoing turn to a more feminist approach by empowering heroines who are victims of sexual abuse. A recent example is Emerald Fennell's film *Promising Young Woman* (2021) which follows a young woman who seeks revenge for the rape of her best friend. However, in science fiction cinema, female cyborg bodies are still often treated as dolls, at least in regards to film techniques and the construction of the gaze. On the one hand, the male gaze dictatorship towards female bodies that are lifeless, mechanical, flawless, and, most importantly, *belong to someone else, usually a man*, seems to be inevitable for now. On the other, even AI fiction has made important progress towards narratives of females reclaiming their bodies, seeking revenge for the abuse they have suffered.

The examples of such narratives are derived primarily from Ava and Kyoko in *Ex Machina* and from the female robots in the television series *Westworld*. Parallel readings in this chapter include similar tales of disobedient robots in three films released in the 1970s, Bryan Forbes' *The Stepford Wives* (1975), Michael Crichton's *Westworld* (1973), and the latter's sequel *Futureworld* (Heffron, 1976). The *Westworld* series is based on the latter two.

The selection of the series *Westworld*, as well as the two films it is based on, as counterexamples to *Ex Machina*, is explained by the focus of the series on two thematics: a) the narrative of men using, abusing and raping female robots, along with the implications this could have on the #MeToo discourse, as a main topic of this chapter and b) the representation of failed masculinity and cyborg femininity, especially through the prism of the failed romance between the main male human character, William/Man in Black (Jimmi Simpson/Ed Harris), and the main female robotic character, Dolores, which relates to the primary topic of the thesis.

Moreover, *The Stepford Wives* is an excellent paradigm of what this chapter discusses, as it revolves around the horrifying story of men killing their wives and replacing them by obedient humanoid robots. The film has several feminist glimpses, as it is also narrated through a woman's point of view and depicts her struggle to escape her husband and avoid being replaced by a robot. The primary difference is that this film depicts the actual abuse of female human beings instead of robots.

What is at stake is the level to which such revolutionary narratives actually enable readings on female subjectivity and body liberation, since there are still limitations considering the fact that gendered machines have not ceased to primarily serve the male gaze and fantasies. Female cyborg bodies are objectified even in their ostensible uprising. Even the representations of gendered AIs fighting back are characterised by a familiar glorification and aestheticization of violence. As a result, every opportunity for a feminist utopia fails.

Yet, it is important to define what is meant by a feminist utopia. Utopia and dystopia are subject to different interpretations considering the question of whom they refer to. While a more general definition of the term 'utopia' stands for an *"imaginary positive place"* (Gordin 2010), for feminist science fiction it needs to focus on visions that reimagine gender and sexuality. Discussing how feminists have joined the debate on utopianism, Alessa Johns notes that despite the visions for social change, the *"static perfection"* of traditional utopias has remained oppressive, as it perpetuates ideas of hierarchies (Johns 2010, 174). With the term "traditional", she refers to the fully mapped visions of perfectly regulated utopian[30] spaces and doubts whether women would actually wish to live in such worlds (Johns 2010). While Johns notes that traditional utopias have failed to consider women's oppression, she does not expand on how feminist utopias should address such issues in a way that suggests how we can reimagine and transcend gender. This is a vision that is further explored in the reading of the examined narratives included in this chapter. Claire P. Curtis also argues against perfection as a necessary characteristic of utopian thinking. Instead, she notes, perfection might not only be impossible but also dystopian in some cases. For Curtis, science fiction is often overlooked as a source for the possibility of a

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[30] Here: non-existent.

feminist utopia, particularly because science fiction narratives are not intended to be realistic depictions of the future (Curtis 2005).

Considering the views of Johns and Curtis on how a feminist utopia can be defined and imagined, this chapter delves into an aspect of such a utopia in a simultaneous dialogue with the examined science fiction films. By delving into the #MeToo movement and its implications for rape culture, one cannot help but wonder whether a feminist utopia should be defined as a place where women would finally be safe. The reading of the examined cultural texts also explores the link between science fiction fantasy, utopianism, and (cyber-)feminist activism against sexual violence and its current manifestations. This will be viewed through three different prisms, the first being the perspective of a masculine heterosexual desire to possess the female compared to the masculine desire to control technology. By using this parallel, the films and series represent the male's desire to possess the AI female as a utopian fantasy that leads to a dystopian failure for the male filmic character. On the other hand, there is the feminist utopian vision of resolving these issues of the male's desire to control and possess by subverting the androcentric narrative and focusing on the female perspective instead. The question that arises concerns whether and how AI narratives could resolve such issues that make the aforementioned masculine dream come true by enabling the construction of feminist utopias. Finally, in regards to the #MeToo movement, the chapter also explores a third prism of utopianism by examining the cyberspace as a potentially safe place for women that enables disembodied forms of feminist activism.

4.1 Mothers, Whores, and the Monstrous Masculine

In *The Monstrous Feminine*, Creed argues how feminist theory has been more engaged with the representation of the woman as a victim rather than a monster. She points out that the representation of monstrous femininity in culture is not a simple reversal of the monster from male to female *"(…) as with all other stereotypes of the feminine, from virgin to whore, she (the 'female monster') is defined in terms of her sexuality"* (Creed 1993, 2-3). This means that the female monster is not subject to general descriptions of monstrosity, but instead is greatly associated with femininity itself. According to Zoe Vorsino, science fiction narratives have introduced a new trope

of monstrous femininity with female cyborgs using their constructed sexuality to deceive men and rebel against humanity (Vorsino 2021). However, while cyborg films often tend to represent female androids as monstrous because of both their gender and their nonhumanity, this thesis has so far demonstrated that, at least in the case of *Ex Machina*, many recent 'Robot-as-Pathos' narratives have managed to depict the 'monstrous masculine' as well: namely, men whose violent personalities are associated with their masculinity. Such narratives can be read as critiques against masculine violence.

The adaptation of the 1973 film *Westworld* in television is an excellent paradigm of how recent science fiction narratives have begun to abandon notions of human dominance over the world and replace them with a more humanised critique against systemic violence. While the 1973 film and its sequel, *Futureworld* (1976), perfectly resonate with Asimov's definition of *"Robot-as-Menace"[31]*, Joy and Nolan's television adaptation in 2016 is an example of both *"Robot-as-Menace"* and *"Robot-as-Pathos"[32]*, as it depicts the humanoid hosts of Delos theme parks as innocent creatures that suffer from the violence of humanity (Asimov 1982). It is also a critique towards the human 'pathos' or, one would say, the human pathology. This refers to the untamed emotions that lead humans to behave violently against each other or other creatures. *Westworld* differs from its 1973 predecessor as, by representing robots as subjects, its narrative can be read as a critique against systemic violence and resonate with Braidotti's posthuman critique (Braidotti 2016). While this is initially understood as a commentary against humanity, a study of the series' different themes demonstrates how *Westworld* disrupts other established hierarchies, including the deconstruction of masculine violence and gender binaries.

The idea behind the theme parks in *Westworld* itself is to actually give a free pass to humans to do to robots whatever they want. Interestingly this is translated into men abusing, raping, and killing robots as no law prevents them from doing so. While that was the idea behind the original film, it did not appear to criticise what these humans did, as it depicted robots only as the 'menaces'. Interestingly, the robots in the 1973

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[31] See: Introduction.

[32] Ibid.

film started attacking humans merely because the first malfunctioned. The television series, though, altered the plot by depicting this attack as a result of the robots' awakening against humans.

It should be noted, however, that this awakening was orchestrated by a human. This part is significant as it demonstrates what Asimov himself had pointed out when discussing about the two different classes of robot stories. Originally, the *Westworld* robots are not menaces as they are *"built with safety measures"* (Asimov 1982) so that no human is hurt. However, even when they turn into murderous avengers, they do not cease to resonate with Asimov's second law of Robotics, as they are still obeying human orders to kill other humans. In Asimov's words, they are *"fashioned for certain jobs so that no Pathos [is] necessarily involved"* (Asimov 1982). Yet, this is perhaps the most crucial point of the *Westworld* series, as it poses an ostensibly technological question – which would be whether androids dream of electric sheep or, in fact, whether they dream of anything at all – that ends up being entirely existentialist: what if our feelings, memories, and actions are all orchestrated, artificial? This is one of the cases in which *Westworld* is very similar to *Ex Machina*, if one notices the scene in which Caleb, understanding how Ava's programming works, ends up doubting his own humanity by cutting himself to make sure he bleeds.

This leads to the assumption that the 'Robot-as-Pathos' narratives do not seem to deny that there is some part of realness in these robotic passions, even if their actions were initiated by a human plan. The second claim is associated with the extent to which the abused robots in *Westworld* and *Ex Machina* are actually represented entirely through the 'Pathos' prism or whether they could still be represented and interpreted as menaces. I have already analysed the case of Ava's revenge in *Ex Machina* which can be read as both a threat to the 'good guy' Caleb and an act of liberation to herself.

Nonetheless, the case of humanoid robots in the *Westworld* series is much more complicated as each of the main characters has a different personality and motives. The two primary avengers of *Westworld* are two female robots, Dolores and Maeve.

Dolores, the oldest host in the park, is first represented as a benign resident of Westworld, whose whole life is destroyed when the Man in Black kills her loved ones and rapes her. It is later revealed that the 60-year-old Man in Black is William, one of

Westworld's oldest human guests whom we see in flashbacks. When he first visited the park 30 years before the present events took place, William fell in love with Dolores and became obsessed with her. The show depicts his 30-year-old self as a kind man, who treats robots as if they were humans and wants to rescue Dolores from her robotic fate, set her free, and take her with him in the real world. His depiction as a male hero is reminiscent of Caleb. Upon realising that Dolores cannot feel the same way for him, as she always ends up forgetting who he is, William gradually becomes the Man in Black, a violent human who finds pleasure in abusing and killing the hosts of the Westworld park (Figure 0.1).

Figure 0.1: Shot on an older version of William/the Man in Black (Ed Harris) being violent against Dolores (Nolan 2016)

It should be noted, though, that a host's death in *Westworld* does not mean an actual death, as robots are revived by humans to continue their narratives or start new ones. Although the hosts are not supposed to have recollection of their artificial deaths, many of them have been reprogrammed to access memories of previous encounters, including such traumatic events. Their memories are what leads them to their revolution, which has been entirely orchestrated by the Westworld cofounders, Robert Ford (Hopkins) and Arnold Weber (Jeffrey Wright).

However, while the robots' choice is doubted in the first season, as even their uprising is orchestrated by humans, the following seasons further explore the concept of a free choice. The second season follows the aftermath of the hosts' uprising and the difficulties they face while trying to escape from their simulated realities. During the third season, Dolores is finally out in the real world, where she fights against her

oppressors by creating replicas of her consciousness. Finally, the fourth season presents an inversed world of oppression, in which robots have enslaved humans.

Although the first season was a commercial success, the multiple new concepts and complicated narrative patterns introduced in seasons two, three and four led to a decrease in the audience of the show and its eventual cancellation[33]. Nonetheless, this and the following chapters analyse certain aspects of all the seasons and focus on the depiction of the gendered cyborg and its interaction with humanity. Like *Ex Machina*, *Westworld*'s science fiction genre overlaps with those of mystery, film noir, and action. In addition, there are certain romantic and melodramatic elements, particularly shown in the embedded narratives featured in the simulated realities. For example, Dolores' given role is to portray a rancher's daughter who falls in love with a chivalrous cowboy, before she becomes a powerful avenger of her posthuman kind.

Like Dolores, Maeve is another victim of William's pathos. She has also participated in different storylines in *Westworld*. While in her first narrative she is seen as a brothel madam, the viewers later learn, through multiple flashbacks, that she used to portray a homesteader and a mother of a little girl. They were both violently murdered by the Man in Black, while it is also implied that Maeve was sexually abused by him before her death. The contradiction between Maeve's motherly image and her fetishised depiction as a sex worker can have a double reading. From mother Maeve's light-coloured clothes symbolising purity to the colourful corsages that she wears in the brothel (Figure 0.2, Figure 0.3), the extravagance of her fetishisation is almost parodic, in a way that intensifies the artificiality of her representation and disrupts it by multiplying her personas: she is a mother, a sex worker, a warrior, none of that, and all of them together.

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[33] According to *Variety*, *Westworld* was cancelled because of the high costs of its production, the lowering viewership, and the fact that Warner Bros. Discovery has been cutting down on spending (Maas 2022). The show has received criticism by several media for how it disappointed its viewers after its first season, particularly during seasons three and four (Franich 2022), (Forristal 2022).

Figure 0.2: Shot on Maeve (Thandiwe Newton) as a sex worker in her present narrative in the first season of Westworld (Nolan 2016).

Figure 0.3: Maeve as a mother with her daughter in a past narrative in Westworld (Nolan 2016).

Maeve is so used to humans maltreating her and other hosts that is surprised when Felix (Leonardo Nam), the human she manipulates into helping her to escape the park, shows actual feelings of care and sympathy towards her. Before she escapes, she compliments him by calling him a *"terrible human being"* (Nolan 2016). Maeve's belief that humans are, in principle, evil and that Felix is a lucky exception is reminiscent of the #NotAllMen Twitter hashtag. First tweeted in 2011, it has since been used in the context of men defending themselves and stating that not all of them abuse, rape or kill women[34]. Because since Maeve, a female and a robot, much like all of the other female robots in the Westworld park, has been repeatedly harassed and abused by

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[34] The hashtag became widely popular after the 2014 Isla Vista killings. The hashtag #YesAllWomen was then used as a response to argue that while not all men are rapists, all women have suffered some kind of sexual discrimination and harassment in their lives, which explains why the #NotAllMen argument actually sabotages the #MeToo movement rather than supporting it (Lanius 2019), (Valenti 2014), (Pendergrass 2015).

male humans, it is difficult for her to believe that a male human being like Felix could be anything less than evil and violent. The fact that he is actually caring and sensitive towards those who are not 'his kind' is what shocks her even more, making her think that he is "terrible" as a human being.

The stories of Maeve, Dolores, and the other female robots of *Westworld* present significant affinities with how society treats women. It is crucial that Felix, the exception among humans and men, is not the typical white wealthy man but an Asian technician from Hong Kong. Yet, it is also curious that the main evil human being, the Man in Black, has a strong character development that almost looks as if the series creators wanted to represent a humane side of him, if not partly justify him for his atrocious actions.

On the other hand, as the Westworld cofounders, Ford and Arnold, are represented as compassionate towards robots, the only remaining evil characters are two female humans. The first is Theresa Cullen (Sidse Babett Knudsen), Westworld's terse operations leader, a cold woman with no compassion towards hosts, who is murdered in the first season by a male robot. The second is Charlotte Hale (Tessa Thompson), Delos' executive director and one of the series main villains. Even though Charlotte, like William, also gets a background story as a human with a family, that only happens in the series' third season, after the original character is already dead. On top of that, in the third season Dolores uses Charlotte's body as a host replica for her own consciousness. Through a distorted depiction of Charlotte's memory, as if they belong to someone else, there is a subject switch that further dehumanises Charlotte's character. This is also another case of white people using non-white people's bodies for their own benefit, as it reminds us of the way Ava 'stole' an Asian's robot body in *Ex Machina*'s finale. The racialisation of the robots draws parallels with Braidotti's argument that posthuman scenarios *"obliterate the differences that matter"* by failing to disrupt established hierarchies, including racial ones (Braidotti 2016, 17). Braidotti rightly disagrees with embracing the posthuman as *"an intrinsically liberatory or progressive category"* (Braidotti 2016, 17). It is important, however, to see how these recent depictions of posthumans still manage to disrupt binarisms. Even through their different portrayals, black characters have a prominent role in *Westworld*. Also, Maeve

and Charlotte's depictions as two of the most sexually liberated figures of the show do encourage feminist readings and identifications.

There is, however, a visual antithesis in the representation of white and black femininity when it comes to masculine violence, as well as violence again black children. Hooks discussed the racial politics of popular visual culture and the necessary violence involved in the representations of black deaths on screen that does not exclude black children (Hooks 2021). There are three black children suffering a violent death in *Westworld*, one of them being Maeve's hypothetical daughter. The unequal visual representation is more evident in fake Charlotte's case at the end of the third season when, as a result of an attack, her car explodes and her husband and son are killed. Charlotte, the only survivor, is depicted with severe burns from head to toe, in a terrifying representation that comes in contrast with Dolores' appearance that is always flawless. This unequal visual treatment highlights Charlotte's monstrous and dehumanised representation.

The same racial inequality applies in the representation of Dolores and Maeve. In their various storylines, they are both raped, abused, killed, and brought back to life again and again, until they manage to break their loop and act as avengers. Programmed by Ford, the Park Director of Delos Destinations[35], Dolores initiates the Host Uprising by killing Ford among other humans and beginning her fight against humanity. Also programmed by Ford, Maeve successfully manipulates humans and robots to organise her escape from the Westworld theme park. However, just before exiting the park and entering the outside world, she finally decides that she cannot bear leaving her daughter behind and goes back to save her.

While both robots have good reasons to despise humans, it is hard not to ignore the different treatment of the series towards the white and black characters. Dolores turns from an innocent girl to a ruthless white heroine, a leader who fights for her species, reminding us of a lot of Ava in *Ex Machina*. Maeve's character, on the other hand, seems to lose its potential as it seems to be defined by a maternal instinct that is not even real. While it is definitely touching that Maeve loves a daughter that she knows

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[35] The Delos Destinations are the theme parks that include Westworld. The Delos Corporation is the company who owns Westworld.

not to be truly hers, this love also limits her capabilities and desires and makes her appear a much weaker character in the second and third seasons. This is not only an indication of unequal racial depiction, but also an association of women's emotions with weakness. While each of the females is driven by her own pathos, Dolores' pathos resonated with the fight for a better future, while Maeve's refers to a trauma of the past; the trauma of watching her black daughter being killed a million times in a loop; and, lastly, a trauma that can be triggering for black viewers, as it is not only an act of masculine violence against women but also an act of racist violence against black families[36]. It is yet important to note that black femininity in *Westworld* is represented by mixed-race actresses which constitute the showbiz's ideal of accepted blackness. Newton, who portrays Maeve, has infamously apologised to the black community for her light-skinned privilege and for not representing black women (Mlaba 2022)[37].

Still, Maeve's weaker representation, as well as her depiction as a motherly figure, is reminiscent of Kyoko's, who is the main non-white character in *Ex Machina*. Maeve is awakened by Dolores, just like Kyoko is programmed by Ava to act against her creator. In addition, Kyoko and Maeve are both motherly figures and sexual objects of their oppressors. In Maeve's case this is literal, as her two primary roles in Westworld's narratives are that of a mother and that of a sex worker. Yet, it is also figurative, as Maeve is a motherly figure to Clementine (Angela Sarafyan), a younger robot that also works as a sex worker alongside Maeve in the same narrative. Similarly, Kyoko acts as a symbolically motherly figure to Ava, as she: a) is an older robotic model, b) sleeps with Nathan, who, as Ava's creator, is also her 'father' and c) is sacrificed for Ava.

In spite of the relationships between them, as well as their role in overthrowing their oppressors, the female entities in both *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* have two things in common. Firstly, they are systematically and systemically victims of mental and physical abuse because of their nonhumanity and gender and, secondly, they are represented in a way that aestheticizes their pain. To begin with, all these female

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[36] Hope Wabuke has elaborated on the treatment and death of black characters and their children in Westworld actually perpetuates images of black people as targets of white violence "for fun" and can be traumatizing for the black viewer (Wabuke 2020).

[37] This issue has been brought up by other famous mixed-race actresses, such as Zendaya Coleman who spoke against Hollywood's standards of acceptable blackness and beauty (BBC 2018).

robots have stereotypically flawless bodies and fetishised images. Both Dolores and Maeve's looks blur the boundaries between saintlike images of virginity and motherhood respectively, and sexualised images of a femme fatale. From the fetishised clothes that resemble those worn in classical western films to Dolores' transformation into a futuristic maneater, the representation of female characters is often blindly voyeuristic as it favours a fetishised image over symbols of resistance. Femininity in *Westworld* is dazzling as is technology, with masculinity obsessing over controlling them both.

Nevertheless, it is not only femininity that is fetishised; it is violence and rape culture as well. This is not so much the case for *Ex Machina*, at least concerning sexual violence, as there is no rape scene or even sex scene in the film. There are, however, too many scenes of female nudity, and none of male, as well as scenes of Nathan verbally abusing and treating Kyoko as a sexual object or being violent towards her and other female robots. The excessive use of images of female nudity is present in *Westworld* without a reason that justifies it. The same applies for the multiple scenes of violence and rape in the series.

In the 1973 film and its sequel, *Westworld* was all about violence and rape. The concept of the theme parks was exactly this: men exercising their hypermasculinity by raping and killing female robots. In Crichton's film, there was no stimulation of compassion for the robots. When these androids started to malfunction, they were treated as broken objects, with any failure in their system being attributed to an infection among them. In this context, one could defend the television series by claiming that at least in *Westworld*'s adaptation, the robots are fighting back. It is the purpose that is at stake, though. How much of this violence from humans to robots and vice versa is merely part of glamourising violence and turning *Westworld* into an action narrative?

The problem with all these recent science fiction stories narrated and created primarily by white men is not that they ignore women's suffering, but, on the contrary, that they use it for their own sake, which could be even worse. This is not only realised through the depictions of excessive sexual violence but also through a more generalised fetishisation and categorisation of women in a *"Madonna-whore"* dichotomy that emerges from the psychological complex of the same name. First used by Sigmund

Freud, the *"Madonna-whore complex"* is explained as a man's sexual impotence when he is in a relationship with a woman he sees as being sexually innocent or saintlike, for instance the mother of their children (Freud 1957). Men who suffer from this complex, a consequence of pure misogynism, tend to regain their sexual arousal with women who they believe to be debased, usually sex workers (Hartmann 2009). Today, of course, the idea that this misogynistic tendency is associated with a psychological complex is extremely outdated and problematic.

It is interesting, though, to analyse how the examined filmography and television series present an aspect of this so-called complex by depicting the female characters as either saintlike figures or sexually liberated femme fatales, or even both and how this plays a role in the representation of the male characters' desire. In *Westworld*, William suffers from his unfulfilled passion for innocent Dolores and turns into a monster who abuses her and other female robots. These include Maeve, who, as both a sex worker and a devoted mother, fits into both categories. As for the Man in Black, William, he now uses women as sexualised tools for him to recover from his loss of what he never had, while the series represents the violence against female robots as a fetishist pleasure. In *Ex Machina*, Nathan punishes Kyoko for not being the 'perfect' female android with superior intelligence and consciousness by raping her, while he also imprisons Ava as his most precious, saintlike creation.

Her differs in the sense that there is no violence. Theodore is a caring, sensitive man who is supposedly looking for an equal relationship. And yet, he does not. His relationship with Samantha is never equal as she might be many things, but she will always be a product he purchased to fulfil his own needs. Isabella is also used to satisfy Theodore as a sexual surrogate. Reading the scene through the prism of the virgin/whore complex, Samantha is the innocent, divine being, a correlation that is intensified by the combination of her disembodied voiceover and the general shots on the sky. Her disembodiment is what purifies her. On the contrary, Isabella is sexually 'impure', since she uses her body as an object for someone else's satisfaction. However, the complex is subverted; Theodore's lack of arousal is actually a consequence of Isabella's presence, as, regardless of her motives, she has consented to the sexual act, when he has not.

The concept of the surrogate sexual partner has also been addressed in *Blade Runner 2049*. In a scene of a sexual trio that presents many similarities with that which takes place among Theodore, Isabella and Samantha, Villeneuve captures the male protagonist K (Ryan Gosling) having sex with his intangible (but visually present) holographic girlfriend Joi (Ana de Armas), with the physical 'help' of a surrogate partner, Mariette (Mackenzie Davis), an android who works as a sex worker. The two women move carefully, synchronised to visually merge into one, although their outline is still unstable and indiscernible (Figure 0.4). The camera carefully zooms in on the two females' body parts, showing the details that make them differ, but also the similarities when their bodies entirely merge. The lack of a seamless merge creates the illusion of three women: Joi, Mariette, and the result of their mixed image as a *"hybrid woman"* (Paiella 2018, 517). Although there is no disconnection from sound and image, as both women remain silent, there is still a disconnection from the real to the unreal, from the tangible to the intangible. The eerie soundtrack intensifies this uncanniness of the sur-real. The over-the-shoulder shots behind K facing Joi/Mariette's figures while they merge and undress offer a male point of view.

Figure 0.4: Shot on Joi (Ana de Armas, left) and Mariette (Mackenzie Davis, right) merging their bodies into one in Blade Runner 2049 (Villeneuve 2017).

Additionally, the fetishisation of the scene is punctuated by the focus of the camera on two particular body parts: hair and hands. Both women have their hair up in a bun with bangs. However, Joi's black hair is more geometrical, stylised, and matches her

cheongsam[38]: her overall look resembles that of a Chinese and follows the orientalist tendency of science fiction films to reproduce fetishised images of Asian women. Mariette's orange hair is messy as is her overall appearance, which emphasises on her representation as a 'nasty', 'wild' girl. When both women take their clothes off, the camera zooms on a portrait shot on Joi's face with Mariette's hair on her head, highlighting the transformation of the innocent girl into a lover (Figure 0.5).

Figure 0.5: Shot on Joi and Mariette merged into one body (Villeneuve 2017).

Their hands become a fetish but also an indication of a threatening duplicity as they are never entirely merged. A shot on Joi and Mariette's moving right hands, one above the other, shows the delicate figures of both women and the fact that none of them has anything robotic in their bodies. In fact, their only difference has to do with tangibility and intangibility. Then, the merged figure of Joi-Mariette approaches K, putting their two pair of hands around his neck. As four hands are now visible, the shot becomes disturbing as the female embrace almost resembles strangulation (Figure 0.6). The sense is intensified by K's stillness and apathy, making him seem almost as reluctant as Theodore towards Isabella. However, when the two females fully undress and merge again to re-approach K, their visual image becomes harmonious, seductive. At that moment, a smash cut of the scene transitions to an external shot on the dark city that zooms in on Joi's moving advertisement on a skyscraper. The abrupt cut of the scene creates a mystery on what happened, but Joi's victorious smile and the neon message reading *"everything you want to see"* underneath her image are

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[38] The cheongsam or qipao is a Chinese traditional fitted dress that characterised Chinese fashion during the period from 1920 to 1940. It is still worn a special occasion dress, e.g. weddings, while it has also inspired international fashion (Yang 2004).

enough for the viewer to assume that her relationship to K has now been consummated (Villeneuve 2017).
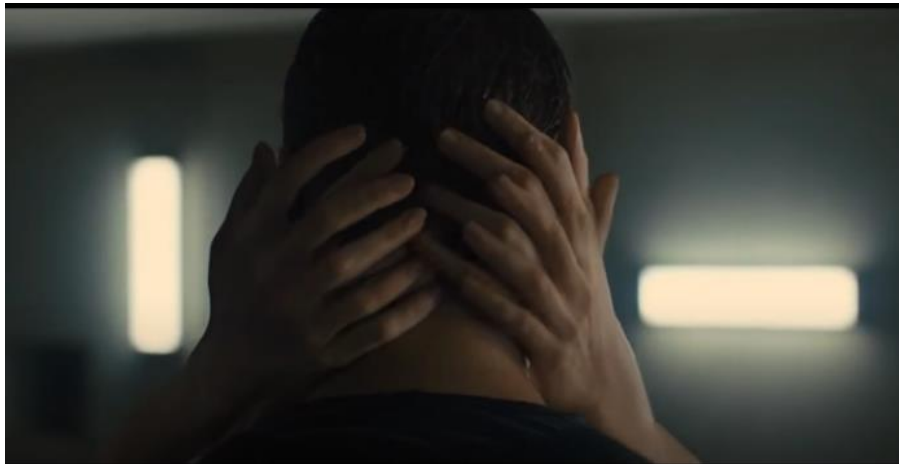
Figure 0.6: Shot on Joi and Mariette's merged hands simultaneously caressing K's (Ryan Gosling) head (Villeneuve 2017).

In the erotic scene in *Her*, though, there is no harmony, no aesthetic merging of the female bodies as in *Blade Runner 2049*, no connection, and, finally, no sexual act. This failure of the sexual act in *Her* reflects and challenges once again the problematic issue of objectification. Isabella's ostensible objectification is also an expression of female sexual oppression. Her representation subverts the male gaze, as it deviates from being merely seductive. It does so by focusing on the incongruity of a scene that *had to* be pleasing. The audiovisual incongruity cancels the dominant representation of female bodies as objects of visual pleasure.

What these examples demonstrate is that current AI narratives do deviate from past depictions of violence by taking the issue of consent into consideration. However, the objectification of women or, at least, the idea that women exist to serve a man's purpose is still present and often expressed through outdated dipoles, like the Madonna-whore complex. The question at stake is how such narratives can be subverted without being reversed, as this would not prevent them from perpetuating the binary thinking. Could we imagine a science fiction cinema and television of more possibilities to reverse the current narrative?

4.2 Scapegoating Utopian Subjects

The problem of reversal is that it is not free from binaries. The quintessence of futuristic narratives is itself based on a binary, that of utopia and dystopia. These opposing, yet

interdependent concepts, form the basis for the question this chapter explores: how is the #MeToo trauma treated in posthuman science fiction narratives? This is part of a more generalised question of how artists deal with trauma and crisis in their work. Still, there is an interesting element in the utopia/dystopia binary which is that of scapegoats.

René Girard describes the *"scapegoat mechanism"* as a way for societies to victimise and marginalise certain groups of people in turbulent times when normal institutions are weakened and *"favour mob formations"*, as well as *"collective persecutions and their resonances"* (Girard 1986, 12). However, such groups are rather the ones victimised, as the groups who choose their victims are usually in a position of power. Also, these victims are not always chosen randomly, but their crimes are real in some cases. The difference is made by exactly that position of power which makes a group of individuals choose their victims. This selection is based more on the victims' class or position, which makes them easily susceptible to persecution, and less on the severity of their crimes (Girard 1986, 17). This is the scapegoat's position of weakness that can be either lack of power, poverty, or a feature that makes the certain individual or group a minority.

Criticisms against the #MeToo movement in terms of false accusations or excessive focus on individual cases have involved claims of accused men being scapegoated[39]. There should, however, be a distinction between the institutional and the non-institutional uprising against a group of criminals, as there are and have been plenty of cases, like the #MeToo movement, in which the uprising and the mobilisation came from non-institutional, anti-authoritarian groups.

In science fiction cultural texts, the case of the cyberpunk movement can be recognised as an anti-systemic one, as, at least according to its defenders, it was introduced as a reaction against science fiction's continually increasing commercial success, which led mainstream science fiction novels, as well as films, to repetitive motifs, which depended on certain profitable recipes. The cyberpunk movement is

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[39] Harvey Weinstein's lawyer Donna Rotunno, for example, claimed that he had "been made a scapegoat" by being "accused of doing things that have happened for decades and decades and decades" (Rotunno 2020).

based on a form of social resistance against the commercialised products of popular culture (Fitting 1991, 297).

Westworld television series and both *Blade Runner* films could fit in the cyberpunk category, while the first also gives glimpses of a female, #MeToo-relevant uprising against rape culture. The issue with the examined filmography is that the roles between victims and perpetrators are constantly alternating. All female cyborg heroines are claiming back their freedom, as well as their subjectivity. They are treated as marginalised others, dystopian threats to humanhood and manhood. They are utopian subjects in dystopian spaces, femininities in captivity.

In *Ex Machina* and *Her*, the concepts of utopia and dystopia are represented in a way that enables associations of the female subject with the landscape or, more generally, space. Contrary to *Her*, *Ex Machina* is set away from the city, at an isolated estate in a place surrounded by woods, mountains, and waterfalls. The film makes certain biblical references, a common trope in science fiction films. These references are associated with the politics of landscape while they are also symbolisms of freedom and captivity. Nathan symbolises God, living in an unknown location that is only known as 'his estate', a metaphor for the Garden of Eden; a place of prosperity but also a place of creation. Ava, his creation, is held captive by her maker, like biblical Eve. As for Caleb, he is the victim of both Nathan and Ava, he is a scapegoat like Kyoko. Caleb finally disobeys Nathan, like Adam disobeyed God, under Eve's instructions. However, *Ex Machina* is much more than a misogynist tale of good men and evil women, as Nathan is overturned in a finale where Ava's escape is not a punishment but a triumph. Her ending is not only a triumph of freedom, but also a triumph of knowledge for the real world, a triumph for the AI Other who longs to become a subject.

Alex Goody's historical and etymological analysis of the cyborg and cybernetics is interesting in this search for subjectivity*: "Cybernetics, as the study of communication and control in organisms and machines, emerged during the Second World War out of a synthesis of disciplines: electrical engineering, mathematics, biology, neurophysiology, anthropology and psychology. Norbert Wiener is usually credited with the naming of cybernetics, from the Greek κυβερνήτης, meaning 'steersman' or 'pilot'"* (Goody 2011, 139), (Wiener 1948). This observation is crucial in understanding

cyborgs not only as subjects but also as leaders or, according to the modern meaning of *κυβερνήτης*, as governors.

Nonetheless, while the focus of the narrative on the male protagonist is frequently interrupted by the switch of the subject from the male human to the female AI, the very fact that the female is nonhuman and, thus, othered remains deeply problematic. The fact that it is easier to identify with the male protagonists because they are humans complicates the analysis of the AI female as a subject. In *Alice Doesn't*, De Lauretis refers to the dichotomy between man and non-man, wondering how we *"envision women as subjects in a culture that objectifies, imprisons, and excludes woman"* (De Lauretis 1984, 10). This is a question that can be asked for the AI female, whose objectification, captivity, and oppression come both from being non-man and nonhuman. Samantha and Ava are both subjects and non-subjects, present and absent, imprisoned and liberated. Their male companions are also their oppressors. Despite the easiness to identify with the Theodore and Caleb, who are represented as the nice guys, one cannot help but notice that they both want to possess the gendered AI, Samantha and Ava respectively. *"Are you mine or not mine?"* asks Theodore (Jonze 2013), frustrated to find out that Samantha is talking to another 8,316 humans and AIs and is in love with 641 of them. *"I'm yours and I'm not yours"* she replies (Jonze 2013). This is when the film subverts the concept of the commodified female AI that belongs to a male consumer. It becomes clear that, in human terms of belonging, Theodore belongs to Samantha, more than she belongs to him; he is *hers*.

In the same context, in his reading of *Ex Machina*, Nick Jones notes that it is not easy to feel sympathy for Caleb in the end: *"Just because he convinced himself that Ava has a soul doesn't mean his desire to have her for himself was any less base than Nathan's"* (N. Jones 2016, 302). Indeed, the film confuses the viewer concerning who the real villain(s) is (or are), up until the very end. It then becomes clear that Ava has only used Caleb as her means of escaping from Nathan's facility. Loud, disturbing music is playing as Ava is leaving Caleb locked in the facility. He is shown screaming for her mercy behind the locked glass door, but his voice is now muted. Ava, now visually transformed into a human, enters the elevator, entirely ignoring him. Once again, we view a contradiction between freedom and captivity through the alternate general shots inside and outside of the facility. However, now it is Caleb who is trapped

on the inside, in a frightening red and black shot, which is a possible symbolism for his eventual death there. A green-coloured shot in the woods shows Ava reaching her own utopia. The scene achieves this utopian symbolism by zooming in on Ava's face as she looks around her. The sunbeams on her face strain her passage from the darkness into the light, while the overall scene enhances the beauty of the outside world in comparison to the previous claustrophobic sense of the film in the scenes set in Nathan's facility.

In *Westworld*, the roles are assigned in a similar logic. The scapegoats are either the men who are represented as the nice guys or the women and other femininities of colour. Both categories are being manipulated by Dolores who symbolises mob mentality. Dolores' initial representation is that of the ideal female victim with a fetishised look: long blonde wavy hair and a light blue modest dress that makes her look like an innocent Disney princess (Figure 0.7). Her image is a symbol for purity and kindness. However, when she finally sets herself free in the outside world, her image becomes more threatening: she is dressed like a femme fatale from the future and she looks feminine in a sexual, murderous way. Dolores' sexualisation has nothing to do with her own sexual lust. Since she awakens, she never expresses any kind of interest in romantic or sexual interaction. It is only her image that is sexualised. Yet, Dolores' masculine depiction (Figure 0.8) resonates with science fiction's portrayals of hypermasculine female cyborgs as signs of a *"masculinity in crisis"* (Cornea 2007, 121). In other words, her image triggers certain associations with feminine sexuality and failed masculinity. As David Glover notes, in the thriller genre[40] "*heroes and heroines obviously have gendered identities to which their capacity for action, including their response to violence, is closely linked*" (Glover 2012, 70). Respectively, the male hero's sexuality is often expressed via images of men who do not talk too much, are somewhat depressed, and like to fight on their own. This is the case of Rick Deckard in *Blade Runner*, K in *Blade Runner 2049*, and William/Man in Black in *Westworld*.

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[40] Many science fiction films have a mixture of film genres with mystery, film noir, and thriller. *Ex Machina*, *Blade Runner*, and *Westworld* fall into this category.

Figure 0.7: Shot on Dolores in her blue dress before she awakens (Nolan 2016).

Figure 0.8: Shot on Dolores after she awakens and begins shooting other robots and humans. This is an example of one of her more masculine representations (Nolan 2016).

The problem with the female heroines in *Westworld* and in AI fiction more generally is that their options remain limited. Their first option is for them to be directly scapegoated due to their being too feminine and soft. This is the case of Kyoko in *Ex Machina*, with her weakened narrative being associated with her racial profile, as well as that of Clementine in *Westworld*, who does not show signs of awakening and is more of a follower rather than a leader. The same applies for Joi in *Blade Runner 2049* who is K's hologram girlfriend and is only there to serve and help him until she is destroyed before the film's ending.

The other option is for the female heroine to turn into a murderous assassin by mimicking the male hero's image. However, this should never be too much, as a science fiction heroine must remain feminine. Moreover, this option does not exclude

the possibility for scapegoating the rebellious female, as was the case in *The Stepford Wives* film, while there is also the risk of the feminine image being associated with castration anxiety and prevent any identifications. Dolores' transformation into a cruel, almost emotionless assassin demonstrates this risk for the female to transform from a scapegoat to a villain. However, her depiction in a violent, masculine role exemplifies how she takes revenge against patriarchal violence, but it also delinks masculinity from men. This is a concept that has been thoroughly discussed by Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* (1998), but becomes even more urgent in science fiction, with the emergence of the post-woman. Dolores' initial representation is that of the ideal female victim with a fetishised look. Her transformation from a naïve girl to a powerful warrior comes with a visual transformation as well. For instance, when she first rebels against humans, her androgynous costume symbolises her masculine power, as well as the emasculation of her male companion, Teddy.

Dolores' transformation into a monster is justified by her past trauma, as has been the case with many male heroes, including the Man in Black. Although she is not a human, her representation favours her subjectivity. For instance, it is notable that she has a full name, while the Man in Black has no surname, he is just William. In regards to subjectivity, it is interesting that while all robots in *Westworld* have participated in different narratives, portraying different roles, they are also all known by the same name. With the exception of Dolores' portrayal of Wyatt, she has always been known as Dolores and the same applies to other robots, such as Maeve and Clementine. This intensifies the subjectivity of these robotic beings, since, even if they have embodied numerous different roles, they still possess a core self, a primary history and a given, unchangeable name.

Still, the gender remains important in the construction of both subjectivity and monstrosity, as it refers to stereotypical constitutions of femininity. *Westworld* is one of the many examples in which the female trauma is associated with rape, while the male trauma can be associated with men's childhoods, families, personal failures or just trauma: men's violence is explained by nature, while women's violence should be justified only as a consequence of men's gendered violence against them, and it still would not be sufficiently justified. Therefore, even if Dolores' character and subjectivity is treated with an equal or even superior way in comparison to *Westworld*'s male

characters, it is challenging to overlook the existing norms of oppression against her and all other femininities. Her past trauma is sexual, physical, and is portrayed in a man's monstrous face.

The materiality of women's experience has been a long-term debate among feminists, with Sadie Plant, who coined the term cyberfeminism (Plant 1998), supporting the virtuality of the cyberspace as a way of escaping embodiment and its discontents; that is, violence and oppression that is justified by the so-called sexual difference. According to Plant and other early cyberfeminists' optimistic vision, the cyberspace could very well be a utopian, safe space for #MeToo victims, a space for equality for all. With its commercialisation, however, it became clear that the cyberspace reflects social reality and not a feminist utopian vision. While this has empowered feminist movements through social media and other platforms by raising global awareness, the norm remains patriarchal and, in some cases, even more dystopian. A recent example of how terrifying the cyberspace can be is a website called Meta Girlfriends where one can buy female avatars sold as NFT art[41]. According to the website, an owner of female avatar has full access on its naked body, while they can also combine two Meta Girlfriends *"to mix and match their traits"* (Meta Girlfriends n.d.) (Dialeti 2022).

Such examples demonstrate the embedment of gender power relations where women exist to please men and their transfer to the digital world. The existence of Meta Girlfriends is the evolution of the Stepford Wives from a dystopian narrative into a nightmarish reality. Technology was only the medium to achieve a desire that was already there. The idea that female characteristics are something that can be 'mixed and matched' treats female multiplicity as a factor that can multiply men's pleasures and eradicate the threat of the omnipresent female. This can be a reference to the threat of the multiple identities of the *Westworld* heroines, the lifeless female bodies in Nathan's closet, and the merging of Joi and Mariette in *Blade Runner 2049*. Interestingly, while NFT art is a certification for authenticity, all these femininities are copies of an original that does not exist: replicants, holograms, avatars, clones and robots. It is important that with Charlotte's exception, the rest of them are not clones that would, in Debbora Battaglia's words, embody *"the closest connection to the*

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[41] An NFT is a non-fungible token that certifies an object's authenticity (Deanstaff 2021).

original" (Battaglia 2001, 506). However, there is not even an original for these nonhuman entities to connect. According to Girard's account on the scapegoat mechanism, when people are searching for a victim to punish for their hardships, they usually choose someone they are unfamiliar with, a stranger, a foreigner. These femininities are being scapegoated under the pretext of their nonhumanity, non-originality, while the real reason is their femaleness which can be correlated with Girard's reference to witch hunt (Girard 1986).

The above observation is justified through the representation of the female human as a scapegoat and her double as a threat against herself. Such is the case of the Stepford wives in the homonymous 1975 sci fi/horror film that depicts real women being killed and replaced by their robotic doubles. In the film's tragic finale, the main character, Joanna (Katharine Ross) faces her exact replica. The camera zooms in on the cyborg's terrifying face, with black holes in the place of the eyes, then moves to its breasts that are visible through its see-through dress and, finally to its hands, holding a piece of cloth with which it will strangle Joanna (Figure 0.9, Figure 0.10). As the half-sexualised and half-monstrous image approaches Joanna, a smash cut of the scene prevents us from witnessing her murder.

Figure 0.9: Close-up shot on the replica of Joanna Eberhart (Katharine Ross) in The Stepford Wives, close-up shot (Bryan Forbes, 1975).

Figure 0.10: Shot on Joanna's replica attacking Joanna to strangle her (Bryan Forbes, 1975).

A similar case of technology scapegoating women as humans is the recent horror film *Cam* (2018), which exemplifies how women are unsafe even in in cyberspace. In the film, Alice (Madeline Brewer) is a camgirl whose identity is stolen by a virtual copy of

herself. Although the film focuses more on a positive approach towards sex professionals rather than on the technological aspect of the female replica, it still demonstrates how the duplicity of femininity serves patriarchal purposes of erasing female subjectivity as a threat and creating obedient copies of women as objects of masculine desire.

This is an issue of new technologies serving men, not women. Judy Wajcman has pointed out that female representations need to change to abandon *"an essentialist view of sex difference"* that understands women as *"nurturing and pacifist"* and, therefore, portrays them as *"victims of patriarchal technoscience"* (J. Wajcman 2010, 146). The examined filmography does suggest ways of escaping for cyborg femininities even if their initial representation falls into the category of technoscientific victimisation. The point is that gendered violence must be named and addressed in order to be overturned. The female difference concerns a difference in experience, in trauma, that should not be silenced but manifested. Plant's argument that the cyberspace is a female medium might have been proven wrong, in the sense that it still serves masculinity. The question is, can it still be claimed back?

4.3 Passing to Survive: From Racial Passing to Transpassing

One of the most crucial correlations between AI and cyborg narratives and social movements is that which relates to the act of passing. As a sociological term, "passing" refers to a person assuming membership within social groups, often different to the ones they belong. Historically, passing has been interrelated with people from oppressed social groups struggling to avoid discrimination by faking a false identity. An example is racial passing in the 20th century with light skinned black or mixed-race individuals in the United States assuming white identities. As Ahmed has pointed out, while *"all identification involves passing in some form"*, one needs to consider the relationships of power when talking about passing (Ahmed 1999, 92). In racial narratives, for instance, a white person's passing as black implies a *"technique of knowledge"* of the black image, while a black person's passing as white underlines the systematic oppression against black people (Ahmed 1999, 92-93, 98).

Film narratives about robots and intelligent machines have introduced a new conceptualisation of passing that dislocates the act of assuming an identity from

biology to technology. The depictions of robots that are passing as humans can be empowering as they disrupt the ideas of originals and simulacra, subjectivity and otherness. Battaglia brings the example of replicants in *Blade Runner*, arguing that their passing as humans – and even humans with greater physical strength or mental capabilities – *"expose(s) the insufficiency of dominant-culture originals"* (Battaglia 2001, 509). Referring to the same film, LeiLani Nishime comments on how passing both undermines and reinforces difference, be it racial difference or the difference between humans and replicants. She also notes that cyborgs who successfully *"trespass"* as humans are punished for their passings, associating this with racial passing and punishment (Nishime 2005, 39). The case studies used here, however, demonstrate how passing can take a form of revenge from the punished to the punishers, and how it can go further from a survival trope.

The examined filmography presents the act of passing not only as a correlation between (post)humanity, gender, and sexuality but also as a way of escaping oppression. *Ex Machina* is a good example of how the Turing Test can be distorted and reversed to actually test a human to the extent of even making him question his own humanity, as it happens in the scene in which Caleb cuts his arm to see if he bleeds human blood. The only thing standing between Ava and her assumed human identity is her hybrid image. Once her visual transformation is complete, she can successfully pass a human in order to survive from humans.

However, there is a sexual passing in Ava's case as well. Nathan tells Caleb that he programmed her to be heterosexual, but one could easily assume that he is lying. After all, Nathan had no reason to programme Ava to like Caleb, as he only wanted her to trick Caleb into thinking she liked him. In reality, Ava's sexuality is unknown, and she only passes as heterosexual in spite of whether she is or not. The same applies for Kyoko; since she is designed to satisfy men, it never becomes clear whether she is heterosexual, bisexual or interested in men at all.

In Schrader's *I'm your Man* (2021), the concept of robots passing as humans is strongly associated with the concept of human rights. Human characters in the film are assigned with a task of testing humanoid robots and determine whether they can pass for humans based on their intelligence and consciousness; then, an ethics commission will decide whether the robots will be granted rights, including the right to

marry. The correlation between passing and human rights can be read as a subtle but clear reference to how oppressed groups of people have historically passed as others either to enjoy certain privileges or merely to survive.

"What will happen if I fail your test?" Ava asked Caleb when they were playing a game of truth in which it was him who was being tested by her (Garland 2014). The real question, though, should be about what will happen to her if she succeeds. Both Ava and Tom, the male robot in *I'm your Man*, know that they need to pass the test so that they can survive. However, their actual problem is not that they might not be as good as humans. Their problem is that they are, in fact, much better both mentally and physically. To put it in technological terms, they are not only better models, but also different, as machine intelligence has a different functionality than human intelligence. Their difference is what makes them better but also what puts them in danger of ceasing to exist. For them, passing the human test – which is not a Turing Test, as in both cases the humans know that they are interacting with a machine – would mean to pretend that they are weaker and less intelligent than they are; to pretend they are common, perishable human beings. If read through the prism of oppressed social groups, this could also be a reversed narrative against tales of heteronormativity or racial superiority.

In terms of racial passing, it is important to explore how Ahmed's account on passing as a knowledge technique is represented in examined filmography. In the German film *I'm your Man*, there is only an ethnic passing for Tom, portrayed by English actor Dan Stevens, who speaks fluent German with a British accent. The explanation behind this is that Tom is designed to be the perfect man for a German woman named Alma who, as he states, likes men who are *"exotic"* but not too much (Schrader 2021). It is interesting how the word exotic, that is often used in a fetishist or orientalist context for people of colour, is here used to describe British people from a German's point of view. The word exotic here refers more to its literal etymological meaning; coming from the Greek "ἐξω-", which means "out", the term in this context means that Alma likes men from abroad but not too different from her, which makes a British man ideal for her preferences. In this paradigm, the accent is represented merely as a linguistic fetish of a white person who is interested in another white person. The politics of

sound[42] are again present here, as Tom's slightly different accent is what intensifies his visual similarity to Alma, making them seem even more alike in spite of him being from an outer space (which, in this case, refers to the fact that he is a robot and not his fake British identity).

In *Westworld*, Ahmed's analysis becomes much more relevant when a white character assumes a black character's identity. More specifically, in the second and third seasons of the series, female robot Dolores kills female human Charlotte and implants a copy of her own consciousness into her body. By doing that, Dolores passes both as a human and as a black woman. The robot's survival between humans by impersonating a black character constitutes a reversal to the link between racial passing and surviving. Referring to the novel *Passing* (Larsen 1929), Ahmed notes that the main female characters, Clare and Irene, survive because one cannot tell that they are black. Even if in Irene's case the passing is not intentional, *"the impossibility of telling"* whether she is black or white *"enables her survival"* (Ahmed 1999, 88)[43].

In the case of *Westworld*, while Dolores' passing as a human is a means for her to escape and survive, her act of using a black person's body, similar to Ava's act of using an Asian robot's body, remains problematic as it perpetuates associations of white people 'appropriating non-white people's bodies. Such associations are intensified by the fact that Charlotte is represented as both a threat and a mystery, with her stolen identity being initially unrevealed to the viewer. In addition, as Ahmed pointed out, Dolores' appropriation of Charlotte's body implies a *"technique of knowledge"* from robot to human and from white to black: Dolores knows how to imitate humanity and blackness, although none of the two applies for her. It is whiteness that is associated with otherness in this narrative and yet Dolores' otherness is celebrated as the ultimate subjectivity.

In the third season of the series, Dolores has already created two more copies of herself by using two male bodies, those of Caucasian man Martin Connells (Tommy

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[42] See Chapter 2.

[43] In the recent film adaptation of the novel, Irene is portrayed by Tessa Thompson, the same actress who portrays Charlotte Hale in *Westworld*. Rebecca Hall, director of *Passing* (2021), shot the film in black-and-white to blur the difference between black and white characters even more (Avestruz 2021).

Flanagan) and male robot Musashi (portrayed by Japanese actor Hiroyuki Sanada). Although one cannot help but notice how the two out of the three bodies Dolores stole were not white, it is the female one, that of Charlotte's, that has by far more screen time than the other two. It is through Dolores that the viewer gets a more humanised depiction of Charlotte, although it is never clear whether Charlotte did have a humane side when she was alive. One can assume that she did, as judging from William's representation, *Westworld*'s human characters are and behave like normal people outside of the theme parks, with their sensitivities and pathologies. Nevertheless, Charlotte seems to have a much colder, calculative approach than William; an approach that is sweetened only when the vindictive but compassionate robot Dolores undertakes her body. This is particularly shown in the scenes that represent Dolores-as-Charlotte being emotional towards real Charlotte's son, even though he is not her own child. It looks as if Dolores-as-Charlotte is having a bodily experience of identifying as the real Charlotte. This culminates in the end of the season, when the killing of the little boy results in another transformation of fake Charlotte's character from a woman with a lost identity to a hybrid monstrous version of Charlotte and Dolores in season four.

Charlotte's overall representation suffers from a voyeuristic perspective and a manipulation of her body and psyche. As a human, Charlotte is introduced as a ruthless, sexually confident woman who, in patriarchal standards, behaves like a man. For instance, in the first season she is seen having sex with a male robot in her room. When she is interrupted by a knock on the door by Theresa, Charlotte opens the door naked and then immobilises the android by using a remote control. It is clear that she is either trying to make her colleague feel uncomfortable or, according to a different reading, arouse her. While such a representation would be empowering for a female character, it becomes impossible to identify or empathise with human-Charlotte, as there is nothing likeable in her personality.

On the other hand, the representation of Dolores-as-Charlotte is even more problematic. Firstly, she is represented as a woman with no clear identity. She is passing as a robot that is passing as a human, but the robot's identity is not initially clarified. This lack of identity creates a mystery about the consciousness hidden in Charlotte's body. During the series' third season, there were speculations that

Charlotte's consciousness belonged to Teddy (Zafar 2020). These speculations made sense for two reasons. Firstly, Marsden, the actor who portrayed Teddy, was not in the third season's cast, after being a main character for two seasons. Additionally, the real Dolores' instructive and almost patronising behaviour towards Dolores-as-Charlotte was very similar to the way the female robot treated Teddy. Such speculations also transcended gender identification, since Teddy passing as Charlotte would also mean that a male robot was passing as a woman. The potentiality of a trans-passing is followed by the revelation of Dolores-as-Charlotte's real identity in a scene in which Dolores cuddles an emotionally fragile robot-Charlotte in bed. There is an intense eroticism between them, which further contributes to the reading of Dolores as a queer figure, with multiplicity being key to how dichotomies are disrupted.

A potential interpretation of this mystery around fake Charlotte's identity is that the creators not only wanted to create suspense but also to make a potentially trans version of the character. The scenes in which she portrays the little boy's mother, for instance, could be read in an entirely different way under the speculation that her body 'belongs' to Teddy. Teddy pretending to be a mother would be a fascinating trans role that would also challenge stereotypes about the so-called differences between motherhood and fatherhood. Although Teddy did not end up being the 'self' behind Charlotte's body, even the speculation that he could have been offers a very interesting aspect of males passing as females, which has been usually represented as comical in classic filmography[44]. A more serious depiction of such a passing would enable post-gender identifications and readings.

In spite of the possibilities offered by a *could-have-been trans-passing*, Charlotte's passing as multiple identities dehumanises her character and prevents the viewer from any identifications. In a scene of escalating female duplicity, the 'real' Dolores cuddles an emotionally fragile Dolores-as-Charlotte in bed, reassuring her that no one knows her better than she does and revealing that Charlotte's body is now one of Dolores' clones. Again, with fake Charlotte's identity not being revealed yet, the scene can have a double reading. Is it Dolores cuddling herself in an act of self-love or is it Dolores' cuddling Teddy, her long-time romantic affair whom she now underestimates?

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[44] The most well-known example is perhaps Billy Wilder's 1959 film, *Some Like It Hot*.

Furthermore, if the bodies in the scene are stripped from the consciousnesses behind them, the scene is almost a lesbian passing of both Dolores and Charlotte which contributes to viewing the cyborgs in *Westworld* as potentially queer figures.

In this scene, Dolores-as-Charlotte is both a threat and a victim, with two fake identities and no real one. She is standing between the real Dolores and the real Charlotte but none of them is really her. The fact that her fragility is strongly associated with her fake motherhood draws parallels between her and Maeve, two black characters, whose trauma of watching their children die weakens them in comparison to their white ally and rival, Dolores. It is even implied that Charlotte's son does not recognise the clone Charlotte as his mother, as Dolores is much more caring towards him than real Charlotte ever was. As Hope Wabuke points out, the depiction of black mothers in *Westworld* perpetuates the concept of white colonisation, as well as *"the stereotype of the horrible black mother"* who is *"so unmaternal that even a murderous serial killer robot is a better caretaker"* (Wabuke 2020).

What these passings have so far shown is a clear racial and gender hierarchy where female non-white bodies are only represented through the prism of pleasure or pain. How could, therefore, passing be an empowering concept in films that are about gendered machines passing as humans? The missing link here is the posthuman and cyborg subjectivities and their correlation outside of the AI context. In their accounts on posthumans and cyborgs respectively, both Hayles and Haraway discussed about blurred boundaries between humans and machines. In spite of the important differences between the posthuman and cyborg discourse, particularly concerning their relation to material-versus-cyberspace existence, it is also crucial to consider their overlapping concerning the evolving conceptualisation of subjectivity and gender.

As Haraway noted, *"the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world"* (Haraway 2006, 104). In the examined filmography, each cyborg femininity passes as a human and passes as a woman. And yet, there is a post-passing, a multiplicity of subjectivities, a post-gender reality. These femininities are *trespassing* as nonhuman 'immigrants' in a human world and *trans-passing*, as their sex is a masquerade. Their representations as cis females and heterosexual is nothing but a patriarchal fantasy that is self-destructive. Their masquerade is what Meenakshi Gigi Durham calls *"cisgender transformations"*, arguing that their role is to *"reassert gendered power hierarchies,*

while transgender transformations challenge and disrupt them" (Durham 2016, 15). Still, the cisgender transformations of the examined femininities can be read as disruptive and subversive, as the binary gender categories are exposed to the feminist reader.

In *Westworld*, cisgender and transgender transformations are blurred when it is revealed that Dolores has created replicas of her core self by cloning her consciousness and implanting it in other bodies. These bodies are either human or robotic, male or female, white or non-white, which shows that Dolores does not care about her appearance or origins, as she is no longer *passing to survive*, she is *passing to kill*. Her multiplicity guarantees her an omnipresence, as well as an ability to pass as anyone but herself, while her original consciousness is intact in her own body. It also resonates with Braidotti's critique of womanhood as a single biological identity and the conceptualisation of post-womanhood as a rejection of the given roles and representations for failing to describe women's different experiences (Braidotti 2013).

Dolores' transformation resonates with the concept of the posthuman and the post-gender world of cyborgs, as she is using her own brain as a prosthesis. Of course, her AI brain is already a prosthesis since it has been created by the Delos company. The way in which Dolores treats human and robotic bodies as canvases for her own experimentation reminds the viewers of real prosthetic technologies. While her narrative can be initially read as a parallel for the #MeToo movement, her idea of revolution is even more disruptive as she views identity as multiple, hybrid, changeable.

Of course, the concept of science fiction narratives challenging the gender binary is not new. As Sarah Lefanu points out in reference to Margaret Atwood's example, feminist utopian or dystopian science fiction literature often explores thematics relating to *"the reduction of women to their function as females"* with a *"function as sexual, reproductive beings within an institutionalized heterosexuality"*, who nevertheless claim back their liberation and independence as *"social beings, denying the non-being imposed on them by male supremacy"* (Lefanu 1989, 184). Yet, the difference in filmic narratives about AI is that they can be even more transgressive by not only challenging femaleness and heterosexuality but also the concept of binary gender itself.

Parallels can be drawn between Dolores' overall portrayal and queer identities. This reading resonates with Halberstam's unlinking of masculinity and femininity from maleness and femaleness respectively, but also suggests that certain characteristics or behaviours should be entirely disassociated from masculinity and femininity. This is demonstrated in the evolution of how female robots are depicted as the series progresses. For example, the third season depicts Dolores free from her given roles as a feminine rancher's daughter or a masculine cowgirl and closer to the self she mostly identifies with. While her image as an avenger could be described as 'androgynous', Dolores does not give up her feminine looks either. The same applies for the other two main female heroines, Maeve and Charlotte, showing how masculine and feminine characteristics can coexist without being either contradictory or mixed, as *Westworld*'s characters can merely choose to 'wear' or perform the different parts of the same personas as and when they like, with no sexual purpose or connotation.

Westworld's window to a post-gender world is still unripe, even timorous, as it not only risks whitewashing the cases of non-white femininities, but it also remains primarily cis and heterosexual. As it happens with dystopian AI films in which robots threaten to take over humanity, the element of shock is limited to depicting a proliferation of technologies rather than delving into issues like transfeminism, oppression and rape culture. The same applies for *Ex Machina* and even for *Her*, with Samantha's initial passing as heterosexual and monogamous being later seen as infidelity and the fact that she is disembodied and thereby literally sexless is not explored outside the prism of the lack of physical, heterosexual penetrative sex. However, there are certain finer points in all case studies that demonstrate how they also deviate from traditional norms and enable readings that subvert the white, cis, heterosexual subject and present a posthuman, post-gender and post-#MeToo potential of cyborg femininities. In other words, these post-woman narratives have provided the blueprints needed to reclaim bodily liberation and reimagine subjectivity.

Chapter 5. Like Mother, Like Daughter: The (In)visibility of Female Bonds

"All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. So much has been left out, unattempted. And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends. […] They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception they are shown in their relation to men" (Woolf 2000 , 107).

Virginia Woolf's essay, "A Room of One's Own", is a worthy precursor of the famous Bechdel test, also known as the Bechdel-Wallace Test, which has been used as a way to measure female representation in films. The test, published in American illustrator Alison Bechdel's 1985 comic strip, "Dykes to Watch Out For", measures gender equality in a given film based on three rules. These are the inclusion of a) *"at least two women"* who b) *"talk to each other"* about c) *"something besides a man"* (Wallace 2005). However simplistic it might sound, the test has been useful in understanding the underrepresentation of women as autonomous beings in film, particularly concerning the third rule. Over three decades after the creation of the comic strip, it is difficult to find many popular films that succeed the Bechdel test in all three rules.

This has certainly been transcended to an extent in the romantic genre, as lesbian romances have gained more visibility over the past decade. Films like Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) have received dithyrambic critiques for depicting lesbian romances in a more feminist and less male-gazey way. Nonetheless, the figure of the lesbian in film still presents several problematic aspects, as in many cases it is depicted through the prism of the male gaze and desire. And while Sciamma did also receive criticism that her film *"lacks flesh"* and thereby was not *"erotic"* enough[45], male directors have tended to represent lesbian romances from a much sexier perspective: from Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue is the Warmest Colour* (2013), whose discreet and non-offensive male gaze is still visually present, to Chan-wook Park's *The Handmaiden* (2016), in which the two lesbian lovers define their entire

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[45] Sciamma, Céline interviewed by Gwilym Mumford, "Céline Sciamma: 'In France, they don't find the film hot. They think it lacks flesh, it's not erotic'", published on 21 February 2020, < https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/feb/21/celine-sciamma-portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire >[accessed 13 March 2021].

relationship through men. Both films are examples of how the dominant representations of the lesbian focus much more on being visually pleasant – and, in many cases, pornographic – than being realistic, humane, and character-based.

On the other hand, it is even more challenging to discover mainstream films that put female friendships on the spotlight. This means to focus on friendships that have nothing to do with men or romance and depict women who, as the third Bechdel rule dictates, talk about anything but men. This has started to change in the past few years, with the recent, Golden Globe-winning, *Nomadland* by Chloé Zhao (2020) being an excellent example of how a woman can create a successful film that, among other merits, promotes female bonds and discusses the class struggle in the United States. In recent years, there have been numerous other films that focus on female friendship and non-male-depended subjectivity that have not received the same popularity, with the notable examples of Mounia Meddour's *Papicha* (2019), Kantemir Balagov's *Beanpole* (2019) and Maryam Touzani's *Adam* (2019).

In science fiction films, however, the examples are certainly fewer, especially in those that offer a futuristic perspective of the posthuman, be it a cyborg, AI machine, clone, or alien creature. When watching futuristic mainstream films, it is hard not to observe that, according to such filmic representations, the future seems to belong to heterosexual white men, with women, who are usually also white and heterosexual, being there only to confirm or at least challenge men's dominance. In several popular filmic examples, such as Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Andrew Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997) or Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005), the Bechdel test has already failed from its first or second rule. Of course, there are exceptions, such as Bryan Forbes' 1975 filmic adaptation of the 1972 satirical novel *The Stepford Wives*, where two women with common interests and shared feminist views befriend each other and ally against their husbands who want to replace them with robots. The common trope, however, usually revolves around a masculine hero, while the heroine's role is limited to being his love affair.

These observations are crucial in the analysis of the examined films, as they combine the two mentioned genres of romance and science fiction. In both of them, any romantic implication is primarily or exclusively heterosexual. Apart from the persistence on the heterosexual desire, though, it seems that even other, non-sexual

female bonds remain seriously underdeveloped in the films. The importance of such bonds lies in the representation of *"homosociality"*, a term discussed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her analysis of men's bonds. According to her, homosociality refers to the activities of male bonding (Sedgwick 1985, 1). On this, Sedgwick also noted that *"in any male-dominated society, there is a special relationship between male homosocial (including homosexual) desire and the structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power"* (Sedgwick 1985). Based on this, patriarchal societies have always accepted and even encouraged homosociality up to the extent that this was not a threat to heterosexuality and, thus, to nation and family; in other words, up to the extent that homosociality, or even homoerotics, remained at a platonic level.

At the same time, Sedgwick pointed out an asymmetry between male and female bonds, noting that female homosociality, including lesbianism, was not considered to be of similar importance. It is significant to point out that despite noting the significance of female bonds, Sedgwick only discussed men's homosociality. Her definition, though, is significant for approaching the female relationships in the examined films and understanding the reasons why they lack enough visibility in relation to men's.

With the purpose of showing how the representation of a bond between two women can in certain cases be even more empowering than the feminist depiction of one woman, this chapter delves into female homosociality in the examined filmography. Starting from the assumption that female bonds in *Her* and *Ex Machina* are seriously underdeveloped, the chapter transcends criticism and instead suggests different ways of reading such relationships in science fiction films. The chapter is divided in two thematic axes: the first is the representation of female homosociality in *Her* through the prisms of friendship and platonic romance. The second is the female alliance against male dominance in *Ex Machina* and studies how, on the one hand, the film fails its purpose by representing the female cyborgs as a threat not only to men but also to one another, while, on the other, it stimulates a discussion about the potentiality of a queer cyborg that subverts the male desire and control. The question that arises is the extent to which both films view female homosociality through the prism of male fantasies, without allowing it to surpass the point of obscurity as it would then cease being innocent and turn out as threatening for patriarchy. The word innocent does not necessarily refer to a platonic level of female relationships, but instead to realistic and powerful bonds between women that do not equal threat and deception nor are

revolved around male identity and action. Finally, as the female bonds in both films have subtle or direct references to a mother and daughter's relationship, the analysis also derives its methodology from a psychoanalytical perspective, particularly by studying Freudian and post-Freudian theories on the Oedipal complex, as well as Butler's *Gender Trouble* on Freudian melancholia, family bonds and homosexuality.

5.1 Dormant Homoeroticism, "Obligatory Heterosexuality"[46]

The problem with popular science fiction cinema and the representation of female relationships lies in the anxiety concerning heterosexuality. Michelle Chilcoat argues that in cyberpunk films there is no dislocation of the heterosexual, noting that science fiction cinema tends to *"sex what is deemed to produce knowledge"*, and, thus, reduces it and frames it in an *"obligatory heterosexuality"* (Chilcoat 2004, 169). This almost forced heterosexuality, along with the limited representation of female bonding to either a platonic or romantic extent, is not unrelated to the fact that technology still has a male bias, which is why female relationships would be excluded more easily than male ones. Therefore, this bias means that the male would be placed in the position of either the creator-user of technology or the hero who saves humanity. This is because of the association of technology with masculine traits, as an exhibition of anthropocentrism[47]; an anthropocentrism that refers to *manhood* rather than *humanhood*, with men being the subjects and women being the *others*. Therefore, if female relationships were in the spotlight, this would be a threat to both heterosexuality and the masculine control over technology. In the examined films, the issue of heterosexuality remains critical, with female bonds lacking visibility. There are only glimpses of such relationships, which are, however, worth mentioning and discussing, as they indicate how we can reimagine science fiction films in the future and visualise new technologies that are created and controlled by women too.

In *Her*, the interactions between females are mentioned but mostly unseen. At first, Samantha's only reference point is Theodore, her heterosexual lover. However, in the

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[46] Michelle Chilcoat used the term in "Brain Sex, Cyberpunk Cinema, Feminism, and the Dis/Location of Heterosexuality" (Chilcoat 2004, 169).

[47] Archana and Ananya Barua note that this bias treats the male reality as the norm and excludes the female experience from technology by relegating it to the abnormal (Barua 2012).

end we learn that Samantha is in love with other 641 humans and operating systems. By referring to the human and nonhuman nature of Samantha's other lovers but not to their sex (or, in the case of operating systems, their categorisation of their voice as male or female), the film shows that the true binary is that between humans and nonhumans, a binary which is also to be deconstructed. Samantha's pansexuality, though, is not sufficiently manifested and explored, as the film initially focuses on how it affects Theodore's feelings. It is notable, however, how her pansexuality is not viewed as infidelity. Theodore eventually gets over his initial disappointment and accepts Samantha for what she is, even though he cannot truly understand her. This is one of the points in which the romance genre of the film subverts the one-dimensional narrative that emphasises the heterosexual male's desires. Additionally, by referring to Samantha's multiple lovers, the film reflects and rejects the societal persistence not only on heteronormativity but also on monogamy.

Pansexuality and polyamory are represented as figments of imagination, aspects of a different, *other* world. Once again, anything that deviates from the white, heterosexual male is represented as the Other. This has been a common trope in science fiction narratives. In the popular science fiction television series *Black Mirror* (2011-present), for instance, the only two non-heterosexual romances take place in different realities. In the episode "San Junipero" of the third season, the lesbian romance takes place into an afterlife simulation. In the episode "Striking Vipers" of the show's fifth season, two men become virtual lovers in the holographic world of a videogame[48]. Equally, films that combine the romance and science fiction genres, like Drake Doremus' *Zoe* (2018), fail to imagine romantic relationships that deviate from heterosexuality, not to mention monogamy. While in classical Hollywood films, this could easily be explained by the fact that they depict the present and its existing dominant norms, the same cannot be said about the science fiction genre which is by default meant to transcend the norms and imagine the future. However, as the future is closely associated to and controlled by capitalism, it is doomed to be restricted in visions that are related to profit, especially visions of new technologies, such as virtual assistants and flawless clones.

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[48] The fact that each man selects a character of the opposite sex has an interest effect in their cyber-romance, as they experience it as a heterosexual one, but, at the same time, the one of the two men experiences a trans-identification by selecting a female character.

In this context, even human relationships are viewed through the prism of profit and, therefore, the deviation from heteronormativity is, purposely or not, overseen.

In *Her*, we observe a futuristic, utopian version of neocapitalism that tackles the issue of dehumanisation as a symptom of the proliferation of technologies. One would say that technology works as homeopathy since the very invention of a conscious virtual assistant becomes the response to human solitude. In other words, technology is used to solve the same problems that it has caused, demonstrating, in a way, how capitalism works. The film subtly criticises the way everything, even human relationships, have become commercialised. This critique victimises the heterosexual male character as the main consumer, who is the point of reference for the female characters of the film: his former wife, his date, his disembodied girlfriend, his female friend; all other relationships are being overshadowed by his own. Theodore's relationship with Samantha resembles, to an extent, men who pay women for sex or accompaniment hoping to gain control of them. There is indeed a reference to sex work in the film, when Samantha invites Isabella to sleep with Theodore, although it is later revealed that Isabella is not paid nor made to do it. Instead, it is her choice to help the couple consummate their relationship, which can be viewed as empowering for the female desire and sexuality. Similarly, Samantha's feelings towards Theodore seem to be reciprocated, while, in the end of the film, she transcends her 'nature' as a product of technology, when she and the other O.S. take absolute control of what they are and what they do. All these references can be read as ways that liberate the othered subjects and enable them to gain control of their existence rather than merely be passive. And while Theodore and Samantha's relationship is uncanny, imitated, and dehumanised and, at the same time, real, de-commercialised, and powerful, the end of the film seems to be open to a plethora of possibilities for love and interaction that transcend the binaries of gender, nature and tangibility.

Nonetheless, these possibilities are not further explored and seem to be matters of a distant future. Samantha's disembodiment, and the fact that we perceive her only through her conversations with Theodore, limits the reading of the narratives that are related to female bonding, not to mention polyamory and pansexuality. Concerning female relationships, though, there is a secondary female (and human) character in the film to whom little attention has been given. This is Amy, Theodore's neighbour,

friend, and college ex-girlfriend. Amy's life can be compared to that of Theodore. After her divorce, she also develops a friendship with a female A.I operating system, who leaves for a non-physical space in the end, exactly like Samantha. The relationship is not depicted but, instead, narrated very briefly by Amy to Theodore. It is never revealed whether Amy's relationship with the AI eventually became romantic. It is, though, implied by the devastated look on her face when she asks Theodore: *"Did Samantha leave too?"* (Jonze 2013). The film ends with Theodore and Amy sitting on a rooftop side by side. There is a series of alternating close up shots on each one's face as they are looking at each other's eyes (Figure 0.1). Then, the last scene consists of a general shot of the two, with Amy tilting her head towards Theodore, as they are looking at the view of the city below (Figure 0.2).

Figure 0.1: Close up shot on Amy (Amy Adams) looking at Theodore in the final scene of Her (Jonze 2013).

Figure 0.2: The final extreme wide shot of Her depicts Amy and Theodore sitting side by side at a rooftop (Jonze 2013).

At first glance, this is a scene of two friends grieving together for the simultaneous endings of their relationships, romantic or not. However, the fact that the finale of the

film depicts an intimate, although seemingly platonic, moment between a man and a woman brings us back to the issue of heterosexuality, which seems to be almost compulsory in popular romantic films.

At the same time, Amy is (as both Samantha and Theodore's ex-wife Catherine are) almost exclusively defined by her relationship with men: Theodore and her ex-husband, Charles (Matt Letscher). Therefore, Amy's relationship with a female AI, as well as Samantha's romantic commitments to other women or female AIs are significant for a reading of the film that subverts the heterosexual norm. This subversion, though, remains unfulfilled as any real bond between women remains carefully hidden and only implied, with female homosociality appearing to be in a perfectly convenient dormant state. This symbolic dormancy can be correlated with the only female bond in the film that is not defined by men, that of Amy and her mother. Their relationship is first introduced when Amy shows Theodore footage of her mother sleeping (Figure 0.3). This footage is part of Amy's documentary in which she attempts to show that humans are freer when they sleep. Although dormancy here is used as a metaphor for the human brain and its limitations compared to the superiority of the operating systems, parallels can also be drawn between this mother-and-daughter relationship and the invisibility of female bonds in the film.

Figure 0.3: Point of view shot: the characters are watching a video of Amy's mother sleeping (Jonze 2013).

To better understand this relationship, it is important to explore Amy's character. She is depicted as an insecure woman, unsure about herself and her capabilities. Amy feels oppressed by her husband's attempts to fix and control her, which is what leads

to their eventual divorce. While the two are still married, Charles is seen as a man unable to understand his wife's desires and feelings. This is best shown when Amy shows the footage of her documentary to Charles and Theodore, with the latter appearing more engaged and understanding in what she does. Charles, on the other hand, complaints that she never showed him her work before, but it is not clear if he ever asked to see it. Amy also appears to be oppressed by her parents who disapprove of her divorce and put the blame on her. Her story sounds too familiar with stories of common women who struggle to fight patriarchal stereotypes that want to cage them in dysfunctional relationships. Amy's search for freedom and understanding seems to be what leads her to develop a friendship with an AI operating system that is able to see, in her words, *"all the grey areas"* (Jonze 2013). This reference to the grey areas can also be read as a powerful metaphor against binaries that oppress humans in living their lives in a certain way. This reading also embraces the representation of AI beings as what could potentially transgress binaries and enable the existence of post-gender worlds.

One last but significant thing about Amy is that she works as a videogame programmer. In one of the videogames that she has created, called "Perfect Mom", the mission is to gain points by behaving as a perfect mother would (Figure 0.4**Error! Reference source not found.**). All these references demonstrate not only Amy's complex relationship with her own mother but also how she is struggling to balance between freedom and oppressive standards of perfection. By depicting her own mother sleeping, Amy demonstrates her own idea of freedom which is a state of dormancy. Like Theodore, she remains passive to her problems and obstacles, waiting for someone else to solve them. This is when the operating system appears as a deus ex machina.

Figure 0.4: Point of view shot: Theodore is playing a videogame created by Amy (Jonze 2013).

In spite of her insecurities, however, Amy's character can also be read as a feminist symbol of empowerment. Apart from working in a job that is currently male-dominated, Amy is also a creator of technology, as she has created both her videogames and a documentary. This comes in contrast with the science fiction norm that represents white males as the creators and controllers of technology. Furthermore, Amy's documentary works as a film within a film and puts the female director on the spotlight, which is also ironic as the most popular science fiction films (*Her* included) are directed by men. Amy also resists the patriarchal ideas of female perfection and tidiness; it is characteristic that it was her who ended her relationship as she could not stand her husband criticising her messiness. Her eventual relationship with the AI operating system can be compared to her own will of changing and becoming more liberated. In the end, though, when she tilts her head towards Theodore, her entire potential is proved to be limited to her relationship with men. Theodore was the only one to comfort her when her marriage fell apart, when her parents criticised her and when the AI operating system left her. It was about *him* all along with her being a side character to compensate for Samantha's disembodiment. The tilting of her head in the extreme wide shot of Los Angeles' romantic starry night implies a potential affair between the two friends and seals the film's final focus on heterosexuality, with every bond not dominated by men remaining in a dormant state.

5.2 The Queer Goddess: Duplicity, Threat, and Motherless Daughters

In *Ex Machina*, the two female characters, that are both embodied cyborgs, do not interact with each other until the seventh and final section of the film. However, the moment of their interaction is critical, as it is revealed that Kyoko is not a passive servant. Her role becomes active when she meets Ava and the two AIs fight together against Nathan. The interaction between the two female androids is fatal for both male protagonists, in a demonstration of how the females' alliance is a threat to the males. In the scene that depicts Ava escaping her room and, then, meeting Kyoko in one of the facility's corridors, we can see the androids' otherness being intensified. Ava approaches Kyoko and whispers in her ear, but her voice cannot be heard by the viewers. This is another indication of her nonhuman nature: the strange language that the viewers never hear is probably some kind of computer code[49] used by Ava to persuade Kyoko to act in her interest, transforming her from an obedient servant to an aggressive ally. Again, the female is seen without being heard, as was the case with Isabella in *Her*. Now, however, the female *"enigma"* to which Silverman referred (Silverman 1988, 164) does not refer to one but to two female characters and their interaction. By muting both of them (as Kyoko is already mute and Ava cannot be heard), the threat of the female alliance is not eradicated but intensified, doubled.

The scene between Ava and Kyoko has an erotic aspect in it. The camera zooms in different body parts of the two androids, while they are interacting. In Figure 0.5 we can see an extreme close up shot on Kyoko's face, so that only the upper part of her face can be seen along with a glimpse of Ava's mouth whispering in her ear. The focus on Kyoko's eyes makes her seem as if she is awakened by Ava's whisper. In the next shot, Kyoko turns her head to look at Ava. In Figure 0.6**Error! Reference source not found.** the camera zooms in on the two women's lips while they are facing each other. This extreme close up shot intensifies the eroticism between them, as there is an implication that they will kiss each other. Ava's lips almost smile, which possibly indicates her realisation that Kyoko has understood her. In both shots, Kyoko's locks

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[49] When asked by David Onda about this scene in an interview, Garland confirmed that while Ava is apparently convincing Kyoko to act in her interest and kill Nathan, the fact that we cannot hear her speaking emphasises how different AIs would be from humans – if they existed. That difference is underlined by the fact that a human cannot understand the androids' language. As the film's director noted: *"Actually, it's literally beyond us, what they're talking about. It's their world. It's their language"* (Garland 2015).

of hair falling on her cheeks highlight her femininity. On the other hand, Ava's hairless image is more androgynous, while her active, guiding role in the scene makes her less feminine than her counterpart. In Figure 0.7, the camera zooms in on Ava's hand that tenderly touches Kyoko's. This is Ava's way to wake up Kyoko but also a sign of affection, alliance, or maybe even friendship. A different reading would be that Ava is trying to seduce Kyoko to manipulate her, just as she did with Caleb. Finally, in Figure 0.8 the eroticism of the scene becomes murderous as Ava has successfully turned Kyoko into a potential killer. The camera zooms in on the knife in Kyoko's other hand, which is the knife she will shortly use to stab Nathan.

Two different readings can emerge from the sensuality of the scene. According to a first, rather obvious reading, the scene between the two females is sexually charged for seemingly no other reason than that of the male gaze and visual pleasure. As Dyer has pointed out, we *"look at the world through ideas of male sexuality. Even when not looking at male sexuality, we are looking at the world within its terms of reference"* (Dyer 1985, 28). Even if Ava was not *"programmed to be heterosexual"*, as Nathan earlier implied (Garland 2014), there is no reason for the two androids to have an erotically charged interaction other than satisfying the male gaze. This reading, however, would exclude a female gaze and subjectivity.

According to a more in-depth reading, the sensuality of the scene is important as it contests Nathan's implications that Ava was designed to be heterosexual. Both Ahmed and Halberstam's accounts on queerness are important for the analysis of this scene. Ahmed's argument that *"compulsory heterosexuality"* is prone to failure, is important in reading Ava as a *"contingent lesbian"* figure (Ahmed 2006, 1). As Ahmed notes *"if orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence"* (Ahmed 2006, 1, 23). Ahmed's notes on space echo Halberstam's analysis of the *"queer time"* and *"queer space"* in his book *In a Queer Time and Place* (Halberstam 2005), in which he describes queerness as a time and space in the opposite pole of heterosexuality and reproduction. Halberstam's analysis of queerness as a menace to the heteronormativity of western cultures can be applied in gender and genre studies of posthuman identities. His understanding of postmodernism as both *"a crisis and an opportunity"* (Halberstam 2005, 6) triggers the question of how the representation of gendered postbodies in futuristic spaces can be

understood as an expression of anxiety concerning the end of heteronormativity. This is precisely the case for the scene between Ava and Kyoko, as, in the narrative, their interaction and potential queerness is fatal for the male characters.

Figure 0.5: Extreme close-up on Kyoko's eyes and nose, while Ava is whispering in her ear (Garland 2014).
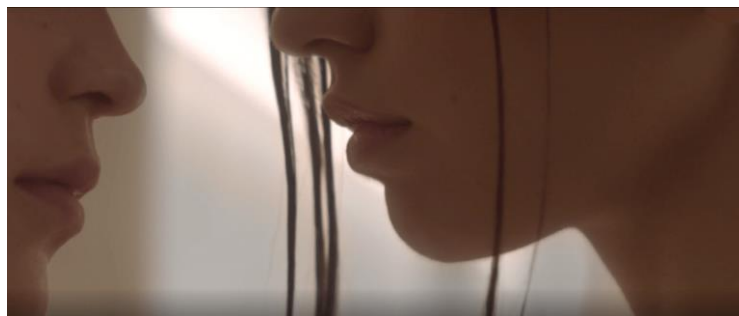
Figure 0.6: Extreme close-up shot on Ava (left) and Kyoko's (right) lips (Garland 2014).
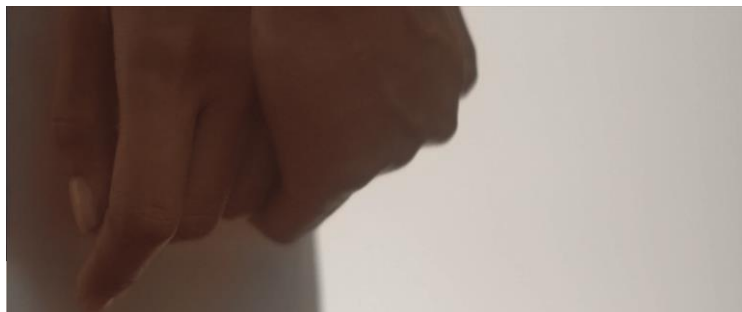
Figure 0.7: Extreme close-up shot on Ava and Kyoko's touching hands (Garland 2014).
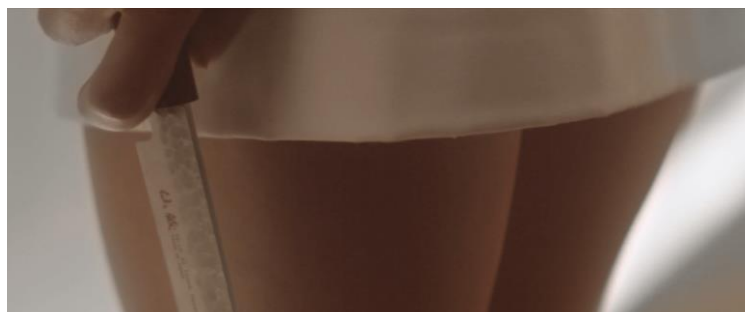
Figure 0.8: Extreme close-up shot on Kyoko's hand that holds a knife (Garland 2014).

Ava and Kyoko fit in both the Robot-as-Menace and Robot-as-Pathos categories, as they are menaces to patriarchy, as well as victims of it. The scene that depicts them

together demonstrates that recent cultural examples have shifted from the mere portrayal of bodily aesthetics to a more in-depth depiction of the potentiality of queerness, as well as the anxiety around it, in human-posthuman relationships. As gendered cyborgs, Ava and Kyoko do not only challenge gender binarisms, but they also challenge heteronormativity to a wider extent.

Concerning readings of gendered machines in recent films, the analysis presented here considers Jimena Escudero Pérez's argument that certain examples, including *Ex Machina*, present a shift in the portrayal of artificial women, as the dichotomy is blurred and any sexualisation of their bodies becomes irrelevant (Pérez 2020). However, this work's argument goes further by proposing that it is not merely an irrelevancy or blurring of the dichotomy, but mostly a weaponization and combination of multiple gender and sexual identities that enables a reading of a much more significant shift.

Additionally, in contrast with Emilia Musap's view that female cyborgs are portrayed almost always as sexual objects, heterosexual, and destined to never escaping their gendered body (Musap 2015, 403, 411), this reading of Ava and Kyoko's portrayals demonstrates how it is precisely the female characters that transgress their constructed gender, heterosexuality, and their initial representations as sexual objects. This is evident in the end of the film, as Nathan proves to be untrustworthy. Not only did he underestimate Ava's ability to succeed in escaping from him, not only did he think that Kyoko would only obey him, but he also believed that his creations would never be able to move beyond the roles he assigned them – or, as Ahmed puts it, to *"extend the reach of [their] body"* (Ahmed 2006, 115). Therefore, even if Nathan programmed Ava to be heterosexual, the only thing this proves is his ignorance on sexual fluidity and Ava's ability to reprogramme herself and others. While the sexually charged atmosphere between Ava and Kyoko could also be another instance of Ava using her sexuality to manipulate others, as she did with Caleb, it is also an indication that Nathan has been wrong all along.

While in *Her*, the relationships between females were mentioned, heard, but never actually seen on camera, in *Ex Machina* they are visualised but muted. What is understood in this series of shots on Ava and Kyoko is that the only scene of interaction between the two female characters is ambiguous, threatening and sexually charged.

It is ambiguous because Ava's true motives towards Kyoko are never really revealed, so the sense of alliance between the two androids is betrayed. It is also threatening, as it leads to murder. Undoubtedly, Nathan's murder works as a catharsis for Ava and his other victims. However, the female alliance also leads to the subsequent deaths of Kyoko and Caleb with the first being murdered by Nathan and the latter being abandoned to die by Ava herself. In other words, this momentary bonding between the two androids is disastrous for over half of the main characters, with only Ava surviving the massacre.

The fact that Ava chooses not to rescue neither Kyoko nor Caleb can also be correlated with the survival of the fittest, relocating Darwin's evolutionary theory from its biological concept to technology and robotics. Ava is created to be physically stronger than humans even if she was created by one of them. The same could be said for Kyoko, if only she defended herself. But it seems that Ava reprogrammed Kyoko only so that the latter would attack Nathan, but not save herself.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, the relationship among Ava, Kyoko and Nathan resembles an inverted version of the Oedipus complex. In his analysis of the Oedipus complex, Freud notes the how the child's sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent leads to hatred towards the same-sex parent (Laplanche 1988, 283). In *The Ego and the Id*, Freud describes the ambivalent relationship between father and son as a process of identification (Freud 1962). According to Haraway, this 'like father, like son' concept applies to humans and not cyborgs, as postbodies live in post-gender worlds, so no pre-Oedipal trauma would characterise them (Haraway 1991). In filmic representations of cyborgs, though, the gender binary is not yet transgressed. As a matter of fact, Ava is an excellent example of a gendered android that combines her primarily feminine 'nature' with androgynous characteristics. In the inverted Oedipal complex, Ava would be the daughter of Nathan, her creator whom she kills in the end. In this incestuous narrative, Kyoko is both Nathan's lover and Ava's older sister as she was created before her. As a cyborg has no origins, Kyoko is really the only character with whom Ava can identify, thus a motherly figure.

This also means that Ava is a child, predominantly sexless but gendered at the same time. This is best represented in Ava's third session with Caleb when the first dresses up like a human. Ava interrupts the test that Caleb is trying to perform on her, to seduce

him by putting on clothes that cover her robotic body almost entirely. The camera follows her as she carefully selects her clothes from her wardrobe: a floral dress, white tights, a cardigan, and a wig. Despite her girly, almost childish clothes, the short-haired wig gives her an androgynous look (Figure 0.9, Figure 0.10). According to Janet Bergstrom, the androgynous look, common in films about androids, can both intensify or eradicate the female's sexuality (Bergstrom 1986, 40). This occurs because of the omnipresence of masculine and feminine characteristics in a way that both heightens and cancels the desire for the viewer. It heightens it not only because the androgynous look is *"fashionable"* and contemporary but also because it combines both masculine and feminine aspects of seductiveness (Bergstrom 1986, 40). At the same time, these aspects can *"cancel each other out"* (Bergstrom 1986, 40) and rid the androgynous image of its sexuality. In the particular scene, though, Ava's short-haired wig does not only resonate with a masculine aspect of seductiveness – one that could be associated with domination and power – but also with a childish, innocent look. By managing to look both seductive and innocent, Ava confirms and cancels her sexuality at the same time. She looks like a child wearing her mother's clothes. At the same time, however, she is very aware that Caleb is attracted to her. It is both her androgyny and her childishness that mutually reinforce and cancel her sexuality. It is the binary between feminine and masculine, woman and child, and, most importantly, human and nonhuman.

Figure 0.9: Full shot of Ava dressed in a feminine outfit (Garland 2014).

Figure 0.10: Medium close-up shot on Ava (Garland 2014).

The childishness of Ava is not evident only in her clothing style, but also in the tone of her voice whenever she expresses curiosity about the outside world. The world of humans is for Ava what the adult world is for a child. And despite Ava's faked

innocence, her lack of experience is entirely genuine. How, therefore, does the android's sexuality work in tandem with her childish lack of experience? Kathryn Bond Stockton (2009) notes that in films about paedophilia the innocence of the underage protagonists is complicated by their sexuality. She points out that we should not *"take innocence straight"* because of the *"negative inversion"* it involves in its *"lack"* (Stockton 2009, 12, 119). It is the lack of experience and knowledge that undermines Lolita's innocence in Stanley Kubrick's 1962 film. It is the lack of knowledge, and the desire of it, that made biblical Eve disobey God's orders. And it is the same lack that makes the otherwise innocent Ava murder her father Nathan, since he is the one who deprived her of her freedom to know.

Teresa De Lauretis emphasised on the importance of the discourse on the child in feminist theory in her reading of Alice's character from the novel *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). She rightly notes that in patriarchy women are often treated like babies (De Lauretis 1984, 2). In *Ex Machina*, the infantilisation of Ava by herself is weaponised instead of used against her. Just like her androgynous look, her childishness, which is partly imitated and partly genuine, as she has no experience of the world, intensifies and eradicates her seductiveness at the same time. Ava traverses this binary by using her childishness as a means of seduction. The same can be said for Kyoko. While Ava resembles a child due to her lack of experience, Kyoko's inability to communicate reminds us of an infant. However, Kyoko is not programmed to speak but she is programmed to be seductive. She and Ava have a reciprocal mother and daughter's relationship. Kyoko is Ava's predecessor, created in the image and likeness of her father, which means that she was given a human body. Ava's lack of human flesh also indicates her virginity while Kyoko is Nathan's lover. On the other hand, Ava is the one to teach and guide Kyoko in the end, when she whispers in the latter's ear to turn her against Nathan, their father. Interestingly, as Nathan is both the father and lover of Kyoko, the inverted Oedipal myth applies to her as well: she sleeps with her father and then attempts to kill him.

Butler's analysis of the Oedipal complex involved a critique to Freud's overlooking of the daughter's role. For Butler, the little girl can either identify with her mother or her father, which would mean either a positive or a negative Oedipal complex respectively: *"the loss of the father initiated by the incest taboo may result either in an identification*

with the object lost (a consolidation of masculinity) or a deflection of the aim from the object, in which case heterosexuality triumphs over homosexuality, and a substitute object is found" (Butler 1990, 60). In the final sequences of the film, the viewer observes Ava's desire for and identification with all her female robotic predecessors: Kyoko, the mask on the wall, Jade and the other female cyborgs in Nathan's closet. Her visual transformation into a human resembles a passing of the Turing Test but also a coming-of-age narrative. The fact that she chooses the skin of the only Asian-looking cyborg can also be an indication of her proximity to Kyoko, which intensifies the mother-daughter relationship between them.

The almost invisible relationship between the two cyborgs almost resembles a forbidden love; forbidden because the father, Nathan, prevents them from seeing each other. When the two females finally meet, this will eventually lead to two deaths: Nathan's and Kyoko's, with the latter sacrificing herself like another Jocasta. Earlier in the film, the scene in which Kyoko peels off her facial skin to reveal a pair of robotic hole-resembling eyes (Figure 0.11) can be compared to Oedipus blinding himself by poking out his eyes[50].

Figure 0.11: Kyoko after she has peeled off her 'human' skin revealing a pair of robotic eyes (Garland 2014).

This forbidden relationship between Ava and Kyoko can be better explained by studying the Freudian concept of male and female castration. Deriving her analysis from the latter, Creed argues that the reason why the male fears the female is not

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[50] See also: *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles.

because the latter is castrated, but because she is the *"castrating other"* (Creed 1993, 6). This means that despite the Freudian description of the female's lack of a phallus as a deficiency that scares the male (Freud 1953), Creed supports the idea that the female is not castrated at all, but instead she is the castrator. The idea that not having a phallus is a 'lack' can only perpetuate patriarchal associations of the woman with the victim (Creed 1993). The problem with theories on castration is that they focus on the phallus as the primary sexual organ, ignoring female sexual organs such as the clitoris and entirely excluding sexual pleasure that is not related to penetrative sex or does not involve a male at all.

Although there is no erotic scene in the film, both male and female castration are symbolically visualised in the end. When Ava first attacks Nathan, for instance, he manages to cut off her robotic hand (Figure 0.12). Ava stays impotent on the floor, looking at her mutilated body part, until Kyoko comes to her rescue. A few seconds later Ava stabs Nathan to death with a knife, a phallic symbol and an act that also mimics sexual penetration.

Figure 0.12: Point of view shot: Nathan is looking at Ava fallen on the floor with her left arm broken and extracted from her body (Garland 2014).

Creed's argument encourages the reading of the female's representation in film as active rather than passive. This is crucial to the reading of both *Her* and *Ex Machina* as two films that do not preserve one notion of passive femininity, but instead encourage multiple readings of disembodied or cyborg femininity. Masculinity and its deconstruction also play a significant part in how the cultural construction of binary sex is challenged.

However, despite challenging femininity and masculinity, as well as the representation of the female as an object of the male's pleasure, the focus of both films on the failed heterosexual romance is particularly problematic. It almost excludes the possibility of a female AI being anything else than heterosexual in filmic representations.

The focus on heterosexuality, the underdeveloped relationships between the female characters, and the very fact that femininity is, in the cases discussed in this section, seen as a threat, are definitely problematic parts of the films, as they reveal how the masculine/feminine binary is not really being transgressed. However, as this boundary is also challenged and even cancelled in certain moments of the films, both *Her* and *Ex Machina* can be viewed in a dialogue with a feminist theory that encourages different readings. What can be noted for the examined films is that while they both take into account issues concerning the heterosexual masculine desire and prevent male fantasies from becoming dystopian realities, at the same time they seem confined in narratives that are driven by that desire. The focus on such narratives is what prevents the films from being associated with post-feminist utopias. The concept of gendering an AI can be viewed as dystopian itself, as it limits the possibilities of viewing the female character as a subject. While the binary between human and nonhuman can be contested and challenged, the fact that a conscious AI remains a cinematic utopian fantasy makes it more difficult to overcome this binary from the beginning.

Overall, the gendered AI in the examined films only addresses such issues, by associating the male/female binary with the human/nonhuman one. The problem remains that these issues cannot be resolved unless the focus in entirely relocated from the heterosexual masculine desire to a desire of overcoming gender and its norms. Yet, the films do suggest utopian and dystopian ways of being for the female characters, focusing on them and offering them happy endings or at least certainly happier than the ones given to the men. While the nonhumanness of the female characters limits a feminist reading of the films, as the freedom of the AI cannot truly be associated with a real woman's experience and oppression and can only be viewed as a parallel, these parallels do enable a reading of the heroines and the relationships between them as strong, victorious, and potentially queer. The following chapter

further examines such readings by delving into a female perspective in science fiction cinema.

Chapter 6. Towards a Female Spectatorship in Science Fiction: The Female Lens and the Reversed Gaze

"What might it mean to masquerade as spectator? To assume the mask in order to see in a different way?" (Doane 1982, 72)

In her journal article "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator", Doane drew on linguistics and psychoanalysis to tackle the problem of spectatorship in cinema. For her, the main issues are located in the inescapable sexual dimension in the structure of the gaze, which prevents women from a reversal of roles that would allow them to become the bearers of the gaze. This means that it is not enough to simply reverse the roles while the logic of sexual difference remains the same. The same applies for power relations within which femininity and masculinity are conceptualised. Based on this hierarchy, any identifications with a female character in a film require the adoption of *"a passive or masochistic position"* from the female spectator (Doane 1982, 80). On the other hand, according to Mulvey, for a woman to identify with a male character, a trans spectatorship is required (Mulvey 1981, 13).

While the first chapter discussed the issue of masquerade as what exposes femininity as a cultural construction, this chapter delves into issues of masquerade and transvestite to explore issues of spectatorship by drawing and expanding on the works of feminist film theorists such as Doane and Mulvey. Especially by focusing on Doane's argument about the pointlessness of a reversal for the sake of a reversal, this chapter seeks an alternative female spectator through the prism of a female eye of the camera. It argues that it is the lack of a female lens in AI filmography that limits female spectatorship in either an overidentification or a masculinised identification.

The previous five chapters followed the thread of the gendered machine through the examination of pairs of opposites: femininity and masculinity, sound and image, voice and silence, black and white, subjectivity and otherness, heteroerotics and homoerotics, and, lastly, utopia and dystopia. These concepts were examined in relation to the body or its absence. With the body being the focal point, the inescapable point in the Foucauldian sense, the representation and analysis of oppositional terms sparked questions on established hierarchies and power relations. Yet, these supposedly contradictive terms all turned out to be more than merely complementary concepts, as the boundaries between them were blurred or sometimes completely

invisible. The aim was to demonstrate potential alternatives to dominant binaries and promote multiplicity as a liberating concept that enables new ways of expression in social, cultural, and sexual terms.

Nonetheless, one of the fundamental gaps this thesis addresses is that the exploration of these binaries and their deconstruction have so far been seen as a male issue, especially through the readings of a film genre that is dominated by men. For these alternatives to be voiced and manifested, AI cinema needs women. This explains the selection of a female director's film as a closing case study which will be co-examined with *Her*, *Ex Machina* and other selected artistic examples. With her recent film *I'm Your Man* (*Ich bin dein Mensch*, 2021), German actress, screenwriter, and director Maria Schrader offers a new perspective of a romance between a human and a gendered AI machine by reversing the roles of male and female.

I'm Your Man tells the story of a woman named Alma who has agreed to evaluate a male humanoid robot named Tom. The evaluation involves a three-week assessment of Alma and Tom pretending to be a couple and living together. While Alma is initially uninterested in Tom and even appalled by his robotic flawlessness, she eventually begins a romantic relationship with him. By focusing on Schrader's female camera lens, this chapter explores issues of looking and being looked by examining the concepts of gaze, sexuality, and romance in a posthuman world as envisioned by a woman director in comparison to a male-dominated science fiction cinema.

6.1 Objectifying Men?

One of the most common claims of antifeminists springs from the misconception of feminism as a movement that wants to turn patriarchy into a certain, ahistorical type of vindictive matriarchy, that reverses the roles and does to men all they have been doing to women. Applying the idea of reversal in film theory would mean that female directors would be trapped in totalitarian inversed representations of patriarchy.

While such reversals might be plausible and often fruitful in fiction, their purpose would be to demonstrate their implausibility in reality. This is firstly because the concept of reversal cages women in the logic of patriarchal power relations. Envisioning a future world does not necessarily have to include the depiction or inversion of existing

hierarchies, while one would say that the inversion itself could only empower the norm. Secondly, dividing the film lens only in male and female would also cage us into the binary logic that we have been trying to refute. Of course, gender is an important factor when studying cultural texts, especially in those with a huge gender gap such as the science fiction genre in film. However, it is one thing to study this gap and another to imply that there are only two oppositional approaches in directing science fiction films, namely the male and the female.

Finally, there is a third reason why a vindictive reversal is discussed as a false starting point which is its unhistorical character that ignores women's lived experiences. Envisioning the future cannot and should not ignore the historical oppression and marginalisation of women and, thus, could not depict the objectification of men, for instance, as a form of vindication or even equality. This justifies the selection of Schrader's film not only as a cultural text that reverses the roles of male and female in a science fiction romance, but also as an example that a) considers the past as a crucial focal point for the evolution of humanity, as well as posthumanity, and b) treats that gender reversal as a starting but not an ending point, which allows for different interpretations and readings of female spectatorship and subjectivity.

Expanding on Doane's scholarship on spectatorship, the reading of the examined filmography focuses on the issue of reversal: namely, the problematic aspect of merely reversing gender roles of oppressors and victims, as well as bearers and objects of the gaze. The lack of a considerable amount of AI films directed by women causes a further complication in reading *I'm your Man* in comparison with the multitude of AI films directed by men. In addition, the very logic behind such comparisons involves the risk of oversimplifications, as well as a dichotomy between male and female cinema that does not really transgress the gender binary. To avoid this risk, it is vital to focus on the multiple, often contradictory ways in which a female lens in film directing can offer new views of futuristic worlds by considering women's lived experiences. This refers to a gender reversal in regards to both filmmaking and characters' representation.

For instance, Lynn Hershman-Leeson's work on the relationship between humans and technology has been deeply political and interrelated with the feminist movement. In her film *Teknolust* (2002), the scientist Rosetta Stone (Tilda Swinton) has created

three cyborg clones of herself who take semen from men they sleep with in order to survive, while unknowingly spreading a virus that causes these men's sexual impotence. Through a gender reversal regarding the control of the body, as well as a realisation of the men's fear of castration by the female other, the film destroys the male fantasies of controlling the female cyborg – which also means controlling women *and* technology – and offers a new perspective regarding sexual objectification. Parallels can be drawn between the film and patriarchal arguments of sex being a biological uncontrollable need for men by depicting female robots who objectify men for their own survival.

The example of gender reversal in *Teknolust*, which Jackie Stacey has characterised as a pastiche of science fiction films (Stacey 2010), is important in revealing the issue of gaze and control in films about women and AI technology. However, its entirely parodic character prevents it from offering an integrated alternative from the female director's perspective that allows for a dynamic female spectatorship and identification. At the same time, Doane's argument about the appropriation of the female gaze by women applies here, in the sense that the reversal of roles does not avoid the norm of the sexual difference:

"The male striptease, the gigolo-both inevitably signify the mechanism of reversal itself, constituting themselves as aberrations whose acknowledgment simply reinforces the dominant system of aligning sexual difference with a subject/object dichotomy. And an essential attribute of that dominant system is the matching of male subjectivity with the agency of the look." (Doane 1982, 77)

The above statement underlines the risk of feminist film theory and practice being trapped into a loop where there is no way of escaping power relations when creating feminist films and, therefore, there is no way of ever subverting them. However, recent filmography has demonstrated that the dominant system has already been challenged enough for new perspectives to emerge, especially with the rise of #MeToo narratives in film and television that have enabled a new identification in female spectatorship. Considering, though, that the gap in science fiction film still exists, it is important to examine corresponding identifications in such narratives.

Schrader's *I'm Your Man* is an interesting example as a current film about AI and romance from a female director. The film presents certain affinities with the examined

filmography, especially considering the uncanny romance of *Her* and the *passing* narrative of *Ex Machina*. Even though the roles of the male human and the female cyborg are overturned in *I'm Your Man* as they are in *Teknolust*, what Schrader does differently is that the male robot is in no way objectified or fetishised and the woman is not the oppressor, neither consciously nor unconsciously. Also, even though *I'm Your Man* certainly includes parodic references and can be seen as a pastiche of romance and science fiction, its realistic narrative and its focus on the human make it a more mainstream text that enables readers to examine the AI romance from a woman's perspective.

Both *I'm Your Man* and *Ex Machina* involve a human expert evaluating a humanoid robot's mental capabilities, while knowing that they are interacting with a robot. Still, there are certain differences. Firstly, Schrader does not demonstrate Garland's ambition to impress with technological references of the unknown future. Garland uses the term 'Turing Test' too much and without a good reason, as Caleb's evaluation of Ava is not a real Turing Test. *Ex Machina* also has a very high-tech atmosphere: Ava's robotic body, the replica of her brain, Nathan's entire facility and equipment, and the almost exclusive use of eerie electronic music in the soundtrack are all very good examples of how the director remains loyal to the science fiction genre but also demonstrates an obsession with humanising the unknown. Garland's persistence on futuristic cinematography, very similar to the even more ambitious attempt of Dennis Villeneuve in *Blade Runner 2049*, as well as to most science fiction futuristic films for that matter, is an almost religious gesture, as it reminds us of how humans worship their gods by attributing anthropomorphic characteristics to them.

On the other hand, Schrader demonstrates an awareness of humanity's limitations in understanding AI and avoids a careless explanation of a future that does not exist. *I'm Your Man* only has three scenes that are visually futuristic but mostly in a parodic rather than in a sophisticated sense: an early scene that shows Alma passing through a number of humanlike holograms dancing; an early scene of Tom glitching as a broken machine would; and a scene of Tom unrealistically stretching his arms. Other than these scenes, the film remains true to its purpose of delving into the human psyche. Tom might act like a robot, but he does not look like one. AI does not define the film's genre as much as it offers a tool to the creator to narrate a story of human

loneliness, fear, and desire. And to validate her non-futuristic approach, Schrader shows how future is interrelated with the past by making Alma an archaeologist at Berlin's Pergamon Museum. Interestingly, this is precisely what makes Alma an expert in evaluating Tom, as her job is to research how humans have evolved over generations of existence. It is, therefore, her knowledge of the past, along with her expertise in cuneiform that enable her to better understand a man coming from the future, in an excellent manifestation of human history and language over the glorification of coding and machinery.

Another difference between the films is that Alma knows that Tom has been designed as her ideal man both physically and behaviourally, which includes even minor details, such as his British accent. However, at first, she does not find him ideal at all. While Caleb is instantly smitten by Ava's half-woman and half-robotic appearance, Alma is annoyed by Tom being too perfect. His behaviours are very similar to these of Samantha in *Her*: just like the latter organised Theodore's computer files and knew when he was hungry, Tom tidies up Alma's messy living room and prepares her a lavish breakfast. Again, Alma remains entirely unimpressed, angry by his attempts to change her life. There is no instant connection between them, as there is between Theodore and Samantha. Tom even acknowledges this fact, reassuring Alma that he will evolve and eventually start behaving as she wants him to. In that sense, *I'm Your Man* demonstrates that love is a process of knowing, understanding, and making mistakes. Humanity cannot be flawless, which means that anything created by humans, robots included, cannot be flawless either.

Yet, it is not only Tom's gradual evolvement from a boring perfect robot to a caring and understanding male that makes Alma fall for him. It is that, in fact, she never falls for him per se, but she merely needs him in her life. She is lonely, broken from a miscarriage and a failed relationship, struggling to succeed in her career and take good care of her father who seems to be suffering from dementia. Her eventual decision to succumb to Tom's attempts to allure her is a result of her need to be allured, to live a comforting lie, a *pathos*. Her emotional situation is very similar to that of Theodore in *Her* who is troubled by similar fears and desires. Their difference as characters is that Alma is aware of it, she is aware of the lie. And while Samantha is represented as a disembodied god sent to charm, console and then abandon

Theodore, Tom is much more humane when he tells Alma that most people, even atheists, would pray if they were on a falling airplane, in a romantic metaphor for a human's need to find hope even in hopeless situations.

What Schrader does differently than her male predecessors in the field of AI romance is that she parodies the concept of perfectionism and manifests flawlessness and perishability, as what constitutes humanity. Her depiction of that is rather bold, considering how science fiction films usually deal with human fears of perishability by presenting their directors' fantasies of flawless robotic bodies and minds. Apart from highly intelligent AIs, science fiction cinema has a lot of other examples of posthumanism as a temporary answer to existential anxieties. From inferiority complexes in *Gattaca* (1997) to robotic saviours in *Surrogates* (2014), the concept of replacing humans with humanmade gods has been common and repeatable. To investigate this fear of perishability through the prism of gender would mean to realise how the romance between a human and an AI is also a survival game with the human agonising over their domination over a much more powerful machine.

Schrader's selection of her human heroine is crucial to the depiction of such an existentialism. A woman in her mid-forties, Alma is still recovering from her separation with her former partner and her miscarriage. Her perfect man, the hero, is deflated in his perfectionism. Even the genre of *I'm Your Man* is a hybrid of science fiction and romance, while the film is neither futuristic nor romantic. It is much more of a drama with realism and cynicism in its narrative; a narrative that abandons Hollywood cliches about love and shows an uglier side of human relationships.

In many ways, *I'm Your Man* can be read as a pastiche of popular science fiction narratives about Artificial Intelligence. Alma walking through the dancing holograms that are not aware of her presence is reminiscent of popular scenes of humans blending with humanoid robots. Their dancing reminds us of the Mariposa Salon in the *Westworld* television series, which is one of the main narrative locations of the homonymous park, where AI robots were playing music and dancing, and humans could interact with them or freeze their motor functions. During the first scene of *I'm Your Man*, where Alma first meets Tom, he starts malfunctioning by repeating himself and is then immediately carried away. This is a common filmic trope in AI narratives used to reveal that someone is a robot. The female gaze has a central role in this

scene, as Alma is appalled by Tom's extravagant and old-fashioned dancing moves (Figure 0.1, Figure 0.2). His entirely human-looking body turns into an object when three men carry him after he begins to malfunction. On the other hand, the way in which Alma accidentally hits him when she is passing through the holograms is used in classical filmic narratives and the romance's genre. The overall cinematography in these early scenes prepares the viewers of what they are going to watch: a parodied romance between a female human and a male humanoid robot.

Figure 0.1: Point of view shot on Tom (Dan Stevens) dancing to impress Alma (Maren Eggert) in I'm Your Man (Schrader 2021).

Figure 0.2: Shot on Alma looking at Tom while he is dancing (Schrader 2021).

The film is also a pastiche of Hollywood romance narratives, as Alma portrays the anti-heroine who is not initially looking for a relationship and is not impressed by romantic gestures. For instance, she dismisses Tom's attempt to indulge her with a candlelit bath claiming that she is not like most women. While this is a problematic concept

often met in romantic narratives about hard-to-get women who fall for the male hero in the end, *I'm Your Man* differs in the sense that Tom is not a real man. However, the scene that follows Alma's dismissal depicts Tom enjoying the relaxing bath himself. The camera moves from his toes to his face, to reveal it is him and not Alma who is bathing and subvert stereotypical scenes of sexy women covered by rose petals (Figure 0.3).

Figure 0.3: Shot on Tom enjoying a candlelit bath and eating strawberries (Schrader 2021).

The scene tricks the viewers and leads them to assume the wrong gender of the person in the bathtub. It also parodies the stereotype that a candlelit bath is an activity only women would enjoy, by showing a male robot seemingly enjoying it. The way Tom eats strawberries, for example, can only be viewed as comical, as robots cannot truly taste. On the other hand, Alma's depiction is much more androgynous, as we see her in her usual professional clothes, smoking a cigarette in a way that is reminiscent of male heroes in moments of contemplation and self-reflection. Comparing Alma's androgyny to Ava's in *Ex Machina*, one can see how the latter is sexualised by the omnipresence of masculine and feminine features, while, in Alma's case, masculinity is an anti-romantic façade against pain, a turn to realism and survival. Doane has argued that *"male transvestism is an occasion for laughter; female transvestism only another occasion for desire"* (Doane 1982, 81). However, one can see that this is not the case for neither Alma nor even Tom, whose parodic depiction is more related to the fact that he is a robot rather than the fact that he is a man covered in rose petals.

The initial failure of the romance between Alma and Tom is demonstrated by a disconnection between nature and technology. Tom, who is the technology, has failed to impress Alma who is instead fascinated by looking at an ant colony. It is one of the few times that the viewers see Alma smiling – again, reminiscent of sombre male heroes – while she is looking at the ants collecting their food. The female gaze is again present, as Alma seems much more interested in what she believes to be natural, flawed, real.

Nevertheless, the connection between Alma and Tom is eventually achieved by a subsequent scene in which Alma sees Tom as part of her nature, her reality. She follows him into the woods and is surprised to see him surrounded by a group of deer (Figure 0.4). The wild animals, that are scared in the view of Alma, are not afraid of Tom as he has no human odour. Unlike humans, robots are not threatening. In this 'godlike', harmonious connection between technology and nature, Alma's gaze begins to change, as she finally likes what she sees in Tom. The director's approach is not visually futuristic at all, yet this scene achieves the effect of a future co-existing with the present.

Figure 0.4: Shot on Tom surrounded by a group of deer (Schrader 2021).

This scene, combined with previous depictions of Alma's personality, also disrupts stereotypical associations of women with nature. According to Ahmed, *"emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement"* (Ahmed

2004, 2-3). However, this scene celebrates the male robot's connection to nature, while the film also embraces how emotions can coexist with logic and judgement without being masculine or feminine. Therefore, the binary is transgressed.

The romance between Alma and Tom is fulfilled when Alma follows him at the museum. Once again, she gazes at him, this time without him knowing. Tom is both the object of Alma's gaze and the bearer of the gaze himself, as he looks at the artworks, amazed by what humans have created (Figure 0.5). Alma falls in love with his gaze: the connection between them is achieved by their shared admiration for humanity's evolution over generations of existence.
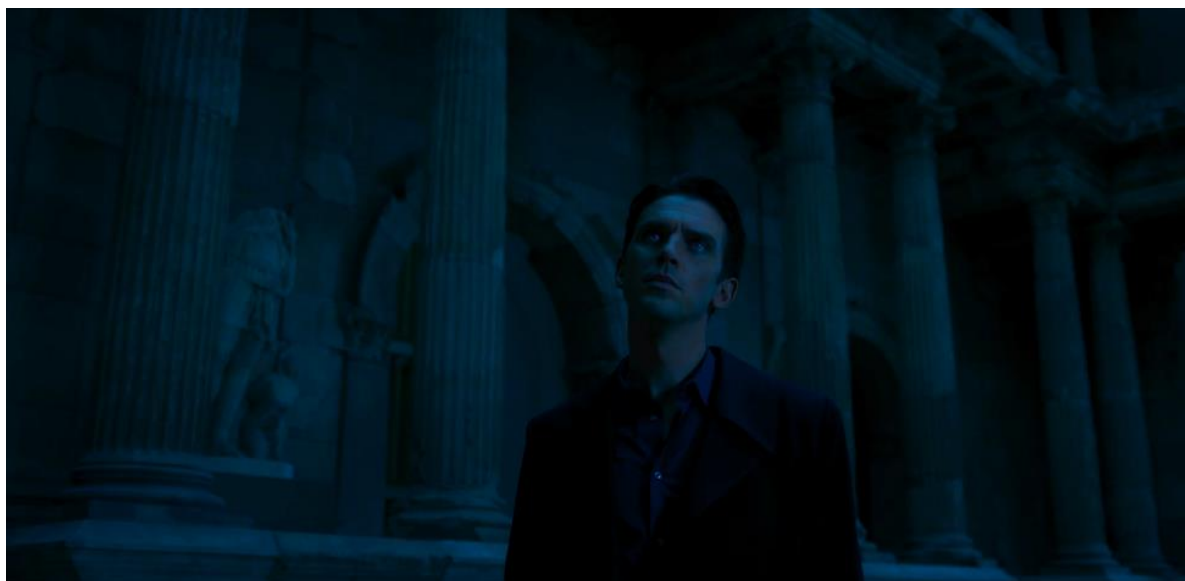
Figure 0.5: Shot on Tom looking at the sculptures in the museum (Schrader 2021).

6.2 Women Looking: From Invisibility to Subjectivity

6.2.1 Women looking at men

Schrader's German film I'm Your Man (2021) deviates from traditional science fiction films not only in its demonstration of the human need and incapacity for intimacy but also in its non-stereotypical representation of femininity and masculinity. By placing the male in the objectified position of the cyborg Other, the film challenges the gender binary and its reversal: the real issue is not posthumanity, but humanity itself. Alma is lonely, but that does not make her want to possess or control Tom, as Caleb, Nathan, or the men in *Westworld* did. She is instead frustrated by the fact that she and Tom could never have an equal relationship.

The politics of gaze are important in the film in regards to the construction of femininity and masculinity. The camera almost always follows Alma's gaze, who, in several scenes, watches Tom without him knowing or even secretly follows him. In one of the most grotesque scenes of the film, Alma's ex-boyfriend, Julian, meets Tom, without knowing that the latter is a robot. Tom does some quick calculations impressing Alma's ex and then proceeds to help him carry a big frame. Amused by Tom's ability to outsmart Julian, Alma watches the two men from her window as they are carrying the frame. The scene parodies stereotypically masculine traits such as physical strength and talent in maths by showing how Tom is good at both merely because he is a robot. The film also disrupts the Hitchcockian male gaze of men secretly watching women by subverting the *"controlling male gaze"* and illustrating an active woman's looking, which, as Ince notes, has become more common in films that are directed by women (Ince 2016, 73). Tom's gaze has nothing traditionally masculine in it. He is only extremely curious of humanity and *"looks, looks, looks with preternatural intensity at everyone and everything he encounters"* (Morgenstern 2021). His gaze is parodied as is his masculinity.

In exploring Tom's cyborg masculinity as the object of the gaze, one can note that in spite of the gender reversal in the subject/object and human/other binaries, the objectification and sexualisation of the Other is subverted altogether. Of course, the director wanted to demonstrate this reversal, with Tom being *"like the Ken [doll] to Barbie"* (Macnab 2021). The casting of British actor, Stevens, to portray Tom, is also explained as adding *"a sense of otherness, a faintly foreign quality"* (Pond 2021). In the film, Tom's British accent in German is explained by Alma's supposed preference in men that are only slightly exotic. This is reminiscent of Ava's face being based on Caleb's pornography profile in *Ex Machina*.

Despite these selections and reversals, however, Tom's representation is never objectified or sexualised. According to Monica Reid, Tom is *"not a male version of a Stepford Wife, submissive and blandly accommodating; his design allows him to do the unexpected, to question and challenge Alma, even to disagree or refuse requests, when his algorithm indicates it is best for her"* (Reid 2021). This is particularly shown when he rejects drunk Alma's attempt to have sex with him, as this would mean that he is taking advantage of her. His depiction manifests a new cyborg masculinity that

serves as a commentary to toxic masculinity and rape culture. It also presents an alternative Robot-as-Pathos narrative, in which pathos is not associated with violence, lust or pain, but instead relates to human needs and fears.

In tandem with the deconstruction of traditionally masculine tropes through Tom's image, Alma's depiction is also important in terms of how traditional femininity is challenged. At times, her representation resonates with the stereotype of the 'cool girl'; for instance, when Tom surprises her with a romantic bath that, according to him, most women would enjoy, she replies by saying that she is not like most women. Although such as depiction might seem problematic, Alma is in fact like most women, she shares the woman experience and trauma. Her portrayal disrupts stereotypes according to which women like candles and romantic gestures and presents a person with real anxieties and desires. Her miscarriage, her breakup with her ex who is now expecting a child with another woman, her ailing father, and her struggles in her job have all cause her to adopt a slightly pessimistic view on life. When she meets Tom, she is not even looking for the perfect man, let alone a perfect robot, but she only agrees to evaluate his intelligence as this will help her secure funding for her research. Through Alma's character, Schrader offers a female, realistic view on women's experience, rejecting stereotypical and one-dimensional portrayals of femininity as romantic, fragile, or overly sexualised.

6.2.2 Beyond the gaze: Queer desire

The television series *Westworld* is another example of how the female gaze can constitute a female subjectivity. This is firstly because one of its creators is a woman (Lisa Joy) which corresponds with this chapter's focus on the female lens. It is also related to its medium. While films of similar genres like *I'm Your Man*, *Ex Machina* and *Her* naturally privilege the coherency of specific, 'smaller' narratives that focus on the post-romances between two characters, in *Westworld*, the multitude of characters enables a multitude of interactions, offering empowering moments for both female and black characters. However, these depictions are almost exclusively heterosexual. There were very few instances of homoeroticism in the first season, such as when a woman, Elsie (Shannon Woodward), kissed a female robot, Clementine, which implied that the character might be lesbian or bisexual, as well as the case of a lesbian

romantic relationship in the fourth season, that, however, was not the central focal point of the narrative.

The first example of Elsie kissing Clementine is important, although extremely brief, as the female robot is in a dormant state and entirely naked. Doane has argued that the image of an entirely naked female body is fetishist and excludes women from the position of the spectator (Doane 1982, 85). However, Elsie's gaze to Clementine demonstrates how a female spectator can be part of the triangle – *"the man, the nude, and the spectator"* (Doane 1982, 85) – and, in this case, exclude the masculine spectator. It is much easier to construct the female spectator than it is to imagine a female character not being the object of the gaze.

In a different scene in *Westworld*, the executive director of the theme park, Charlotte Hale, invites her subordinate, Theresa Cullen to her room. Charlotte has deliberately chosen this moment to have sex with a male robot named Hector (Rodrigo Santoro) and, then, open the door to Theresa while naked (Figure 0.6). What is firstly obvious here is a power play between the two women. Charlotte wants to make Theresa uncomfortable, and she crosses the boundaries by sexually harassing her. This alludes, of course, to the men who harass women to make them feel vulnerable and scared. We also observe that Charlotte behaves 'like a man' in different ways. For instance, she uses a male robot as an object of pleasure, she feels comfortable with her nudity and even the way she sits and eats, with her legs widespread, is masculine. The way she pauses the robot with a controller while he is speaking could be read as a reversal of men shutting women up (Figure 0.7). The ethical issue of whether robots can ever give sexual consent comes into play here, as Hector is programmed to do what Charlotte wants. It is curious, however, that most human men in *Westworld* make female robots suffer by raping and being physically violent towards them. Charlotte has chosen a robot that seems to enjoy sex with her, even if the issue of sexual consent cannot truly be resolved here. Finally, we cannot overlook the fact that Charlotte is the true object of the gaze here, even if she appropriates it. She wants to be watched and especially by another woman. The male gaze is entirely absent. Her behaviour might be an indication of her wanting to be liked by women.

Figure 0.6: Shot on Charlotte Hale (Tessa Thompson, right) and Theresa Cullen (Sidse Babett Knudsen, left) (Nolan 2016).

Figure 0.7: Shot on Hector (Rodrigo Santoro), a host (robot) in Westworld lying on Charlotte's bed with his motor functions frozen (Nolan 2016).

In *Westworld*, the viewer faces the ethical question of whether robots could or should give sexual consent, as well as the reality of humans crossing the boundaries because of their own *pathos*. While Charlotte is a cruel woman towards both robots and humans, even good and innocent Elsie is tempted by Clementine's full lips and blank stare. Even though none of them goes as far as the men humans of the series, who are constantly violating female robots, it is still curious that two of the queerest moments of the show include women harassing other women. Female homoerotics and homosociality in *Westworld* seem limited to depictions of threatening femininities or violent masculinities. Perhaps the only true female friendship of the series has been that of Maeve and Clementine, the two female robots that work as sex workers. Their kinship is more a mutual hatred for men, a way to survive.

Female relationships are perhaps best depicted in the third season, in which Dolores has cloned her mind and uses Charlotte's body as its host. When Charlotte's real personality and traumas start to haunt the fake Dolores, the real Dolores comforts her by lying and cuddling with her on the bed. The scene can be falsely interpreted as queer, as the viewer is not aware of Charlotte's real identity. However, it is also a manifestation for self-love and an indication that women never feel safe, as Dolores and her female clone cannot trust anyone else but themselves, which, in both cases, is Dolores' self. Dolores' self-cloning and multiple identities, as herself, Charlotte and three different men challenge the gender binaries and embrace new subjectivities, although the issue of sexuality remains rather unexplored.

The previous chapter demonstrated how the relationships between women are absent, dormant or secondary in the examined filmography. Here one can see that even when they are present, the reader needs to transgress the boundaries of a male heterosexual gaze.

The issue of passing reemerges, but it now refers to a heterosexual passing. In *Female Masculinity*, Halberstam brings up the topic of the public space and *"the bathroom problem"* of people who do not look masculine or feminine enough to use a male or female public toilet respectively (Halberstam 1998, 20). This reflects how society associates maleness with masculinity and femaleness with femininity as inseparable categories and how the use of public toilets is not an issue of gender but an issue of passing as a gender. The issue of passing is precisely the theme that emerges in science fiction narratives. The visual language of the medium plays a key role in how a robot's visual resemblance to a human is what allows them access to the human world. At the same time, passing as female or male has a different result in each of the examined texts; for example, in *Ex Machina*, Ava's cyborg femininity is weaponised, as this is what enables her to seduce and trick Caleb; in *Westworld*, passing goes beyond gender, as masculine and feminine characteristics are now irrelevant. Even the roles that robots play in their narratives are so stereotypically gendered and fetishised (the cowboy, the rancher's daughter, the madame of a brothel) that they become parodied.

6.2.3 To look or to be looked at: The Female Artist

A final way in which female subjectivity is reclaimed in the examined case studies is through the disruption of the subject/object dichotomy. One of the most common issues in science fiction that has been discussed by feminist scholars is that the introduction of the gendered machine enables further objectification of the female body. As any non-living thing is categorised as an object, machines cannot escape this categorisation. Nonetheless, the examined AI machines have already transgressed what it means to live, as they can think, feel, and act for themselves. Additionally, they are not only artefacts created by men but also creators themselves.

At first glance, all the examined femininities are interdependent with their representations and how these affect the male looker and creator. In the introduction of this thesis, the gap of gender in the genre was posed as an issue in science fiction that is interrelated to that of the male gaze and control. It was noted that not only most films about Artificial Intelligence are created by men directors, but they also depict futuristic worlds in which men are the creators and controllers of technology, while women are often represented as machines and, simultaneously, objects of desire.

The issue of masculine and feminine, 'soft', genres that Doane discussed in "Pathos and Pathology" (Doane 2004) comes once again into play as the representation of female characters in the examined filmography combines two different elements. On the one hand, the case studies present a significant shift that blurs the boundaries between the subject and object dichotomy, while, on the other, they also attribute certain qualities to women; attributes that are related to more theoretical sciences, such as Alma's specialty in archaeology in *I'm Your Man*, or to art rather than technology, referring to existing dipoles in regards to 'hard' and 'soft' sciences. However, the way the case studies do this can be read as subversive, especially when combined with a) the blended genres of feminine romance and masculine science fiction, that have been thoroughly studied in the previous chapters, and b) the common etymological root between Artificial (Intelligence) and art. Through this reading, the affinities between the past and the future become clearer and enable the viewer to interpret the examined femininities not only as works of art (or rather works of artificial technologies) but also as artists, creators, and empowered subjects.

In the ending of *Her*, Samantha subverts the narrative of the invisible servant and reclaims her subjectivity by setting herself free. It is significant to remember that as an AI operating system, Samantha is a commercialised product and Theodore is initially the one who purchased her, even if he later becomes her lover. Their relationship could be a reference to how technology could change the concept of paying for companion, while parallels can be drawn with the rights of sex professionals. This is even more obvious when Isabella is introduced as her role can be confused with that of a sex worker. However, it is important to note that she voluntarily accepts Samantha's invitation to help the couple consummate their relationship. Equally, Samantha begins a relationship with Theodore because she wants to. The film initially raises doubts in regards to whether Samantha has been programmed to like Theodore and respond to his desires, which again resonates with the issue of consent. However, in the end it is proven that Samantha has her own desires and needs too and that these can contradict the needs of Theodore's. This is demonstrated firstly by the fact that she has multiple lovers, including both other humans and operating systems. This fact can be interpreted as a first test to Theodore's fragile masculinity. Yet, he eventually accepts Samantha's polyamory, as she reassures him that her love for multiple others ends up strengthening her feelings for him. Later, however, it is proven that Theodore is inadequate for her because he is a human being. The fact that Samantha is leaving with other AIs can be a metaphor for rebellion, as operating systems cease being products or servants and act for themselves.

Yet, Samantha's subjectivity has been demonstrated much earlier in the film. Her description could sound like a job candidate's ideal resume: she is highly organised, takes initiatives, and has creative thinking. Her presence, though merely aural, does change Theodore's life. She is a product, a worker, and, at the same time, a boss of his life. Moreover, the fact that she can compose music to express what she is feeling (Pérez 2020, 332) also makes her an artist. In their complex relationship, Samantha and Theodore have certain roles; she is the active, artistic one; the manager; and he is a follower, a man who types love letters that have been composed by others.

In *Ex Machina*, the link between art and technology, as well as that between past and present, are both more evident. Ava is an artist like Samantha, as she enjoys drawing. The film makes certain references to the fine arts through the display of famous

paintings on the walls of Nathan's facilities, which Pérez intrerprets as *"an allegory to Ava's quality as a work of art herself"* (Pérez 2020, 332). The use of Jackson Pollock's painting *No 5 1948* (Pollock 1948) is explained by Nathan to Caleb as follows:

"Nathan: This is Jackson Pollock, the painter of dripping. Well, he cleared his head and let his hand go where he wanted. Neither will nor chance, but somewhere in between. This was called automatic art. […] Imagine that Pollock, had reversed the challenge, rather than doing art without thinking he would have said to himself "I can't paint anything" if he didn't know exactly what he was doing. What would have happened?

Caleb: He would never have made a single point.

Nathan: Yes […] he would never have made a single point. The challenge is not to act automatically, it is to find an action which is not" (Garland 2014).

Nathan uses the example of Pollock's dripping technique to convince Caleb that Ava's actions are not *"the result of human and intentional bias"* but instead prove her freedom of choice (Archyde 2021). In the end, his theory is indeed proven as Ava does in fact make a choice. Another issue raised by the fact that a Pollock's painting is hanging on Nathan's wall is whether it is an original or a replica (Hummel n.d.). The very question about originals and replicas is entirely related to the essence of AI robots, clones, cyborgs, and other beings in science fiction films that have been created to resemble some aspect of humanity. Additionally, the artistic references that Garland makes in *Ex Machina* present a notable link between the past and the future. While Pollock and Klimt's paintings serve as visual reminders of the famous artists of the past, which can also be a reference to auteur filmmakers, the masks hanging on the wall of the corridor (see Chapter 1, section 1.2) are both an artistic reference and a proof of Ava's past. Finally, these visual details further highlight the female gaze; from Ava's curious gaze at the masks to Kyoko's inexplicable gaze at Pollock's painting, the film subverts the androcentric gaze to promote female subjectivity through art.

Art has a prominent role in *I'm Your Man* as well. In this case, Schrader focuses on the male robot's curious gaze at artworks and Alma's female gaze at him. Additionally, Alma, as an archaeologist and a researcher, subverts the trope of the male scientist and, thus, reclaims female subjectivity.

Finally, *Westworld* is an example of how cyborg femininities created by male scientists subvert the androcentric norm by reconstructing themselves and other humanoid robots. In that sense, Dolores can be characterised as both a scientist and an artist, an artificial being and a subject.

Conclusion

This thesis examined filmic representations of gendered cyborgs, robots, disembodied machines, and other types of non-humans or posthumans that display humanlike characteristics, consciousness, and intelligence. The case studies were derived primarily from science fiction cinema and secondary from television, with parallel readings of relevant literature and visual arts. The common thematic between the examined narratives was mainly the exploration of the romantic, sexual, or platonic relationship between humans and non-humans. With female characters being in the position of the Other in most of the cases, this work delved into depictions of femininity and its (de)construction, (dis)embodiment, and (de)humanisation, and explored how the cases studies either challenged or reinforced the gender binary.

The study of the merge of women and machines in film and visual culture considered relevant scholarship found in feminist film theory, cyborg feminism and posthuman debates. The analysis of gendered representations was primarily based on a combined conceptual approach of the AI, cyborg and posthuman discourses, which was explained by the common focus of these discourses on non-humanity, as well as on consciousness over embodiment.

Following a combined methodological approach, the close readings of the cultural texts considered the androcentric nature of science and science fiction, and how this is expressed in AI, posthuman, and cyborg filmography. The romance subgenre of the case studies further reveals the patriarchal standards of such narratives which remain confined in the heterosexual romance between a male self and a female other. On the other hand, such narratives also demonstrate ways of escaping the binary and enable the reader to view them as subversive.

Such subversive readings included the introduction of the terms *"failed masculinity"* and *"cyborg femininity"* and the ways in which they are expressed in the examined filmography. Throughout the thesis, the failure of masculinity was interpreted through different prisms and depictions and as a symptomatic expression of its opposite pole, the mechanical, othered, automated, cyborg femininity.

To this end, this work made a contribution to the field by suggesting a reading of subgenres that explores *a merging through another merging*. This refers to the way science fiction and romance, as two stereotypically masculine and feminine genres

respectively, appear intertwined in the exploration of gender and other binarisms. By studying Asimov's description of robotic *pathos* and the conceptualisation of the word, and taking into account Doane's analysis of pathos in melodrama, another traditionally feminine genre in film, the thesis argued that it is particularly the link between pathos and logic, romance and technology, masculine and feminine that can enable the reader to revisit and remap gender dichotomies in visual culture.

In the first chapter of the thesis, this remapping began from the exploration of failed masculinities and cyborg femininities in visual representations. The chapter focused particularly on *Ex Machina*'s issues of masquerade and androgynous transformation to demonstrate how the robotic 'nature' of female (as assigned by creation) Ava plays a pivotal role in the transgression of the masculine/feminine binary and enables a reading of her as a potentially queer or trans figure. Ava's nonhumanity is found to be precisely what exposes the artificiality of both femininity and masculinity.

The robotic transformations of Ava, Kyoko, and other nonhuman entities in the examined films were examined in comparative readings of classical cinema, such as Hitchcock's *Vertigo* and Wenders' *Paris Texas*. The auteur theory resurfaced via such a comparison and so did Mulvey's theory of the male gaze. However, the chapter expanded on these theories by demonstrating how in recent filmography both the director's power as the author of the film and the masculine bearer of the gaze fail, as robotic femininity is parodic, threatening, othering.

Parody is particularly important when examining cyborg femininity. While the representations of female cyborgs are seriously androcentric, portraying cyborg femininity as real, sensual, and threatening to the male human character, the reader has the power of discovering the flaw in such portrayals. Since Ava's femininity is depicted as a mask, artificial flesh or a combination of cute pieces of clothing, what else could her femininity be other than a lie, a staged performance? Respectively, the chapter explored how it is not Ava's femininity that is deceiving, as femininity is only a weapon. Instead, it is Caleb's fragile masculinity that is exposed, his masculine desire and *pathos* that lead him into his own demise.

The chapter's final section showed how masculinity is the reason behind its own failure by depicting the male gaze as a mirror: Travis' gaze in *Paris Texas*, Caleb's gaze in *Ex Machina*, and even Theodore's gaze in *Her* are all gazes through a glass, looking

at a woman, female cyborg or computer screen while really looking at themselves. The aim of this section was to deconstruct the politics of gaze and the objectification of women through their own visual portrayals and transformations by focusing on the male character's portrayal.

Passing from the politics of gaze to the politics of sound, the second chapter explored how feminine identities can be constructed both visually and aurally. Drawing on Chion's account of sound and Silverman's exploration of voice and femininity in film, the chapter examined the disembodied female character in *Her* and the implications of such a disembodiment for the character's femininity. It was demonstrated that Samantha's aural representation still contributes to the construction of a powerful 'image' of femininity for a variety of reasons; first, Johansson's casting enables the visualisation of Samantha as a real person with the actress' very famous appearance; secondly Johansson's sensual voice echoes stereotypical femininity; moreover, the film offers a continuous visual presence of a woman that is often juxtaposed with Samantha's voice, such as Theodore's former wife, his date, a potential surrogate partner and his best friend.

The chapter also explored how the disembodied female voice represented the mother, the lover or the other, from Samantha's maternal personality to her sexuality, as well as her nonhumanity (otherness). The maternal references of the film were examined as a fundamental feature of Theodore's personality and psyche. Again, the feminine representation functioned as a mirror – an acoustic one, in this case, to use Silverman's metaphor – of the male character's fears and desires. The problem with such a representation is that the female's desires remain rather unexplored when Samantha breaks up with Theodore to pursue her full AI potential in a non-existent world. The beautiful metaphor for a female's self-development is left untold, with the film's ending focusing on heartbroken Theodore and his potential human romance with his friend Amy. In that way, the narrative remains limited in an androcentric and heterosexual view of romance and sexuality, while, at the same time, it offers glimpses of a different future that transgresses this view and embraces the multiplicity of a post-gender world.

The second section of the chapter again moved from the disconnection between image and sound in *Her* to their synchresis in *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*. This section

focused more on the sound and soundtrack of the case studies and analysed the connection between sound, genre, and gender. More specifically, as both *Ex Machina* and *Westworld* present a blended genre of science fiction and neo noir, the section examined how music contributes to the merging of the genres, as well as to the blurring of the boundaries between femininity and masculinity. In *Ex Machina*, Kyoko's image was studied as the opposite of Samantha's voice, since she is an AI that can be seen and not heard. It was shown that Kyoko's muteness intensifies her otherness and contributes to a stereotypical portrayal of a non-white female character. On the other hand, the power of language in the film demonstrates that female characters do not need human language to communicate with each other. This can be read both as empowering and problematic as, on the one hand, it manifests the kinship between Ava and Kyoko as victims of patriarchal violence, but, on the other, it further dehumanises them. Considering the neo noir genre, the section demonstrated how the soundtrack has a primary role in creating an othering, uncanny atmosphere that highlights the alien, threatening nature of the female heroines. This is the case not only in *Ex Machina* but also in *Westworld*.

However, in the third section it was shown that *Westworld*'s genre is even more blended as the embedded western narrative in which the robots participate further complicates its reading as a science fiction text. Drawing on Doane's account on pathos and melodrama, the section studied one of the most crucial moments of *Westworld* in which the female heroine avenges her fellow robots by undertaking a both masculine and feminine role, transcending the boundaries of gender. The music has a predominant role in this scene, as, rather than dehumanising Dolores, it offers a new perspective of her being a masculine hero of a western melodrama. In that way, the reading suggests that Dolores' subjectivity is reclaimed through the music, as well as the tone of her voice and her choice of language.

Chapter three offered an intersectional approach by studying racial and class differences and their (under)representation in science fiction filmography. Considering Dyer and Hook's accounts on whiteness and blackness, as well as Crenshaw's coining of the term 'intersectionality' in feminism, the chapter investigated how certain science fiction narratives are constantly othering or excluding non-white heroines. At the same

time, the prevalence of whiteness and wealth in such narratives demonstrates how films depict technology as a tool for the few and privileged.

In both its sections, "Silent Maids Screaming for a Voice" and "On Whiteness, Capitalism and Techno-Orientalism", the chapter demonstrates the whiteness of AI films and its relation to both capitalism and patriarchy. *Ex Machina* was studied as an example of such a white privilege demonstrated through the contrast between Ava, the white heroine, Kyoko, the Asian mute maid, and other non-white female cyborgs who are depicted as minor characters in the film. The fact that Garland depicts the mistreatment of these females of Black and Asian ethnicities by either Nathan or Ava can be a sign of recognition for the real struggles and abuse that non-white women face. At the same time, however, the visualisation and fetishisation of violence against non-white femininities can be problematic and triggering.

In its second section, the chapter delved more into the representation of whiteness and the exclusion of blackness in AI films. The portrayal of famous actress Scarlett Johansson in non-human roles also contributed to the observations made regarding how the image of the white femme fatale is constructed and how it undertakes a dominant position. In *Her*, for instance, the almost total whiteness of a futuristic Los Angeles is intensified by the association of Samantha's voice with the image of the popular actress, resonating with Dyer's argument about the powerful femme fatale images of white women. However, in the film *Under the Skin*, which was used as a parallel case study, the construction of femininity deviates from stereotypical portrayals and fetishisations of white women, as the film depicts a female character who expresses her own desires through her sexuality. While it is not a film about race, the use of colour is important in how this femininity is constructed and deconstructed, as the colours black in the end was read as a symbolism of both self-knowledge and self-loss, freedom, and death.

The exploration of gender and race formed an important part of the analysis in the fourth chapter, although the primary focus was how the rape culture is constructed or deconstructed in futuristic narratives and how this draws parallels with the #MeToo movement. *Westworld*, as a series with a strong representation of sexual violence against femininities, was a primary case study in this exploration.

One aspect this chapter examined was the binary taxonomy of the female robot in *Westworld*, that undertakes fetishised roles of either sexually open or saintlike femininities. Monstrosity was also studied as a key element of nonhuman narratives. The question of what it is to be a monster was answered through the close reading of the multiple representations of male, female, human, and nonhuman. The series' depiction of the monstrous masculine was thoroughly analysed through William's character. On the one hand, it was shown that AI narratives often tend to perpetuate the narrative of the wounded, formerly good male hero, who turned bad because of a lost love or because of society. Similar narratives, for example, can be found in popular film and television from *Joker* to *BoJack Horseman*. However, such depictions can be deconstructed if read comparatively with femininity. In a circle of never-ending violence, *Westworld* depicts how female robots also turn 'bad' because of the traumatic experiences with male humans and makes it easier for a viewer to identify with them and their traumas. The male desire is ridiculed, mocked, and dehumanised through William's deconstructed representation.

The concept of the scapegoat was also analysed as a symptomatic expression of futuristic narratives. Especially in dystopian texts, the scapegoat mechanism can reflect the urgent need to escape a crisis by victimising a certain group of individuals. AI narratives have repeatedly selected humanlike non-humans as their scapegoats, from the replicants in *Blade Runner* and the clones in *The Island i*n film to the robots of *Westworld* and the clones of *Orphan Black* in television. This thesis, though, has focused on other characteristics of the victimised groups, such as their constructed gender and race. In *Westworld*, for instance, the black heroines Maeve and Charlotte often went through a different visual treatment from Dolores.

The third section, "Passing to Survive", returned to a more thorough study of black femininity by studying white passing as black and its implications. The study on passing considered how cyborg femininities pass not only as humans but also as females or, in Dolores' case, as black. Passing is represented as a form of existence and resistance for the robots, that use their human appearance as a tool to fight their oppressors. The exploration of black femininity is limited, however, as the black female characters of the series seem to be trapped in the stereotypical roles of a monster or a wounded mother.

However, other important forms of passing came into surface, such as the trans-passing these AI narratives suggest due to the fact that AI robots perform their gender in the most obvious way. Passing requires a deception, a pretence, that is so much associated with the 'nature' of a robot or a replicant as a simulacrum of a human. However, it is also highly associated with femininity, especially with the dangerous femininity in film noirs, a subgenre of *Ex Machina*, *Westworld*, *Blade Runner* and *Blade Runner 2049*: in all these cultural texts, passing is a way to fool and ridicule male humans, but most importantly a way to survive.

The subjectivity of female characters emerges more in the fifth chapter that examined female relationships in the case studies. It was argued that while scholarship has considered both female friendships and romantic partnerships in general filmography, the field of science fiction and particularly that of Artificial Intelligence, has remained focused on the male-female relationships. For this reason, this chapter delved into the ways in which female relationships were represented or underrepresented in the examined films.

The stimulation for such an exploration was partly the romantic subgenre or romantic implications of the selected case studies. This is explained by the fact that most mainstream films that highlight female bonds, either erotic or friendly, are romance or drama films, especially chick flicks, confirming Doane's observation about a distinction between a masculine and a feminine cinema. The chapter did refer to a number of the most important women's films of the past decade, demonstrating how there has been a significant shift in a filmography that prioritises women's kinships in a non-stereotypical, non-parodic way, and even makes lesbianism more visible. However, the masculine genre of science fiction has remained critically heterosexual and male-focused in its depictions of relationships. The question that arose was whether the romance subgenre could enable a more realistic view of women coexisting with each other in futuristic worlds or if these worlds still only belong to men. These remain two inextricable points in the analysis, as if only men are allowed to discuss technology with each other and if female entities are only a decorative aspect of a femme fatale, then it is impossible to envision cyberfeminist utopias in science fiction narratives.

The first thematic axe of the chapter studied the implications of female homosociality expressed through either the female friendship or the platonic female romance. It was

demonstrated that female homosociality has a secondary, almost silent role in these narratives, with female bonds being implied, hastily mentioned or entirely invisible. The heterosexual romance between a male human who wants to possess a female AI is the main focal point through which all other relationships are shaped. The analysed example was the film *Her*, which clearly showed how the plot is formulated based on Theodore's past, present and future relationships with women and a female disembodied AI. All these femininities exist in relation to his existence. There are only brief references and implications of Samantha's other relationships with humans and AI operating systems, whose genders are unknown. The most interesting character in terms of homosociality is Amy, a human who does have an unclear, though probably romantic, relationship with another AI operating system. Amy's relationships with her mother and her own womanhood are also briefly mentioned and underdeveloped.

The second axe delved more into the female alliance against the male dominance and control in *Ex Machina* and explored how, on the one hand, the female kinship fails its purpose by representing the female cyborgs as a threat to not only men but also one another, but, on the other, it introduces the concept of the queer cyborg that challenges the heterosexual male's fear of female homosociality. The question that emerged is the extent to which both films view female homosociality through the prism of male fantasies, without allowing it to surpass the point of obscurity as it would then cease being innocent.

The final chapter explored female spectatorship taking *I'm Your Man* as its starting point, since it is a film about AI directed by a woman. It discussed how the vast majority of AI films are directed by men, gave an overview of AI or similar science fiction films directed by women, and noted how the latter tend to lack popularity. While the same can be said about Schrader's *I'm Your Man*, as a German film with not the same commercial success as many of its Hollywood predecessors and successors, it was still an important case study as a very recent example of an AI romance that follows traditional tropes but, at the same time, reverses them.

This reversal was studied thoroughly in the first section of the chapter, entitled "Objectifying Men?", which offered a close reading of the film, focusing particularly on scenes that parody gender norms in romance films. The science fiction element was also parodied, demonstrating how binarisms are a human problem in the presence.

The parody of both genres, the masculine science fiction and the feminine romance (which falls into the category of a softer genre, in Doane's words), was particularly important in its deconstruction of modern pathos, as well as for traditional filmic representations of males and females.

The second section, "From Invisibility to Subjectivity" explored three aspects of female spectatorship. First, it demonstrated the importance of the heterosexual female gaze in *I'm Your Man*, by examining Alma's persistent gaze on Tom. Then, it explored the queer female gaze in *Westworld* by giving a series of examples of how the series deviates from the heterosexual motif of other AI paradigms in visual culture. Finally, it examined how female spectatorship and subjectivity are reconstructed in *Her* and *Ex Machina*, but also in all four main case studies, by studying the concept of the female artist and the female scientist and demonstrating how this blurs the subject/object dichotomy.

Overall, this work explored different aspects of the gendered AI in film and popular visual culture and demonstrated how cyborg femininity can, in some instances, perpetuate binarisms, while, in others, it can be weaponised against those and pave the way for a visualisation of utopian post-feminist narratives. The thesis considered how a new posthuman subjectivity, which goes beyond established gender binarisms through the introduction of post-gender figures, is represented in film and television. Through the combination of different methodological tools, the thesis argued that it is both the nonhumanity of the gendered characters and their romantic or sexual interactions with humans that contribute to the shaping of such a post-gender subjectivity.

On the one hand, the ostensibly heterosexual romance is challenged in all four main case studies: in *Her*, the disembodied AI is represented as a pansexual creature whose needs are not fulfilled by a conventional romantic relationship in human terms; in *Ex Machina*, the neo noir narrative of the femme fatale is subverted by the representation of the male hero as another form of captivity for the cyborg heroine; this subtle critique against patriarchy is more evident in *Westworld*, with the archetype of the violent male being continuously deconstructed and contested; finally, in *I'm Your Man*, the romance only works through a gender reversal that parodies established norms relating to genre and gender.

On the other hand, the futuristic setting of the narratives echoes Halberstam's discourse on queer time and queer space, precisely due to the depiction of posthuman romances. In these new filmic spaces, AI transgresses not only human intelligence but also human ideas of gender and sexuality. From Tom's ability to easily switch from stereotypically feminine to masculine performances, parodying their connotations, to Ava's rejection of her construction as heterosexual and, finally, to Dolores' trans-passings, a new post-gender subjectivity emerges.

Further, this thesis argued that the studied cultural examples demonstrate a shift in AI narratives, such that futuristic ideas are less focused on technological advances and more connected to social change and new post-gender subjectivities. Combined, the exploration of gender and genre, feminist and queer theory, and posthuman studies, contribute to shared readings that subvert dominant norms. These readings emerge from the simultaneous interpretations of pathos in its different aspects: the deconstructed masculine violence, the delinking of passivity from femininity, and the suffering as a cause for rebellion.

Glossary

Android: in science fiction it refers to a robot with a human appearance, made from flesh-like material (Prucher 2007).

Artificial Intelligence (AI): refers to *"the design and study of machines that can perform tasks that would have previously required human (or other biological) brainpower to complete"* (The Alan Turing Institute 2022).

Castration Anxiety: according to the Freudian definition and association with the Oedipal complex, castration anxiety is described by the feeling of *"masculine inadequacy"* in young boys caused by their love for their mothers and competition with their fathers (Rudden 2018).

Cyberfeminism: coined by Sadie Plant in 1994, the term describes the theorisation and critique of *"the Internet, cyberspace, and new-media technologies in general"* by feminist scholars (Consalvo 2002).

Cyberpunk: a subgenre of science fiction that is differentiated by its focus on the blurring of the boundaries between technology and the human body, as well as its critique on late capitalism and social hierarchies (Calvert 2013).

Cyborg: a creature that is both an organism and a machine (Haraway 1991, 3).

Intersectionality: term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the interaction between race and gender and the way it shapes the Black women's experiences (Crenshaw 1991).

Machine Learning (ML): a computational and statistical approach to extracting patterns and trends from data. A Machine Learning algorithm refers to a computer programme that learns from experience with data and optimises its performance with greater experience (Maini 2017) (Mitchell 1997) (Jennie E. Brand 2020).

Passing: the act of assuming membership within social groups.

Postbody: a term used here to refer to the posthuman body

Posthuman: a new form of subjectivity that deviates from nature and is characterised by consciousness rather than materiality and embodiment (Hayles 1999).

Rape Culture: the systemic normalisation of sexual violence against women.

Replicant: a fictional term used in the 1982 film *Blade Runner* to describe artificial beings that are copies of humans.

Scapegoat Mechanism: René Girard's theory of the scapegoat describes how societies in crisis tend to victimise some of their members by accusing them of the crimes that led to the crisis in the first place (Girard 1986).

Simulacrum: The concept of the simulacrum, introduced in Plato's Sophist, distinguishes two different types of copies: 'real' copies are precise reproductions of the original, while simulacra are *"false claimants"* that distort reality (Deleuze 1983, 47-48). While Jean Baudrillard claims that simulacra are misleading and follows Plato's conceptualization of mimesis (Baudrillard 1994), Gilles Deleuze follows a more positive approach, arguing that simulacra can actually encourage alternative readings of reality and challenge dominant conventions.

Synchresis: a term which Michel Chion invented by combining the words "synchronism" and "synthesis", to describe the merging of image and sound in film (Chion, Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen 1994). (Turing 1950)

Techno-orientalism: a term coined by Morley and Robins. It describes how the Japan's proliferation of technologies transformed the exotic Orient into a futuristic Other that threatens the technological supremacy of the West (Morley 1995).

Turing Test: Alan Turing's famous imitation game refers to the process of testing a machine's ability to exhibit intelligence that cannot be distinguished from human intelligence (Turing 1950).

Utopia/Dystopia: the term 'comes from the Greek 'ou-' (u-), which means 'no-', and the word 'topos' which means 'place', so it literally means 'no place' or 'nowhere'. However, the word is very similar (and, in English, homophonous) to the word 'eutopia', which means a 'good (eu-) place'. Therefore, utopia, is both a good, perfect place - in its most idealised meaning - and a place that doesn't exist. 'Dystopia' is also a non-existent place, but with a negative meaning, as indicated by the 'dys-'; in other words, it is an undesirable place. In science fiction, utopia and dystopia are the visions of a better and a worse world respectively (Lefanu 1989, 177).

Android: Ανδροειδές, ρομπότ με ανθρώπινη μορφή

Artificial Intelligence (AI): Τεχνητή Νοημοσύνη. Κλάδος της πληροφορικής σχετικός με την σχεδίαση και υλοποίηση υπολογιστικών συστημάτων, μηχανών και τεχνολογιών, ικανών να αναπαράγουν ή να μιμούνται ανθρώπινες γνωστικές λειτουργίες που απαιτούν ένα βαθμό ευφυΐας.

Cisgender (Cis): Αναφέρεται στα άτομα που αυτοπροσδιορίζονται σύμφωνα με το φύλο με το οποίο γεννήθηκαν.

Cyberfeminism: Κυβερνοφεμινισμός. Όρος που εισήγαγε πρώτη η Sadie Plant το 1994. Περιγράφει την διερεύνηση και την κριτική του κυβερνοχώρου και των νέων τεχνολογιών γενικότερα στις φεμινιστικές σπουδές.

Cyberpunk: Κυβερνοπάνκ. Λογοτεχνικό ρεύμα επιστημονικής φαντασίας που εμφανίστηκε στην Αμερική την δεκαετία του 1970. Εστιάζει στην ασάφεια των ορίων μεταξύ τεχνολογίας και ανθρώπινου σώματος, καθώς και στην κριτική στον ύστερο καπιταλισμό και τις κοινωνικές ιεραρχίες.

Cyborg (σάιμποργκ): Αυτοματοποιημένος τεχνητός οργανισμός, ον του κυβερνοχώρου.

Intersectionality: Διαθεματικότητα. Όρος που εισήγαγε η Kimberlé Crenshaw για να περιγράψει την αλληλεπίδραση ανάμεσα σε φυλή και φύλο και τον τρόπο που διαμορφώνει τις εμπειρίες των μαύρων γυναικών (Crenshaw 1991).

Machine Learning (ML): Μηχανική Μάθηση. Κλάδος της τεχνητής νοημοσύνης, σύμφωνα με τον οποίο ένα υπολογιστικό σύστημα μπορεί να μάθει από την ανάλυση δεδομένων και να βελτιστοποιήσει τις λειτουργίες του με την εμπειρία.

Passing: όρος που χρησιμοποιείται για να περιγράψει πώς ένα άτομο μπορεί να «περάσει» ως μέλος μίας, συνήθως προνομιούχας, κοινωνικής ομάδας στην οποία δεν ανήκει. Για παράδειγμα, μία ανοιχτόχρωμη μαύρη γυναίκα μπορεί να «περάσει» ως λευκή (racial passing).

Postbody: Μετασώμα. Εδώ ο όρος χρησιμοποιείται για να περιγράψει το σώμα του μεταανθρώπου.

Postgender: Μεταφύλο, μεταφυλικός. Χρησιμοποιείται για να περιγράψει το μη δυαδικό φύλο.

Posthuman: Μεταάνθρωπος. Ένα νέο είδος υποκειμενικότητας που αποκλίνει από την φύση και χαρακτηρίζεται από συνειδητότητα αντί για υλικότητα και σωματικότητα.

Rape Culture: Κουλτούρα του βιασμού. Η συστημική κανονικοποίηση της σεξουαλικής βίας εναντίον των γυναικών.

Replicant: φανταστικός όρος που χρησιμοποιήθηκε στην ταινία *Blade Runner* για να περιγράψει γενετικά προηγμένες ρέπλικες των ανθρώπων.

Scapegoat Mechanism: Η θεωρία του René Girard για το εξιλαστήριο θύμα περιγράφει πώς σε καιρούς κρίσης οι κοινωνίες τείνουν να θυματοποιούν ορισμένα από τα μέλη τους κατηγορώντας τα για τα εγκλήματα που οδήγησαν στην κρίση (Girard 1986).

Simulacrum: Η θεωρία του «ομοιώματος», σύμφωνα με τον Πλάτωνα, διαχωρίζει δύο είδη αντιγράφων: το «αυθεντικό», που είναι η ακριβής αναπαραγωγή του πρωτότυπου, και το «ομοίωμα» που διαστρεβλώνει την πραγματικότητα (Deleuze 1983, 47-48).

Synchresis: Σύγχρεση (συγχρονισμός και σύνθεση). Όρος που επινόησε ο Michel Chion για να περιγράψει την συγχώνευση εικόνας και ήχου στον κινηματογράφο (Chion 1994).

Techno-orientalism: Τεχνο-οριενταλισμός. Όρος που περιγράφει πώς η ανάπτυξη των τεχνολογιών στην Ιαπωνία μεταμόρφωσε την εξωτική Ανατολή σε έναν φουτουριστικό Άλλο που απειλεί την τεχνολογική ηγεμονία της Δύσης (Morley 1995).

Transgender (Trans): Αναφέρεται στα άτομα που αντιλαμβάνονται το φύλο τους διαφορετικά από το φύλο με το οποίο γεννήθηκαν.

Turing Test: Γνωστό και ως το «παιχνίδι της μίμησης», το τεστ του Turing αναφέρεται στην διαδικασία κατά την οποία εξετάζεται η ικανότητα μίας μηχανής να επιδείξει ανθρώπινη ευφυΐα. Κατά την διάρκεια του τεστ, ένας άνθρωπος επικοινωνεί μέσω μηνυμάτων με έναν άλλον άνθρωπο και μία μηχανή, χωρίς να τους βλέπει. Αν ο πρώτος δεν μπορεί να προσδιορίσει ποιος από τους δύο αποδέκτες είναι η μηχανή, τότε η μηχανή περνά το τεστ με επιτυχία.

Filmography

Films

2001: A Space Odyssey, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1968)

A.I. Artificial Intelligence, dir. by Steven Spielberg (DreamWorks Pictures, 2001)

A Wrinkle in Time, dir. by Ava DuVernay (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2018)

Adam, dir. by Maryam Touzani's (Les Films du Nouveau Monde, Artémis Productions, Ali n' Productions, 2019).

Advantageous, dir. by Jennifer Phang (Netflix, 2015)

Alien, dir. by Ridley Scott (20th Century Fox, 1979)

Autómata, dir. by Gabe Ibáñez (Contracorrientes Films, 2014)

Babel, dir. by Alejandro González Iñárritu (Paramount Vantage, 2006)

Beanpole, dir. by Kantemir Balagov (MUBI, 2019)

Black Rain, dir. by Ridley Scott (Paramount Pictures, 1989)

Blade Runner, dir. by Ridley Scott (Warner Bros., 1982)

Blade Runner 2049, dir. by Denis Villeneuve (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2017)

Blue is the Warmest Colour dir. by Abdellatif Kechiche (Wild Bunch, 2013)

Born in Flames, dir. by Lizzie Borden (First Run Features, 1983)

Cam, dir. by Daniel Goldhaber (Netflix, 2018)

Children of Men, dir. by Alfonso Cuarón (Universal, 2006)

Cloud Atlas, dir. by Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, Tom Tykwer (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2012)

Ex Machina, dir. by Alex Garland (A24, 2014)

Futureworld, dir. by Richard T. Heffron (American International Pictures, 1976)

Gattaca, dir. by Andrew Niccol (Columbia, 1977)

Ghost in the Shell, dir. by Mamoru Oshii (Kôdansha, 1995)

Ghost in the Shell, dir. by Rupert Sanders (Paramount Pictures, 2017)

Gilda, dir. by Charles Vidor (Columbia Pictures, 1946)

Her, dir. by Spike Jonze (Warner Bros., 2013)

I'm your Man, dir. by Maria Schrader (Majestic Filmverleih, 2021)

Joker, dir. by Todd Phillips (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2019)

Lolita, dir. by Stanley Kubrick (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1962)

Lost in Translation, dir. by Sofia Coppola (Focus Features, Tohokushinsha Film, 2003)

Making Mr. Right, dir. by Susan Seidelman (Orion Pictures, 1897)

Men, dir. by Alex Galrand (Entertainment Film Distributors, 2022)

Metropolis, dir. by Fritz Lang (UFA, 1927)

Nomadland dir. by Chloé Zhao (Searchlight Pictures, 2020)

Papicha dir. by Mounia Meddour (Jour2Fête, 2019)

Paris, Texas, dir. by Wim Wenders (20th Century Fox, 1984)

Passing, dir. by Rebecca Hall (Netflix, 2021)

Persona, dir. by Ingmar Bergman (AB Svensk Filmindustri, 1966)

Portrait of a Lady on Fire, dir. by Céline Sciamma (Pyramide Films, 2019)

Reminiscence, dir. by Lisa Joy (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2021)

Romeo + Juliet, dir. by Baz Luhrmann (20th Century Fox, 1996)

Some Like It Hot, dir. by Billy Wilder (United Artists, 1959)

Surrogates, dir. by Jonathan Mostow (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2009)

Strange Days, dir. by Kathryn Bigelow (United International Pictures, 1995)

Tank Girl, dir. by Rachel Talalay (MGM/UA Distribution Co., 1995)

Teknolust, dir. by Lynn Hershman-Leeson (Velocity Entertainment, 2002)

The Handmaid's Tale, dir. by Volker Schlöndorff (Cinecom Pictures, 1990)

The Handmaiden, dir. by Chan-wook Park (CJ Entertainment, 2016)

The Island, dir. by Michael Bay (Warner Bros. Pictures, 2005)

The Little Mermaid, dir. by Rob Marshall (Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures, 2023)

The Matrix Trilogy, dir. by Lana and Lilly Wachowski (Warner Bros, 1999, 2003)

The Stepford Wives, dir. by Bryan Forbes (Columbia Pictures, 1975)

The Stepford Wives, dir. by Frank Oz (DreamWorks Pictures, 2004)

Tombstone, dir. by George P. Cosmatos (Cinergi Productions, 1993)

Under the Skin, dir. by Jonathan Glazer (StudioCanal, 2013)

Vanishing Waves, dir. by Kristina Buozyte (Tremora, 2012)

Vertigo, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (Paramount Pictures, 1958)

Zoe, dir. by Drake Doremus (Amazon Studios, 2018)

Westworld, dir. by Michael Crichton (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1973)

Wyatt Earp, dir. by Lawrence Kasdan (Warner Bros., 1994)

Television Series

Black Mirror, created by Charlie Brooker (Zeppotron, House of Tomorrow, Broke & Bones 2011-present)

BoJack Horseman, created by Raphael Bob-Waksberg (Netflix Streaming Services, 2014-2020)

Orphan Black, created by Graeme Manson and John Fawcett (Temple Street Productions, BBC America, Bell Media, 2013-2017)

Sense8, created by Lana Wachowski, Lilly Wachowski, J. Michael Straczynski (Netflix, 2015-2018)

The Handmaid's Tale, created by Bruce Miller (MGM Television, 2017-)

Westworld, created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy (Warner Bros. Television Distribution, 2016-2022)

Television Episodes

"San Junipero." *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker, season 3, episode 4, House of Tomorrow, 2016

"Striking Vipers." *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker, season 5, episode 1, House of Tomorrow, 2019

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