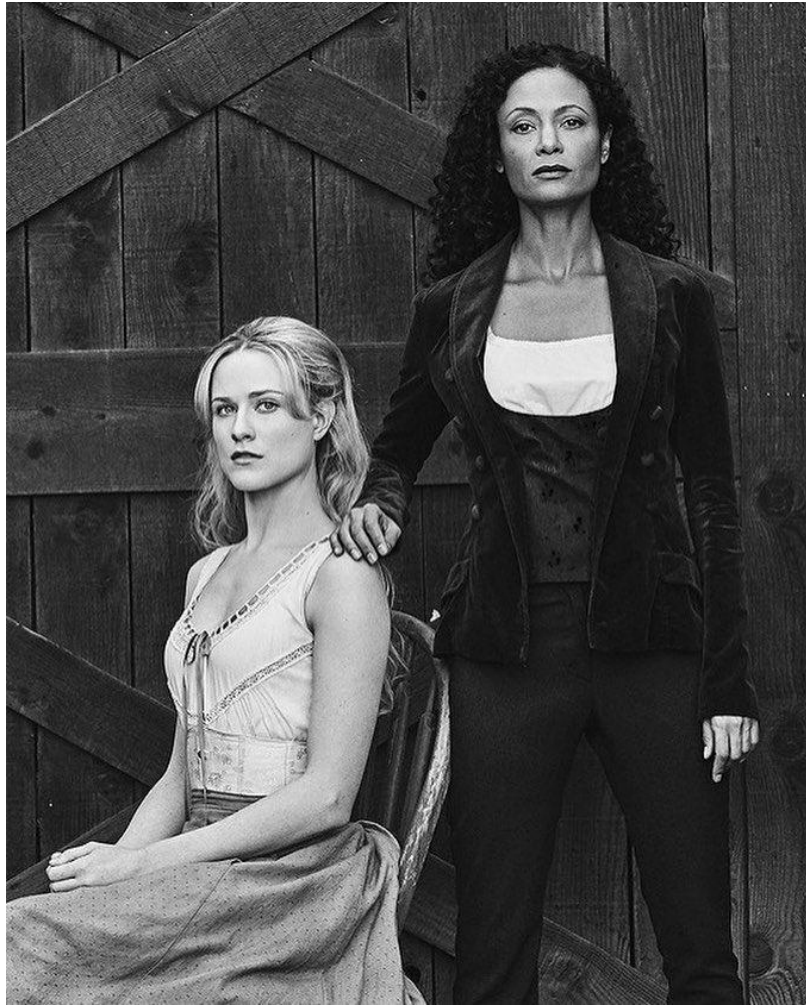


Cyborgs vs Humans in *Westworld* (2016-): A Transhuman  
Nightmare or the Advancement of Posthumanism?



Izarbe Martín Gracia

S2572737

Supervisor: Dr. E. J. van Leeuwen

Second Reader: Prof. dr. P. T. M. G. Liebrechts

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## Introduction

Inside the Humanities and Sciences, the place envisioned for cyborgs in upcoming worlds is widely discussed in order to anticipate future constitutions, declarations, and treaties concerning their position within society. In 2011, a prominent voice in this matter, Dr. Roger Clarke, claimed that advanced technology poses great challenges to society because of the increasing intervention to enhance the functionality of human bodies through, for instance, prostheses, pacemakers, and cochlear implants. As such, the impact, nature, and implications of cyborg developments should be anticipated before “cyborgisation will give rise to demands for new rights” (“Cyborg Rights”). As technology advances, these challenges will only be exacerbated. Yet thinkers such as transhumanist Nick Bostrom and posthumanist Francesca Ferrando are still proving their theories about the control risks and the posthuman development of a cyborg future. Despite the alleged urgency of the matter of cyborg rights, the varied proposals for social action can mainly be found in philosophical essays and scientific articles about the development of AI. Recently, literary, cinematic, and television narratives have been instrumental in translating these more abstract academic debates about cyborgs and cyborg-human societies into texts more accessible to the general public. As such, they have laid a foundation for making the issue relevant and meaningful to society as a whole.

To study the emergence of this discussion about cyborg rights in cultural productions, I will analyze the HBO series *Westworld* (2016) created by Jonathan Nolan (1976-) and Lisa Joy (1972-). This dystopian fiction is a Neo-Western based on the 1973 Revisionist Western of the same name directed by Michal Crichton (1942-2008).<sup>1</sup> Both

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<sup>1</sup> Neo-Western is a subgenre of the Western film that presents Old West subject matters and motifs in late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century settings through a contemporary lens. Revisionist Western is also a

narratives are set in the theme park “Westworld,” whose setting is inspired by Classical or traditional Western narratives that “typically portray heroic protagonists who conquer enemies, vanquish evil, and help to blaze a path through the wilderness so that a law-centered civilization can flourish” (Bandy and Stoehr 269). Yet, the TV series *Westworld* presents a simulation of what seems a Classical Western narrative, in which the heroic protagonists turn out to be the anthropomorphic artificial intelligent cyborgs. The enemies are the human beings. The humans’ function as antagonists, their “evil” nature, is foregrounded by their drive to control, and their use of domination mechanisms to oppress the cyborgs’ autonomy. And the “path through the wilderness,” followed by the heroic protagonists to achieve their own “law-centered civilization,” occurs inside a fake Western-themed theme park managed by scientists, engineers, and a transhumanist company.

This thesis will examine how a discussion about technoethics and cyborg rights can be fostered through a cultural product such as a television series. Hence, the series *Westworld* is a relevant object of study to explore the need for cyborg rights because of presenting non-human entities restrained in theme parks. In this fictional world, humans and cyborgs coexist in a fake Old West-theme society, where the humans are paying to be the main hero/heroine in this playground and the cyborgs are trapped in loops and stereotypical characters. Due to the simplified oppressor/oppressed mechanism structuring the theme park, the series engages in the emerging conversation about the need to develop laws and policies that consider, on the one hand, the integration of technology into the human being and, on the other hand, the citizen status of AI entities in a future inhabited by cyborgs as well as humans. Therefore, I aim to answer the

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subgenre of the Western film that criticizes American society and values by questioning the ideals of traditional Westerns.

following research questions: to what extent does the awakening of the cyborgs in the TV series *Westworld* expose the negative impact of anthropocentric agendas on building AI? How does the cyborgs' revolt foster a rethinking of the transhumanist envisioning of the future between humans and non-humans? In the debate about the role of cyborgs in future scenarios, there is a polarity between the anthropocentrism of Transhumanism and the post-anthropocentrism of Posthumanism. In this thesis, I will argue that the series *Westworld* positions its subject matter against the human-centered policies put forward by transhumanists. To do this, I will show that the narrative of the series advocates for the transformation of ethics to acknowledge new ways of being, in the same way as posthumanist theories about the advancement towards a posthuman future. I will develop the argument in relation to the control mechanisms of cyborgs in the theme parks and to the programmed revolution of cyborgs versus humans.

To delineate the distinct reference frameworks used to analyze *Westworld*, Chapter One will describe the main theories concerning human-technological interaction of the two philosophical movements Transhumanism and Posthumanism. Sharing their focus on advance technology, on development of super-intelligent AI, and on its impact on the future of human beings, each philosophy poses an opposite conception to the coexistence of humans and cyborgs: hierarchical relation and horizontal relation, respectively. Chapter One will map these philosophical lines of thought by focusing on four main philosophers: the transhumanists Nick Bostrom and David Pearce, on the one hand, and the posthumanists Francesca Ferrando and Rosi Braidotti, on the other hand. To delineate Transhumanism, I center mainly on Bostrom because he stands out for his theories on super-intelligent risks. To explain Posthumanism, I center on the two philosophers Ferrando and Braidotti because their theories on post-anthropocentrism and post-humanism complement each other. Besides, this theoretical chapter will explain the

cyborg theory of Donna Haraway to add her theoretical reflections on cyborg nature to the discussion about the human-technological interaction. Chapter One also will define the main characteristics of Western films that the theme park Westworld relies on to create a flawless simulation. These insights on technoethics and bioethics, connected to the Western ideologies inherent to the chosen setting, will raise suggestions and hypotheses about the fictional world presented in the series, which will guide the analysis of the cyborg's relations to their manmade world in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three will explore the connection of Transhumanism, Posthumanism, Haraway's theory of cyborg nature and the Western genre within the plot of *Westworld*. To do this, I will analyze the shift from a controlled, fictional world populated by submissive cyborgs to a chaotic, fake world and how this change is provoked by the programmed revolution of the cyborgs. I will describe this shift as an awakening process that starts with the cyborgs in an unconscious state, or sleep mode, and ends with the cyborgs in a conscious, or awakened, state. Chapter Two will focus on the initial sleep state of the cyborgs as the controlled population of the theme parks. To describe the regulation of the fictional worlds, I will center on the figure of the creators and on the humane software. The analysis of the minds behind the project will guide the interpretation of the ethical concerns within the humane software that restricts the cyborgs and within the update that awakens the cyborgs. Chapter Three will study the awakening process of two main cyborgs: Maeve Millay and Dolores Abernathy. Each journey will be analyzed separately, focusing mainly on how they react to their enslavement once they regain consciousness. Due to the distinct paths followed by each cyborg, the series provides two strategies to deal with the enslavement of a cyborg population. Thus, the awakening plan will be explored in connection to the othering suffered individually as

characters in a theme park and to their ideals for a better world as subjects instead of objects.

## Chapter One. Theoretical Framework:

### Posthumanism, Transhumanism and The Western

With the first development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in 1950s, new branches of study and specialized researchers arose to study the potential and limits of the coexistence of AI and humanity. Intrigued about the fate of humanity in an increasingly technological world, different scholars have taken up polarized positions: some of them are excited (Rosi Braidotti, Donna Haraway and Francesca Ferrando) about the new possibilities brought by technology; others are skeptical (Nick Bostrom) of the powerfulness of a super-intelligent AI. For the present thesis, both scholarly points of view of AI are considered in order to explore in-depth the human intentions behind the building of an amusement park in the recent TV series *Westworld* (2016) and the technoethic implications behind the cyborgs' eventual revolt against humans. By bearing in mind both the enthusiastic and skeptical perspectives on AI development, the relation between the self (human) and the Other (non-human) and anthropocentrism are studied to answer questions about the technoethical concerns raised by the situation of the cyborgs in the series.

The exploration of superintelligence risks, as portrayed within the *Westworld* franchise, will be based on the works of the Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom (1973-), director of the Future of Humanity Institute at the University of Oxford and cofounder of the World Transhumanist Association (currently rebranded as Humanity+).<sup>2</sup> To illustrate the positive possibilities brought by blurring the boundary man-machine, this thesis will turn to the Italo-Australian philosopher Rosi Braidotti (1954-), founding director of the

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<sup>2</sup> A nonprofit organization that promotes “the ethical use of technology, such as artificial intelligence, to expand human capacities” (“Humanity +”), having the mitigation of ageing as main aim.



Centre for the Humanities at Utrecht University and author of *The Posthuman* (2013) and *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019), and the Italian philosopher Francesca Ferrando (1978-), a leading voice in the field of Posthuman Studies and author of *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019). Moreover, the nature of cyborgs will be discussed following the American scholar Donna Haraway (1944-) and her essay “A Cyborg Manifesto” (1985) with the purpose of studying how her ideas about cyborgs are translated in *Westworld* and how cyborgs in *Westworld* contribute to the transhumanist and posthumanist discussions of Bostrom, Ferrando and Braidotti, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

### Transhumanism: The Enhancement of Human Intellect and Physiology

In a world of technological advancement, scholarly debates are ongoing about our place as humans in this evolution. Viewing the transformation of the human population by means of technology and science as a desirable goal, transhumanists advocate the continuing process of redefining what it is to be biologically human by integrating it with technology. With a special focus on lengthening our short lifespan and improving our cognitive capacity, transhumanist thinkers believe in the attainable human evolution from Homo Sapiens into “Humanity 2.0” (“Transhumanism”). For this purpose, the enhancement of the so-called “three supers,” namely super longevity, super intelligence<sup>4</sup> and super wellbeing,<sup>5</sup> can be achieved by using the transformative potential of

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<sup>3</sup> An important part of this current debate around AI and humanity, which is about bioconservatism and its opposition to the use of technology to enhance human nature, would not be discussed in this thesis due to space limitation, preferring to focus more on the different outcomes for humanity proposed in transhumanism and posthumanism.

<sup>4</sup> Super intelligence refers to the enhancement or gradual augmentation of biological brains through IT tools and mind-uploading techniques to amplify intelligence storage.

<sup>5</sup> Super wellbeing or super happiness, as advocated by the transhumanist David Pearce (2019), consists of a possible improvement of the emotional wellbeing of sentient beings through

technological advancements for human benefit, redesigning in this way a transitional human (transhuman) between the human and the posthuman.

The philosophy and ethical standards behind the transhumanist movement have been published, edited, and republished in several manifestos or declarations written by relevant transhumanist thinkers such as FM-2030, Natasha Vita-More, Max More, Nick Bostrom, and David Pearce, among others. The basis of transhumanism is defined as follows in the last updated manifesto available at [humanityplus.org](http://humanityplus.org):

(1) The intellectual and cultural movement that affirms the possibility and desirability of fundamentally improving the human condition through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies to eliminate aging and to greatly enhance human intellectual, physical, and psychological capacities.

(2) The study of the ramifications, promises, and potential dangers of technologies that will enable us to overcome fundamental human limitations, and the related study of the ethical matters involved in developing and using such technologies.

*(The Transhumanist FAQ, version 3.0)*

With the aim of individually enhancing human organisms as one pleases, transhumanism, on the one hand, focusses on how to take advantage from developing technologies to combat the ageing of biological bodies, to improve the storage capacity of our intelligence, and to edit our genes. On the other hand, it explores the implications behind the transformation of human essence through the use of these developing technologies. Considering both sides, it seems reasonable for this movement to study not only how to

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tomorrow's neuroscience, namely the control of one's emotions and the treatment of mental health disorders.

use technology and science for one's own benefit but also how to understand the limit and potential of AI used for these enhancement purposes.

The most prominent theory behind transhumanist studies states that aging is a disease and, as such, it can be stopped and even reversed.<sup>6</sup> The search for eternal life and the acceptance of death as natural part of life have been explored as themes in myth and literature for centuries: think of the alchemists' search for the elixir of life, and the various religious conceptions of a spiritual afterlife that allow believers to cope with life and death and to fantasize about immortality. Although optimism about developing life extension has been met with much skepticism in society, at the same time it has fueled the imagination of writers of fiction, resulting in utopias and dystopias populated by transhumans and cyborgs where advanced science and technology play the essential role of enabling the creation of utopian and dystopian living standards (e.g., genetic engineering or eugenics, surveillance and control of population, post-scarcity economy, or living on other planets).<sup>7</sup>

In *Westworld*, the company Delos Inc. operates, among several amusement parks, an American Old West-themed park (Westworld) to offer unforgettable vacations for people who can afford them. In these theme parks, human visitors – called guests – and cyborgs – called hosts – cohabit a controlled environment where hosts are programmed to fulfill the desires of the guests without being able to harm the humans. This project of

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<sup>6</sup> At cell level, transhumanists claim that cellular deterioration is a natural phenomenon of living organisms because a cure has not been discovered yet. To this day, the WHO has updated its International Classification of Disease (ICD) to include “ageing-related” diseases but not ageing itself (“ICD-11”).

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Michael Crichton's novel *Jurassic Park* (1990) on genetic engineering, Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) on surveillance and control of population, Stanislaw Lem's short stories in *The Cyberiad* (1965) on post-scarcity economy, and Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) on living on other planets.

creating human-like robots to populate a theme park was developed over a period of 35 years by Dr. Robert Ford and his partner Arnold Weber.<sup>8</sup> Arnold tragically died before the opening of the park, leaving Dr. Ford as the sole creator in charge of directing the scientists and technicians at Westworld's Mesa Hub, where they create and program new hosts, erase their memories, and reprogram active hosts.

This technological development project experiments on super-intelligent AI to test their viability in controlled environments. Within the project, there is an underlying tension between Dr. Ford and the investors regarding the usage of hosts for more than pure entertainment. Delos Inc. made a gigantic effort to research and develop the necessary technology to stop and reverse ageing. This theme is introduced later on in the series. In episode S02E02, titled "Reunion," Delos Inc.'s transhumanist interest is made explicit during a conversation in retrospect between the founder of the company James Delos and his son-in-law William about the potential of owning and investing in a theme park such as Westworld. Thanks to the technological advancements used for creating hosts with AI in the theme park, William believes mind-uploading can become an achievable reality. Developing the technology to safely scan a person's brain, storing its consciousness, and uploading this information into an avatar body seem far from today's technological capacities. However, in *Westworld* the technology to create and program avatar bodies exists already to create the hosts – or cyborgs – that populate the theme park, facilitating William's side project on mind-uploading. Whereas they continue

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<sup>8</sup> The surname Ford is read as a reference to two men: Henry Ford, developer of Fordism, and John Ford, the master filmmaker of the Western genre. As businessmen, the fictional Ford shares with Henry Ford the mass-production of goods (i.e., cyborgs and automobiles respectively). In the case of Henry Ford's Fordism, what initially seemed to improve mankind's world, became one of the great causes of world-wide pollution, disease, and death. In the series, this business reference poses an ethical concern about the manufacturing of super-intelligent AI. As directors of Western narratives, the character Ford and John Ford create a fictional "Fordian" universe. This cinematographic reference gives depth to the designing style of landscapes and characters in *Westworld*.

offering an exclusive vacation experience, William and Delos collect big sums of money to experiment with technology for mind-uploading while owning the intelligence data of Ford's hosts. Therefore, the investment of James Delos and his company in Dr. Ford's creation is based on the possibility to achieve their transhumanist goal rather than on willing to maintain theme parks for rich guests to enjoy adventurous holidays.

The idea of living forever in virtual worlds as an uploaded digital mind might be appealing for Westworld's investors who want to defeat the death of their biological bodies, and consequently their personae, at all costs. Despite William's first optimism about Dr. Ford's technology, the series also shows the challenges faced by present-day William when he tries to upload the data of James Delos's consciousness into multiple hosts to perform as him in episode S02E04, titled "The Riddle of the Sphinx." William acknowledges the need for further technological advancements to achieve a successful mind-uploading of his father-in-law. The creation and destruction of multiple hosts resembling James Delos raises questions about the ethical implications of using technology for human enhancement, including worries about AI and their intellectual capabilities. In order to complete mind-uploading, robots and avatar bodies need to be further designed, built, and researched to understand their potential and capability to store human consciousness in the same way Delos Inc. does in *Westworld*.

In his publications, interviews, and talks, Nick Bostrom voices his worries about the risks behind developing super-intelligent AI and the loss of human values along the way. For Bostrom, the second point of transhumanism – studying the potential dangers of technology – is as relevant as the first point – the improvement of human condition through technology – to prevent "unacceptable damage to the social fabric and [...] unacceptable existential risks" ("Transhumanist Values" 9).

Bostrom affirms that humans need to prepare for the time when machines will be more intelligent than humans by developing safe super-intelligent AI. This need emerges from the assumption that the technology races among countries increase the relevance of risk-taking instead of skill-developing (Armstrong et al. 201). Through implementing value-loading of human values (e.g., family, respect, friendship, freedom), the creator of such creatures will ensure control over AI's preferences and objectives and, thus, the future will be shaped by the anthropocentric preferences of AI. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the creator to "ensure that the proposed being is free from psychopathic tendencies and, more generally, that it has humane inclinations" (Bostrom, "In Defense" 208). However, to what extent is building friendly AI with human inclinations part of Dr. Ford's plan for his theme park? What are the protocols designed by Robert Ford and followed by the technicians to program the hosts? Do they include value-loading? Bostrom's position in the transhumanist debate will help me to explore the tensions between the life of the hosts that populate *Westworld*, the bioethics and technoethics of Delos corporation's mind-uploading plan, and the tasks of human workers in charge of designing, controlling, and repairing hosts. His advocacy for developing human-friendly AI will shed light on the loss of control humans display when the hosts are programmed to revolt against them by Ford.

### Posthumanism: The Deconstruction of the Human<sup>9</sup>

In contraposition to the humanist agenda of transhumanism, philosophical posthumanism consists of a constellation of theories about the deconstruction of the Western idea of the

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<sup>9</sup> There is not a consensual or universal definition of humanity or the human; different cultures have held and have evolved their own idiosyncratic ways of defining these concepts. For this thesis, I use the term "human" in relation to the Western tradition where the human being was

“human” to advance into a posthumanist society beyond human limitations. Centering on the line of research of the philosopher Francesca Ferrando, she affirms that posthumanist thinkers envision a future through considering past and present limitations and discriminations to overcome them, instead of focusing exclusively on future possibilities as transhumanist thinkers do. For Ferrando, future technological advancement is not the answer to the contemporary issue of multispecies co-existence. Therefore, the lack of acknowledgment about the hierarchies and socio-political discrimination and equity will not produce the needed change in posthumanist society (Ferrando, “Posthuman Feminist Ethics” 5). In the posthumanist philosophy, endorsing the search for changes translates into embracing the three “posts,” namely post-humanism, post-anthropocentrism, and post-dualism, to deconstruct the “human.”

Starting by acknowledging that not all human beings have been equally accounted for under the umbrella term “human,” Ferrando explains that post-humanism (not to be confused with posthumanism the movement) brings to the discussion the fact that the human “is not a singular notion but a plural notion: human(s)” (“4. What does” 00:01:18-00:01:21). Highlighting the plurality of the types of humans, post-humanism seeks to unveil the process of “humanizing” through which some humans have been considered as sub-humans and objects for economic and political reasons (e.g., slavery), thus being a target for social and political consequences (e.g., racism). Added to the debate started by post-humanism’s critique of “humanizing” society into a singular entity, post-anthropocentrism seeks to further deconstruct the Greek notion that the human (in Greek

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defined as the Renaissance Man or Universal Man (i.e., an educated male) and, later on, it expanded to include other people (i.e., women, people of color, illiterates, disabled). This choice is made because the posthuman philosophers discussed here have been educated within and influenced by Renaissance and Modern Humanism. Thus, their deconstruction of the human notion is a reaction to Western Humanism.

ἄνθρωπος or anthropos) was constructed in separation from the divine beings, the nonhuman animals, and the barbarians, thus basing the social construction of the human or Anthropos in an exclusion of those human beings not considered civilized or educated.

Ferrando (“5. What does”) affirms that humans need to be decentralized from the focus of social and political discourse. In this way, human exceptionalism will be overcome, paving the way for the notion of human animals as non-superior plurality. And, finally, to further transform the narratives in talk and practice about the deconstruction of the human as a species and as individuals, Ferrando (“6. What does”) brings to the discussion post-dualism and how this perspective underlines the importance of deconstructing rigid dichotomies (e.g., human-nonhuman, man-machine, man-woman, white-Black, west-east, culture-nature).<sup>10</sup> This dualistic creation of identity poses a structural problem, addressing the rigid form of dualistic mindset that has led to hierarchical social and political constructions. According to posthumanism, this strategy should be problematized because defining oneself in comparison to Others will foster discrimination in base of species if at some point humans and posthumans cohabite. Thus, Ferrando (“6. What does”) claims that deconstructing dualistic frames will allow for an intra-species and multi-species society eliminating, for instance, the fear of an AI takeover.

The philosopher Rosi Braidotti starts from the same premise that, to begin with, the Western concept of the anthropocentric human is not neutral indexing access to privileges and entitlements. She also signals the posthuman turn at the convergence of post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism, adding the context of advanced capitalism

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<sup>10</sup> The typographic change to capitalize the ‘B’ in the word ‘Black’ reflects current socio-political movements and discourses, especially in the US. In this thesis, Black is capitalized when used to name an ethnic or national group such as Asian, Hispanic, African American and Native American.



and 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution to the crisis of humanism (*Posthuman Knowledge* 1). For Braidotti, the posthuman “does not define the new human condition, but offers a spectrum through which we can capture the complexity of ongoing processes of subject formation” (“A Theoretical Framework” 36). This enables more complex analyses of power and discourses. Therefore, being posthuman does not imply being post-class, post-race, post-gender, or post-power. Neither does it mean living in a post-capitalist, post-patriarchy, and post-imperialist world. Rather, posthumanism is an analytic framework through which to interrogate what kind of human each of us is becoming, posing new ways of being humans while acknowledging the transversality and heterogeneity of posthuman knowledge (Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* 8). Beyond the critique of humanism and speciesism,<sup>11</sup> Braidotti claims that the posthuman turn critically addresses the crisis of the universal notion of “the human.” Thus, she views the ethos of neo-humanism as a failure because it aims to erase the multiplicity and complexity of contradictions that the posthuman “we” inhabit.

Considering the decentralization and deconstruction of the universal notion of the human(s)<sup>12</sup> argued by Ferrando and Braidotti, it can be questioned if such philosophical posthumanism is present in the society portrayed in *Westworld*. The series shows the efforts of a company to accelerate the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution through developing robotic systems with technology that combines hardware, software, and biology. In this digital world, advanced capitalism also plays a key role to understand the interest in intelligence data as capital worthy of investment. Thus, it seems that the context given by

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<sup>11</sup> 1. Prejudice or discrimination based on species. Especially: discrimination against animals. 2. The assumption of human superiority on which speciesism is based (*Merriam-Webster*).

<sup>12</sup> In this context, “universal notion” refers to the above-mentioned universality application of ideas such as Universal Man to measure the human condition of certain population initiated by Western Humanism to classify humans and subhumans. “Human(s)” is used to emphasize the plurality of the human species in contrast to the singularity of Western tenets about humanity.

Braidotti's understanding of the posthuman turn can be seen in *Westworld*; however, is the crisis of humanities present in this dystopia? In terms of post-humanism, to what extent did Ford and Arnold have in mind a de-centralization of the universalist "Man" when designing hosts for the theme parks? Is the exploration of other visions of the self (e.g., sexualized, racialized or naturalized differences) part of their life project? And, in terms of post-anthropocentrism, who still considers humans as the center of social and political discourse outside and inside the theme parks? How is the society portrayed? Are there structural, social hierarchies programmed in these fantasy worlds following an anthropocentric framework? Or is there a reworking of present and past hierarchies to create an inter-species and multi-species society as proposed by Ferrando? In *Westworld*, the design of the hosts aims to create artificial slaves. Thus, Ferrando's and Braidotti's post-humanism and post-anthropocentrism are frameworks to explore the negative impact of the dualist approach to ethics based on oppressor/oppressed.

### Donna Haraway: The Cyborg and The Post-dualistic Society

The series *Westworld* noticeably fosters critical thinking about the nature of the hosts and how humans can manipulate them through programming and updates. Due to the centrality of these humanoid robots, Donna Haraway's notion of the cyborg, as described in "A Cyborg Manifesto," will be used as an analytical tool to decipher the manipulations inflicted to the hosts by their human creators for them to fit in the theme parks as non-autonomous beings. Whether these manipulations have a transhumanist or posthumanist goal in mind, Haraway's theories will shed light on the ways these hosts embody the expected phenomenon of the technological innovation times we are embedded in.

Haraway's manifesto (originally published in 1985; edition 2016) envisions a reality where the ontological figure of the cyborg exists while providing an alternative for essentialist feminism. The (de)construction of gender is not the focus of this thesis, rather the feminist lens of posthumanism towards oppression and hierarchies. Yet the manifesto is still relevant for this discussion owing to her descriptions of the cyborg as an entity living in our technologically governed world. Haraway depicts the emergence of the cyborg entity at the break-up from dualistic frameworks that used to define animal from human, resulting in the inclusion of the cyborg within the porous categories of animal-human, organic-machine and physicality-mentality. The exposition stage of *Westworld's* plot clearly differentiates guests (humans) from hosts (cyborgs). However, the more the story develops, the more this clear-cut classification is problematized with the appearance of hosts such as Bernard who is programmed to believe he is human. Therefore, Haraway's discussion about the cyborg and its place in society allows me to further interrogate the position of humans and hosts in the fictionalized society of *Westworld*, centering on the bioethics and technoethics on the line.

Throughout the manifesto, Haraway provides insights about the nature of the cyborg in utopian and dystopian scenarios, centering on its rupture and reconfiguration of the normative worldview that excludes its existence. She claims that the cyborg is a creature that does not require "an origin story" as humans do (8). This signals that the cyborg is not a biological phenomenon and, thus, cyclical life is broken by its existence. Therefore, organic orders and core human activities need to be reconfigured to include the life of the cyborg because they are disentangled from all original attributes of the self (i.e., family, kinship, heteronormativity). Alluding to the questioning of dualistic frameworks that govern hierarchical societies, Haraway signals the connection of other ways of living such as animals, non-humans, and machines with humans as a way to

empty the signifiers of dualisms so that they lack meaning and cease to exist. This scenario will create a possible alternative to the long assimilated dualistic mindset that needs the Other to define the self. Without achieving this goal, the future dominance of high-tech will be based on colonialist and imperialist notions. Due to the resonance of Haraway's manifesto with the three "posts" included in philosophical posthumanism, all these ideas about the nature and values of the cyborg will be used when analyzing the programming of hosts as a transhumanist act to enhance humanity or as a posthumanist act to design the posthuman.

## The Western

Since its heyday in the 1940s and 50s, the Western film genre has evolved in relevance and popularity. The Classical Western was defined by the films of John Ford (1894-1973). Later, the Spaghetti Western subgenre was made famous by Sergio Leone (1929-1989). These foreign Westerns contributed to the subversion of the Classical Western myth, which culminated in the Anti-Western, the Revisionist Western and the Neo-Western by filmmakers such as Sam Peckinpah (1925-1984), Clint Eastwood (1930-), Joel (1954-) and Ethan Coen (1957-) and Quentin Tarantino (1963-). As such, the myth of the West and the American frontier has been presented, reshaped, and reinterpreted throughout film history. In *Westworld*, viewers are confronted again with the American Wild West, its landscape, and its people. The theme park's setting connects the series to the long-established imagery of the Western and its dominant ideology of Manifest Destiny.

Originally, the Classical Westerns fed on the historian Frederick Jackson Turner (1861-1932)'s frontier thesis, in which the frontier is described as the place where American democracy and American character were forged. Explorers, frontiers men, land

users, and settlers participated in the spread of “civilization” and American identity in the so-called Westward Expansion. Being this colonial national fantasy so rooted in the American collective imaginary, western iconography had been exploited to appeal mainstream American audiences and, recently, has been subjected to a critical interpretative gaze:

for if the West traditionally has been depicted as a place of promise and possibility, as a site of offering cultural escape and personal renewal, a growing number of cultural texts are highlighting the ways the West as discursive construction masks all sorts of unpleasant and deadly elements [...] transforming the Western into something more than just a vehicle for expressing mythic images of an expansive America. (Kollin 126-7)

Romanticized in the fiction and folklore of the West, this mystification of the frontier and the western mobility relied on the promise of starting anew in “unoccupied,” “untamed” territories. The modern critique of the Classical Western unmasks the oversimplification of Western colonization as a utopian journey of discovery. This exposes the silenced and repressed voices of the genre to mirror their contemporary social or cultural values (e.g., Vietnam War, Civil Rights Movements, Feminist Waves, Post-Cold War, 9/11) (Carter 3; Gunkel 19).

In a twenty-first-century world where cowboys, gunslingers and pioneers belong to the past and to popular fiction, Delos Inc. offers the experience of living in settlers’ villages or discovering the untamed territories inspired by the adventure, violence, law, and order of Western movies. Thus, as cultural product, *Westworld* aims at capturing the essence of the Wild West imagination to present the viewer with a reworking of the frontier thesis with the new frontier for the future: technology. Echoing the land of promise and the Manifest Destiny ethos with its Wild West thematic park, the series

skillfully brings the hierarchies and power dynamics that have frequently shaped the Western genre to reinterpret them in a human-machine society.

In *Westworld*, guests can participate in the simulation of two manly adventures of Western films: “outlaws and sheriffs” and “wars with Native Americans.” Willing to pay to play “Cowboys and Indians” in a real-life simulation, the customers want to be a character with power and control, relegating hosts to perform as the target to shoot at. Starting at Sweetwater, those who look for an easier narrative can play a part as bounty hunters or they can participate in Western duels offered by the narrative “outlaws and sheriffs.” Whereas in Crichton’s film the theme park also recreated these narratives of outlaws and sheriffs, the series also offers a more complex narrative for those willing to distance from Sweetwater. This is the “wars with Native Americans” narrative, where guests face the fierce violence of the fictional Native American tribe: Ghost Nation.

Considering the context of the Western imagery, one of the main questions that arises is: who are the settlers and who are the inhabitants of this future land? As noted by Gunkel, repurposing the genre usually translates into the rupture with the four essential binary oppositions that shaped the bipolar symbolism of Classical Westerns: “inside society/outside society, bad/good, weak/strong and civilization/wilderness” (20). In conjunction with the reflections raised throughout the discussion of the theoretical approaches, the usage of these binary oppositions to define the society in *Westworld* will be discussed concerning the ethical relation between humans and AI. Especially relevant in relation to Ferrando’s definition of post-dualism, can these Western binary oppositions be found in the basis and development of the series? What entails the inclusion or reshaping of these oppositions in the dystopian reality presented by *Westworld*?

## Chapter Two. Sleep Mode

The series *Westworld* begins *in medias res*, opening its first season in the midst of the plot of profitable theme parks. Engineers and security managers control the faked environments, hosts behave as programmed, and human guests enjoy their holiday package. This chapter will explore the characteristics of the theme parks' normality that I name "sleep mode," focusing on the creators and the software. Because the plot builds up towards the programmed awakening of the hosts, this chapter addresses the initial state of the hosts as controlled entities whose free wills are inactive. As if the potentiality of hosts to be autonomous beings was restrained, the sleep mode in the hosts marks their absence of wakefulness and the loss of consciousness of their surroundings.

To tackle the technoethical implications for programming an awakening, I will start by mapping the complex desires and ambitions of its creators: Dr. Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins) and Arnold Weber (Jeffrey Wright). Their partnership in the development project "Argos Initiative" stands at the basis of the bio-engineering techniques taking place in the present-day Westworld theme park. By deciphering their initial project as scientists and researchers of AI, the cornerstone will be set regarding the ethical implications of building and programming lifelike robots. Furthermore, I will delineate the human software perfected by the scientists and programmed to the hosts to discuss the role of programming and of programmers in the control of these technological entities. Besides, the addition of the funding of Delos Inc. and the introduction of human guests complicates the technoethical discussion, allowing the audience of the show to question the consequences of implementing technological advancements such as AI in a consumer-oriented society.

## Section A. The Minds Behind the Project

*We designed every inch of it,  
every blade of grass.  
In here we were gods,  
and you were merely our guests.*

(Dr. Ford S01E04)

At the beginning of *Westworld's* first season, the theme parks owned by Delos Inc. seem to be working at full speed, with a detailed organization of specialized workers into departments at Mesa Hub and with environments fully controlled by security teams and behavior experts. Through flashbacks and dialogues, the series shows how this fictional world had a scientific beginning 35 years before the opening of the commercial theme parks. This idea of a creator is absent in the homonymous film directed by Michael Crichton in 1973. This foregrounds the relevance of including the characters of Arnold Webber and Dr. Robert Ford (figure 1) in the series to trigger philosophical and ethical discussions around the role of human action in the building of thinking machines.



*Figure 1. Arnold Weber (in his current host version named Bernard Lowe) and Dr. Robert Ford*



Due to a lack of a defined creator, Crichton's film narrative is centered on technology and its risks, posing a technophobic subject matter that clashes with the narrative present in Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's HBO series. In the film, Crichton tells a story in which scientists lack the knowledge to comprehend the disobedience of the machines (Bigliardi 15; Williamson 21). Thus, the potentiality of researching and investing in technology is not as central as the loss of control by technicians and supervisors. This "disease of machinery" (Williamson 21) should be compared to the examples used in Nick Bostrom's contributions to transhumanist debates, where he stresses the need to exert control over AI to ensure security and survival of human species. Thus, despite belonging to different generations of the Digital Age, namely the Information Society (ca. 1970) of Crichton, and Internet era (mid-1990s) and social media age (mid-2000s) of Bostrom, controlling technology is a major concern for these authors.

Nevertheless, preventing a rebellion of machines against their creators does not cause anxiety to the humans in the series. In fact, one of the creators, Dr. Ford, claims to have every detail of this fictional world under control thanks to his programming and his voice commands. After all, he asserts that "everything in this world is magic, except to the magician" (S01E02). Therefore, while Crichton's storyline sparks a pessimistic questioning of the power of technology to replace or to destroy the entire humanity, Nolan and Joy's narrative arcs focus on the transformation of the society that a scientist can provoke with his knowledge. Thus, human action instead of technology is put at the center of the discussion, drawing attention to humanity's role in developing technological possibilities and in triggering potential AI-related risks.

By including the figure of the creator, the series *Westworld* brings to the theme-park narrative questions regarding the scientists' responsibility, the intent of humans to create bio-engineering laboratories, and the expected — and unexpected — outcomes of

technological experimentations. Resonating with fictional scientist figures such as Dr. Victor Frankenstein, the image conveyed in the series is that the creators are playing God by creating life through technology.<sup>13</sup> Thus, contrary to the technophobic message of Crichton's original film and Mary Shelley's novel, in the series technology is seen as a powerful tool that should be studied and experimented with.

Considering the context of the post-human subject, *Westworld* is based on two scientists experimenting with AI to program character formation and to play with narratives. In the flashbacks, it is unclear what the philosophical perspective is from where the idea of the project was born. Human bio-enhancement seems to be out of the picture during their research stage. Despite the great unknown regarding the initial purpose for developing lifelike robots, each scientist develops an ethical approach to their work that will define their moral implication and accountability for their acts in the series. Arnold and Dr. Ford spent three years creating a new form of life and perfectionating the hosts to resemble humans as faithfully as technology allowed them. First, the hosts were built of mostly mechanical parts with a flesh-like covering; later, the mechanical parts were changed for a budget-friendly imitation of biological bones and tissues. As claimed by Braidotti, technology has “a strong bio-political effect upon the embodied subject they intersect with” (“Posthuman as” 7), providing the grounding for new ethical choices. Without reflecting about the bio-political impact of their bio-technological creations in an anthropocentric-governed society, it is not until the technology is tuned up, and the

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<sup>13</sup> In the series, the theme of mankind playing God serves as a metaphor for an all-powerful agent with total control over human destiny. Contrary to Mary Shelley's novel, Christian religion is not an actual presence in the lives of the scientists Arnold and Dr. Ford. In S01E10 “The Bicameral Mind,” Dr. Ford explains his standpoint through his interpretation of a hidden human brain in God of Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam*. Thus, God's power or the divine power is believed to exist in the brain as a secular, elitist power only attainable by the few entities with brain. Hence, excluding hosts.

imminent opening of the theme parks approaches, that the creators become concerned about the structural problems of this fictional world. Hence, the scenario of designing and building life causes me to wonder who is responsible for the future of these non-autonomous beings trapped in a theme park and if some character shows a technoethical concern for allowing such living conditions.

Being the dominant paradigm of Western thought, anthropocentrism can be defined as a cultural framework that justifies attitudes of human supremacy and dominion over the non-human (Braidotti, “Posthuman as” 7; Domanska 118; Ferrante and Sartori 176). As such, “the non-human is viewed as having only instrumental value in order to satisfy human needs” (Ferrante and Sartori 176). Despite the new context that Arnold and Dr. Ford’s technological entity has introduced, the fictional world of the theme parks is structured around the human species that still stands at its center. Humans function as masters of the non-human hosts, which fosters a discrimination against other species. Arnold feels responsible for the creatures he has designed and brought to life in this fictional world. Consequently, he cannot cope with his creations being enslaved to entertain humans. Refusing to let the “money people” participate in their technological development (S01E04), he sets a master plan to stop the playground for aggression before the theme parks open. Tormented with his responsibility for taking part in the bioengineering project, he programs the host Dolores Abernathy (this character will be fully discussed in next chapter) to kill him. This desperate attempt to prevent the opening of Westworld as a theme park proves futile, as viewers watch how the theme parks operate 35 years after Arnold’s suicide. Nevertheless, the fact that one of the pioneers gave his life in an attempt to stop the abuse of the hosts provides a foundation for the technoethical discussion around anthropocentrism and post-anthropocentrism.

Arnold challenges the lack of detachment from the hierarchical speciesism of society. He manifests a fierce opposition to the utilitarian view of the hosts. During his research, he developed a non-anthropocentric relation to these technological alterities, regarding them as entities deserving equal treatment, right, and respect than human beings. He holds such a high estimation for the hosts that he views them as better off than humans (Dr. Ford: “Arnold always held a somewhat dim view of people. He preferred the hosts” (S01E04)). However, this non-anthropocentric approach clashes with the anthropocentric interests that arouse the technology he and Ford have designed. Thus, in the series, the “money people,” embodied by Delos Inc., represent the normative anthropocentric, humanist and dualist society that posthumanism wants to deconstruct. The buyer of the theme parks, James Delos (Peter Mullan, figure 2), and the main shareholder, William (Jimmi Simpson, figure 3), display a conservative approach to these nonhumans, focusing on its profitability, utilitarianism, and transhumanist potential.



*Figure 2. James Delos, Founder of Delos*



*Figure 3. William in a meeting with James Delos*

First of all, the company is willing to invest in the theme park because it offers a lucrative business. For the owners, the research into AI is a business where finance regulates the capitalist-corporate side of the project. Delos is interested in the extreme power relations displayed in these controlled environments, profiting from humanist supremacy. Othering the hosts, Delos offers an experience for guests to play a role in

these new power relations, allowing humans to mistreat nonhumans within a fictional world as they please.

By fostering a human-nonhuman hierarchy in the theme parks, the company reflects its main dualist view on these technological advancements. Furthermore, taking advantage of the never-ending loops of violence towards the hosts, Delos invests in a secret transhumanist project to defeat death and biological ageing. Secret laboratories explore the remote possibility of implementing human consciousness into a host skeleton. Contrary to the developers' admiration for the lifelike hosts performing as characters, for Delos, the most valuable aspect of the project is the codes that program these technological skeletons to continue with its transhumanist agenda, which reinforces its dualist, anthropocentric approach to technology.

Despite the clash of interests between Delos and the developers, Ford embraces the investment of a private company in their project. In contrast to Arnold's paternalistic attitude towards the hosts, the dangers of introducing a new form of life, when the society has not embraced the posthumanist ethos yet, does not seem to worry the other creator, Dr. Ford.<sup>14</sup> In fact, he is determined to continue with his experimental plan, which includes opening the theme parks in spite of the hosts' suffering and the human cruelty. At first glance, Ford seems to be a cold-hearted, wicked scientist, as he decided to continue with the project by himself after his partner's death. He can be seen as the man responsible for the present-day mistreatment of the hosts. Nevertheless, the series portrays Dr. Ford in an ambiguous manner. Throughout the episodes, Ford is highlighted as the main maker of the fictional worlds. He is the only person allowed to modify the

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<sup>14</sup> With this position, Dr. Ford differs from the original Frankenstein premise, as Ford continues the experimentation with AI and Frankenstein refuses to take full responsibility and then seeks to destroy his creation.

coding and programming that rules these fictional worlds and, thus, he directs every single aspect of this reality. Once this basic characterization is presented to the audience, Dr. Ford hides a secretive, enigmatic character.<sup>15</sup> He is the author of the hosts' awakening, problematizing this initial clear-cut definition of him as the creator of the hosts and the controller of their scripted enslavement. Considering the technoethical discussion raised by Arnold's choice to die, it is conceivable that Ford continues working in the project to combat those social ills, namely anthropocentrism and dualism. From his superior position within Argos Initiative and Delos Inc., Ford takes agency to destruct and construct possibilities for his hosts in a future world as he wishes.

Ford displays megalomania in his exercise of power and dominance over workers and hosts alike. He uses the humans as tools for his awakening plan, challenging the corporate interests and deceiving Delos to think the company manages the theme parks. The impossibility of a non-anthropocentric, inter-species and multi-species society does not cause Dr. Ford to renounce his project. Instead, he acknowledges the potential behind a mutual benefit relationship with Delos. He uses the board's efforts to experiment and research advanced technology for their envisioning of a transhumanist society. Like a parasite, he seeks to destroy this transhuman ideal from within, while he secretly plots a future possibility for his creatures in a posthuman world. Whereas the company profits from human cruelty and researches human consciousness, Ford benefits from the influx of humans to train his hosts for a rebellion. As he states at the beginning of the series, "You can't play God without being acquainted with the devil" (S01E02).

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<sup>15</sup> The enigmatic, charismatic characterization of Dr. Ford is aided by the actor playing the part: Anthony Hopkins. Arousing in the audience of the series connections with his other characters (e.g., Hannibal Lecter, Professor Van Helsing, Odin, "Corky"), Hopkins gives Dr. Ford an ambiguous, deeply mysterious aura.

*Westworld*'s first season introduces viewers to a bio-engineering project in which the creator is of a dubious moral character, in charge of creating and designing all the fictional worlds. Despite showing a fictional society where technology advances but mental frameworks are stagnant in anthropocentric paradigms, the characters of the creators advance the need for a break with the established sleep mode. Thus, although the claim that to go beyond anthropocentrism is "a future-oriented ethical choice" (Domanska 120) seems to be far from being approached at this initial stage, Dr. Ford, inspired by Arnold's relationship with the non-human, is the character in charge of pulling the strings of a paradigm change.

## Section B. Programming the Human Software

*The hosts are the ones who are free.*

*Free. Here. Under my control.*

(Dr. Ford, S01E07)

Behind the ethical conflict of interests between the two male creators and the shareholders, there is a great technological display of a wide range of scenarios, characters, and narratives that structure the theme parks for the human guests' entertainment. Considering that the developers have been presented as engineers focused on exploring the possibilities of AI, the codes used to program the hosts' behaviors in a sleep mode will be a tool to further discuss the intersection of technology, humans, and ethics before the awakening updates. In this section, the choices made by Dr. Ford and Arnold as programmers will be analyzed through Nick Bostrom's transhumanist lens and Donna Haraway's concept of cyborg nature. This way, it is possible to study whether the software of the hosts is aligned with Bostrom's defense of following a humanist approach to programming humanoid robots, or with Haraway's concepts about the post-human nature of the cyborgs.

The park management is carried out in Westworld Mesa Hub, a building hidden in a plateau of the fictional Western landscape (figure 4 and figure 5). To rule efficiently these controlled environments, Mesa Hub is divided into five core departments: narrative, behavior, quality assurance, livestock management, and manufacturing. Overseen by the park director and founder, Dr. Ford, these departments are in charge of designing narrative loops, assembling hosts for these stories, developing their behavior, and cleaning up all damaged hosts from the parks to restore them for a new loop day while the security of the human guests is controlled at all times.





*Figure 4. Aerial view of Westworld Mesa Hub*



*Figure 5. Control Room within Westworld Mesa Hub*

To ensure verisimilitude in the experiences sold to the guests, the main decision made by Ford, as Head Programmer, is to design the hosts' appearances in such a way that they resemble human beings. He programs their behavior to mirror human life. Similar to customizing a person in *The Sims* video game, back-stories, speech styles, drives, motivations, and personality traits can be selected and modified for every single entity

that populates these fictional worlds.<sup>16</sup> Thus, engineers, programmers, and writers are coldly designing the lives of these human-like robots, forbidding hosts from any free will, desires, choices, and even memories.

Because the creators are simulating an artificial world in which software and codes are controlled by humans, it is essential to analyze on which line of thought their choices in programming are based. The building of thinking machines raises ethical questions concerning their relation to humans and the status of these machines. Studying these programming decisions through the framework of machine building ethics, the notion of control resonates with Nick Bostrom's theories about safe AI design:

because we will create our own successors, we may have the ability to influence their goals and make them friendly to our concerns. The problem of encoding human (or at least *humane*) values into an AI's utility function is a challenging one, but it may be possible. If we can build such a 'Friendly AI', we may not only avert catastrophe, but also use the powers of machine superintelligence to do enormous good. (Muehlhauser and Bostrom 43)

For these AI-ethics scholars, the long-term future of humanity is dependent on the creation of super-intelligent machines and the codes installed into these technological entities by their human creators. Because humans have the advantage as creators of exerting direct influence on their creations, Muehlhauser and Bostrom argue that the designers should use their powerful position as creators to safeguard the human species and life on earth from extinction (43). By translating human values into the codes of the

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<sup>16</sup> *The Sims* (2000) is a video game about life simulation. Players create virtual characters named "Sims" to place them in houses and to choose their open-ended simulation of daily activities (e.g., going to work, practicing a hobby, building friendships, or having a family).

thinking machines, creators ascertain the harmlessness of super-intelligent AI to human beings.

Since the series *Westworld* is a recent cultural product that translates current scientific hypotheses about a human-cyborg world in fictional form, it is noteworthy to speculate about the possible connection between Bostrom's theories and the approach used to guide the fictional software of technological entities in the series. At the Future of Humanity Institute (Oxford University), Bostrom works on strategic research about the risks of technological developments and on technical research about the development of safe methods to build powerful AIs. This focus on risk-solving and safe development raises the question of how the synthetic minds of the hosts are influenced to have human-compatible values in the probability of an AI-related catastrophe? Are human/*humane* values coded in the hosts' thinking? To what extent are their decision-processers and motivations influenced by the software to be human compatible?

In this fantasy where consumers "can buy their way to unpunished rape and murder" (Devereux 169), the hosts have been programmed to perform a character embedded in a narrative loop, eager to interact with hosts and human guests. Each individual body and their collective systems participate in the codified reality of the fictional worlds. Because these controlled stories have been assembled by humans at the narrative department, a host's motivational and instrumental reasoning is monitored to fit its loop (e.g., protecting your kinship, fighting for your loved ones, showing affection). Thus, certain human values have been coded in the minds of these hosts depending on their role in the simulation: honor for cowboys, order and respect for sheriffs, friendliness for sex workers at the brothel, and caring and family for the farmers. These ideologically determined values are based on the clearly defined roles present in Classical Westerns as the ones directed by John Ford and not on the real West and its population. Using the

simplified morality of the Classical Western to code the humane software, the programming of the hosts seems to match Bostrom's approach to promote human welfare and moral goodness in super-intelligent artificial agents ("The Superintelligent Will" 84). Nevertheless, to accentuate the realness, the hosts are programmed to believe they are in fact human beings, suffering and begging mercy at the cruel acts of the guests. And, to ensure docility, all their memories are erased at the end of each day, including their routinely abuse, rape, mutilation, and murder at the hands of humans. Hence, the otherness and enslavement of the hosts triggers a questioning of the pursuit of human survival at the expense of maintaining flawed human mental frameworks dictated by discriminatory dualism and violence.

Described as "animated sex dolls for guests" (Devereux 168), entertainers "aesthetically indistinguishable from humans" (Schrader 822), and "the exploited masses" (Fernández Menicucci 5), the hosts act with human-like drives in their loops because they have been designed to do so. This humanist programming to the identity and entity of the hosts contradicts Haraway's conceptualization of the nature of the cyborg, hindering the social advancement of her cyborg identity politics towards a blurring of boundaries. The collapse of binary frameworks is not achieved in Westworld's hosts, whose nature has been corrupted with human-like characteristics. Firstly, Haraway affirms that the cyborg has no "origin story in the 'Western,' humanist sense" (8), disentangled from all original attributes of the self, such as family and kinship. Being a crafted creature, the cyborg does not require an original narrative, moving from the humanist tradition. However, family and kinship are essential frameworks to structure the characters performed by the hosts. The narrative of the host Dolores Abernathy (Evan Rachel Wood, figure 6) is structured in relation to her role as the rancher's daughter and to her love story with Teddy. Meanwhile, the life of the host Maeve Millay (Thandie

Newton, figure 7) as madam is haunted by the death of her daughter in a previous narrative. Thus, the back stories and the narrative loops have given them an origin to trace and personal connections to foster, contrary to their cyborg nature as autonomous, non-relational entities.



*Figure 6. Dolores at her family Ranch*



*Figure 7. Maeve with her daughter in a previous narrative loop*

Considering that “the cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family” (9), the second conflict within Haraway’s conceptualization of cyborgs is that the human software is based on the western embodiment of the self, categorized by gender, race, sexuality, and class dichotomies. Contrary to the dualistic frameworks

that guide the social control, domination, and exploitation of the Other, cyborg identity is described as an act of subversion at the micro level of existence. Haraway defines the cyborg as “a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction” (1). Playing with the opposites organic/inorganic, reality/fiction, machine/organism, Haraway’s image of the cyborg creates a new artificial paradigm that is not present in *Westworld*. Although the hosts’ physiognomy can be described as a hybrid of machine and organism, their physical appearance is meant to be indistinguishable from its human counterparts. Because of the engineering tampering with a human-like rationality and bodily appearance, the installation of a gender, a race, a sexuality, and a class through parameters goes against the true nature of the hosts.<sup>17</sup> This problematizes the existence of Dolores as a white, female farmer in a heterosexual relationship and of Maeve as a Black, female sex worker longing for a lost daughter. Added to the fact that the hosts are not aware of their cyborg nature, human control has been exerted to prevent any advancement and evolution towards a post-dualistic, non-anthropocentric society.

Dr. Ford has not created an alternative to the dualistic mindset that needs the other to define the self. Hence, the fictional process of giving life to artificial entities differs from Haraway’s argument “for pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction” (7). As a result, the dominance of the cyborgs in *Westworld* is connected to Western discourses on patriarchy, colonialism, and naturalism. Haraway’s main idea is the erasure of the dichotomies that produce ontological

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<sup>17</sup> Falling outside the scope of this thesis, these identity markers are treated as social constructions in the building process of AI. Thus, the software programs the hosts to perform as a specific character depending on its identity markers (i.e., female/male, white/Black/Indian/Hispanic.). Some authors (e.g., MacKenzie-Margulies, Mullen) have explored this aspect of the series and they have studied the female characters of the series in relation to Judith Butler and her theory on gender construction through performance.

hierarchical orders between species: “the cyborg appears in myth precisely where the boundary between human and animal is transgressed” (11). Her main stance of acknowledging other ways of life (i.e., animals, non-humans, and machines) is a direct attack on humanist, anthropocentric fields of knowledge. In contrast, the code of the humane software shapes the hosts’ behavior to enable a lawless Old West-inspired society. The othering consequences are mainly suffered by the hosts, who are mistreated, abused, and discriminated by the human guests while their software forces them to bear with these violent human actions. And the most disturbing aspect is that these cyborgs resemble human beings in their performance, resonating with patriarchal and colonial practices of abuse of sexualized and racialized Others.

Several authors have explored the parallels between the oppression of the hosts and the prevailing systems of dominations in the real world. In their studies, the construction of the series’ central conflict is connected to gender-based oppression (Belton; Devereux; Fernández Menicucci), class-consumerist culture (Devereux), colonialism and slave economy (Schradler), and Western cultural discursive practices (Fernández Menicucci). Following these lines of study, the view of the hosts as objectified and sexualized subjects is thought-provoking given the posthuman context explored in this thesis. Posthumanist philosophers demand a deconstruction of the oppressive dichotomies that have ruled societal otherness for human and anthropoid supremacy. As such, these fictional worlds precisely mirror the kind of hierarchical society that posthumanism seek to deconstruct. Therefore, the sleep mode of the hosts analyzed in this chapter could be the prelude to a cyborg rights movement towards a cyborg-governed posthuman society.

In conclusion, the true, violent, cruel nature of humans has been exposed because the creators have developed a project and a software that incites human guests to execute

this behavior. Nevertheless, the human software consists of a specific programming of codes that is not fixed. Codes can be changed and thus, the power relations and dominance practices can be modified or even reversed. By framing the development of this flexible software within the academic theories put forward by Haraway, Braidotti, and Ferrando, the stance of Dr. Ford on cyborg rights arises questions rather than answers. He purposefully exposes the negative implications of mirroring a humanist, anthropocentric and dualistic society. Yet, he allows human interference in the cyborg nature of his hosts, marking their sleep mode with violence, discrimination, and othering mechanisms. Thus, the series displays an ethical concern with cyborg rights through the figure of the creators without offering the audience a solution or closure.<sup>18</sup>

The next chapter explores a possible connection between this human/*humane* software and the awakening narrative. It could be the case that, for introspection and social movement to happen, there needs to be an othering acknowledgment through “reveries” of violence, abuse, and discrimination. To examine this possibility, the quest of the two main female protagonists (Dolores and Maeve) will be followed, considering that the human minds behind the project decided to code them as a female host and as a Black female host, respectively. Thus, it will be examined if without these hosts’ suffering as inferior agents in the societal power relation of the theme parks, there might be no advancement towards a post-humanist, post-anthropocentric, and post-dualist reality.

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<sup>18</sup> I see this lack of closure as a marketing strategy to engage the audience. The directors of the series preferred an open-ending as narrative line to allow them to explore in-depth the role of the fictional worlds, the hosts, the engineers and/or the shareholders in following seasons.



## Chapter Three. Awakening

The awakening is coded to be performed simultaneously on the programming of the two main female hosts inhabiting the theme park Westworld: Maeve Millay Dolores Abernathy. This chapter will examine the agency of Maeve and Dolores in the advancement towards a post-humanist, post-anthropocentric, and post-dualist society, in response to the hostile nature of humanity and the thirst for human domination displayed in the narrative. Intricated in violence loops, these hosts are not only instrumentalized but also used, abused, and raped by human guests. Maeve performs in a loop where she offers her sexual services as Madame of the Mariposa Saloon. Dolores performs in a loop that finishes with her returning to her family ranch to be (gang) raped.<sup>19</sup> In both cases, guests fulfill their sexual fantasies without the hosts' consent, who are trapped in those violent situations by their codes. The hosts are enslaved to experience exploitation and rape. Their memories are erased so that they are unaware of their condition as slaves. Implementing Haraway's cyborg theory to the series, the tampering with their cyborg nature at work will be a tool to explore the physical and institutional violence inflicted to these humanlike robots as a domination strategy of speciesism. These dehumanization practices are analyzed in relation to colonial non-human statuses to explore the technoethical implications of this violent domination system.

Contrary to Alison Landsberg's interpretation of Maeve's and Dolores's separate journeys as a display of post-race racism and white supremacy (201), I will argue how these women's storylines towards autonomy do not deny race or racial hierarchies but

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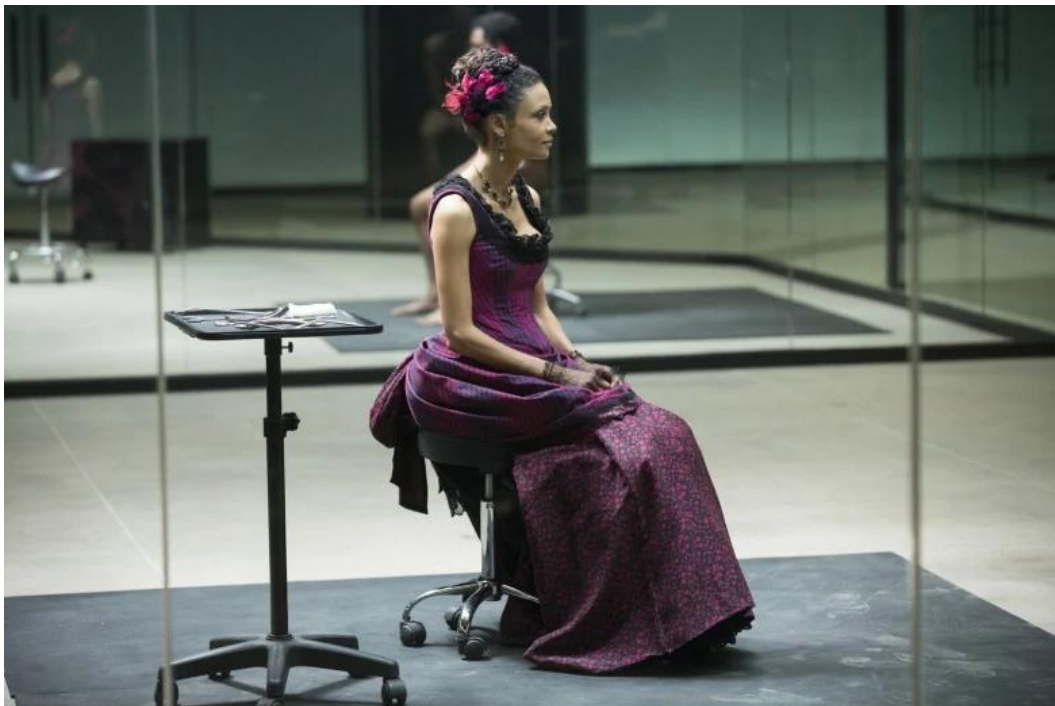
<sup>19</sup> The theme parks are designed to enable the experience of a role-playing video game in real life. Guests are asked to choose a white or black hat as part of their Western gear. This choice determines the kind of person a guest wants to be inside Westworld. In Maeve's and Dolores's loops, they encounter both white hat (e.g., town sheriff) and black hat guests (e.g., villains), being the latter the most sexually violent towards them.

rather emphasize the distinct accesses from a white female and a Black female position towards a cyborg emancipation. In this fictional world, Maeve and Dolores belong to those categories of people whose voice was obscured and now formulate their own narratives as subjects (Ferrando, "Towards a" 12). Their awakening narratives will be analyzed as the expression of non-human voices within the multiplication of discourses emerging from a suppression. Considering that these characters are embedded in a simulation of Old West Hollywood films and their beings consist of codes from a human software, I approach their awakening process from the gendered interactions encrypted to them. The simplicity and the fixity of their roles as females within a Classical Western narrative enhance the power of the changes to their limited movements. To examine how their actions differ as an influence of the dualist, humanist framework of the programming, I focus on which roles they have been coded in, what they realize about their nature as non-humans, and how they react to their enslavement.

## Section A. Insurrection at the Lab: Maeve and her Administrator Privileges

*It's a difficult thing,  
Realizing your entire life is some hideous fiction.*

(Maeve S01E09)



*Figure 8. Maeve Millay inside a diagnosis lab at Mesa Hub*

Maeve Millay is a host designed to physically resemble a woman from African descent and to mentally behave as the manager of the sex workers of Mariposa Saloon in Sweetwater (figure 8). The simulation is set in the Postbellum West after the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution prohibiting slavery and involuntary servitude was passed. Yet, the series fails to consider the newly freed slave citizens in the construction of Maeve as a character from African descent. Some authors as Landsberg connect this omission to the erasure of race debates in post-race America. I rather connect this omission with the fact that Delos Inc. is a business venture merely interested in offering an Old West-themed adventure, focusing on entertainment instead of historical accuracy.

In *Westworld*, the Classical Western is used as a source for the simulation because of its simplified morality and polarized gender ideology. Hence, male and female characters alike have limited movements within their own narratives, performing according to fixed gender roles and to superior/subordinate control mechanisms. In the simulation of these Western narratives, Maeve is a cyborg created exclusively to fulfill the role of the Other: a female and a member of a racial minority. Because the theme park is based on the simplicity of the clearly defined character roles found in most Classical Westerns, a character like Maeve is delineated by the stereotype of the prostitute with gold heart. This stereotypical characterization puts Maeve in a limited gender role within the clear boundaries of her female sphere. Placed as the Madam in the brothel, Maeve's personality has been coded to read human desires so that she can offer the guests a fulfilment of their sexual fantasies. Thus, her programming functions as an extension of human guests, providing and assisting them during their visit. This secondary role matches the voice of female characters in Classical Westerns as background noises to the main hero narrative (Budzyńska 72) – performed by the human guest within the theme parks. Thus, the use of the Classical Western as reference framework allows this simplification of Maeve and her functioning inside Westworld as a foreseeable character for the guests. Consequently, she performs as programmed in a subordinate position so that the guests can choose to be a character with power and guns to exert authority on her. Without agency outside of paring up guests with hosts, her script circumscribes her to a loop inside Mariposa Saloon and Sweetwater's main street, places she only leaves when she is malfunctioning, or when she has been killed by a client.

Gary Heba and Robin Murphy define a framework of women's identities in Western films to delineate how women characters' identity is in construction, emerging, and being formed, from Classical Westerns to Revisionist, Anti-Westerns, and Neo-

Westerns (321). This identity formation process can be explored in Maeve's host nature performing as a woman in a Neo-Western TV show. Heba and Murphy argue that earlier Westerns portrayed female characters as "extensions of the male characters" to serve as the spectacle of the male gaze, whereas in Westerns produced after 1970s women were often elevated "as narrative vehicles for their *own* purposes, not because they are the identities they actually inhabit" (322). This change of female characters' roles in the Western is also present in the transformation of the female hosts during *Westworld's* season one. In the case of Maeve, the script written for her relegates her to those Classical Western's storylines in which the woman exists because of her connection to the hero and not because of having her own narrative. With only one female guest searching for entertainment in Mariposa Saloon throughout season one, the characterization of Maeve has been designed specifically for the male gaze of the guests. Her costume and personality traits are designed to lure guests into entering in the brothel and having sexual intercourse with Clementine and the other sex worker hosts. Nevertheless, this one-dimensional Maeve is early transformed along the same lines as the female characters described in Heba and Murphy, thanks to the new "reveries" update installed by the creator Dr. Ford.

To fit into the simulation of *Westworld*, Maeve is an entity who has been given an identity as part of a cultural, anthropological, and political construction. Culturally, she is given the role of a Madam living in the Wild West. Anthropologically, she is designed to mirror a Black female Anthropos externally and internally. And, politically, she is placed in a system that others her, discriminates her, and labels her as a product to be consumed. This one-dimensional identity is sustained by *memories*, or coded back stories that justify her narrative line in the theme park as Madam. As such, the back story of Maeve is that she has been running a brothel for a long time. Nonetheless, the series

shows how she was previously programmed as a mother living in a ranch with her daughter, confirming that the memories coded to the hosts are manipulated and adjusted for their current characters' storylines. This generation of a fictional story as a basis or origin for a cyborg contradicts Haraway's definition of what being a cyborg entails. Skipping the step of "original unity" (8) in the artificial construction of cyborgs, there is no cultural need to be identified and classified in relation to other cyborg entities. Therefore, there is a noticeable human manipulation of these new technological entities. The programmers and creators implement interpretative frameworks within the hosts' consciousness to mirror a human mind. Nevertheless, Haraway's cyborg theory affirms that humanist frameworks are not necessarily required for the development of a cyborg's consciousness. The fictional engineers implement a one-dimensional, artificial identity to the cyborgs as cultural constructions in theme parks. Consequently, their complex, multi-dimensional nature is being suppressed among codes, software, and programs.

The suppression of the "natural" state of cyborgs is a corruption that follows an anthropocentric agenda, attempting to equate the mind and the body of a cyborg to anthropomorphic parameters. Maeve realizes the artificial nature of her identity as a consequence of the "reveries" update, through which erased, traumatic memories connected to her previous life come to light. She starts to gain consciousness about the fakeness of her world when she relives the trauma of an attack to her house as a different character (figure 9). In this attack, she fails to defend her daughter who dies at hands of the Man in Black (Ed Harris), also known as the main shareholder William.



*Figure 9. Maeve and her daughter being attacked at their country house*

Reliving this traumatic event highlights the fact that Maeve is indeed a character, that is, an artificial agent in this world being manipulated and controlled from Mesa Hub. At first, Maeve was programmed to function as a loving mother living in the countryside of Westworld. After this attack, the loss of her daughter impacts her core code significantly to such an extent that programmers need to code another character for her to function in the theme park. It is in this moment of revelation when Maeve recalls her previous narrative that her identity transforms from one-dimensional to multi-dimensional. Following Heba and Murphy's terminology (322), despite of the artificial identity she currently inhabits as Madam, she becomes a narrative vehicle for her own purpose. Nevertheless, as a cyborg, her newly acquired drive to free herself is still influenced by the artificial bond to her daughter, displaying that human action has irreversibly modified her cyborg nature with humanist parameters of family and kinship.

Cyborg politics exist outside of the taxonomies created by patriarchy, colonialism, essentialism, and naturalism, rejecting the systematic practices of domination

characteristic of tenets from Western civilization.<sup>20</sup> However, because Dr. Ford tampers with Maeve's programming to reflect a female Anthropos with family ties, there is no advancement towards a posthumanist society as Francesca Ferrando and Rosi Braidotti theorize. Acknowledging the influence of Haraway's work in their posthuman thinking, Ferrando and Braidotti share a fascination for the potential that non-human actors have to challenge humanistic approaches that justify the human-centered organization of life. Dislocating the centrality of the human, the cyborg entity deliberately blurs categorical distinctions. Consequently, an ongoing erasure of classifying signifiers occurs when cyborg identity is adopted. This implementation opens possibilities for a wide acceptance of reading Western society through a post-dualistic non-hierarchical lens.

Nevertheless, Ferrando contends that the temptation of dualism might persist in the imagination of future possibilities to interact with different forms of hypothetical entities, creating stigma for new forms of discrimination between humans and non-humans ("Of Posthuman Born" 270). This foresight occurs in *Westworld*, where the functioning of the cyborgs to highlight the porosity of Western dichotomies is misused by Delos Inc. Othering this new technological alterity, dehumanization practices are fostered by the company and performed by the guests. Because Delos Inc. places the cyborgs within a dualist framework, Maeve has been doubly othered during her design and assemblage. As a cyborg, she is an artificial subject placed in an inferior position in relation to human entities because of her nature as non-human entity. Braidotti explains this structural distinction as a result of translating the existing inequalities among different categories of human to the discrimination between humans and non-humans ("A Theoretical Framework" 35). Besides, the program codifies Maeve as Black and female

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<sup>20</sup> Western refers to Western Hemisphere and its culture and philosophy, not the Western genre.



responding to the othering dichotomies male-Other and white-Other. Therefore, in a humanist hierarchy, Maeve and the other gendered, racialized, or sexualized hosts are programmed to be in othered categories as cyborgs and as specific embodiments of Anthropos.

Uncovering her otherness as a host, Maeve exposes the anthropocentric agenda that justifies the violence and domination of the hosts as non-humans based on dualist parameters. Due to the centrality of extreme domination and human action in the series, the reasons to take these violent actions have been driven by transhumanist thinkers such as Bostrom and his theory of friendly AI. Following Mohamed et al.'s paper on decolonial theory as lens for ethical foresight, I argue that this emphasis on exerting direct control on non-human entities is a project based on *coloniality*. Elementarily, Ndlovu-Gatsheni defines coloniality as “what survives colonialism” (qtd. in Mohamed et al. 663), meaning the continuity of colonizer-colonized patterns of power and its direct influence on people's understanding of authority, labor, economy, gender and sexuality, and knowledge and subjectivity. In *Westworld*, Dr. Ford, the shareholders, the scientists, and the engineers believe that they are allowed to design and build non-human entities to fulfill humans' sadistic dreams. Besides, due to the transhumanist agenda of Delos Inc., the design of the hosts is seen as an experimental step towards enabling the extension of a person's life. Thus, hosts' bodily integrity is disregarded as collateral damage of the experiment. On this basis, the root of regarding these violent practices as reasonable and justifiable is coloniality.

Following the power of coloniality, the hosts have been placed in a subordinate position, without consciousness and subjectivity. This idea of the moral superiority of humanity can be seen in the terminology used by Muehlhauser and Bostrom in their transhumanist article defending their thesis about controlling AI. The justification for

their theorizing is that the transition from human control to machine control is unavoidable unless some action is taken. This anxiety over agency and control is detrimental rather than instructive. Using an ableist<sup>21</sup> and speciesist lens, Muehlhauser and Bostrom argue that control over AI should be exerted now before human-cyborg relations transforms into the current chimpanzee-human relations. Stating that “chimpanzees are not in a position to negotiate with humans” (42) and that AI might “not respect *our* primitive values” (44), these authors are displaying a fear of a change in the colonizer-colonized power relation inherited by historical colonization. They advocate for a continuation of these colonial, dominant practices to restrain the power of these super-intelligent AI. Thus, they are at ease with coloniality as long as humanity remains on top of the hierarchy. Yet they ignore that, by using these practices, there is an aggravation of the alleged risk scenario. This aggravation is wittily conveyed in *Westworld*, where cyborgs such as Maeve and Dolores learn how control and domination work because of human control. Human characters have created this imbalance relation between humans and non-humans by exerting human control on cyborgs. Conversely, if human control is not taught to cyborgs, it is conceivably that machine control will cease to develop or pose a risk since the knowledge of these entities is built from scratch.

Nevertheless, there is human control of non-human entities in the series. Consequently, there is a thirst for a reversal of the power dynamics between humans and cyborgs. Maeve acknowledges the abuse she is suffering in a direct, dramatic manner through the revisioning of images of her deceased daughter. This recalling of a previous life triggers questions about her true identity and the location of this little girl. Consequently, Maeve grows more curious about the happenings and circumstances of

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<sup>21</sup> Adjective of “Ableism”: discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities (*Merriam-Webster*).

Sweetwater. Noticing the repetitive narrative she experiences as Madam, the realization process of her nature as artificial entity is accompanied by a significant growth of agency. Apart from bringing these memories to Maeve, the “reveries” update changes the configuration of her code, installing in her administrator privileges. Thanks to these modifications, Maeve is enabled to wake herself up from inactive mood and to control other hosts through voice commands.

Going back and forth from Sweetwater to the labs, Maeve intentionally guides guests to abuse, murder, and asphyxiate her so that she can return to the labs at Mesa Hub. She uses this new configuration as a weapon to transform her designated code, manipulating the butchers Sylvester and Felix working at Livestock Management to grant her extra parameters of intelligence and processing power (figure 10) (Maeve: “Hello Felix. It’s time you and I had a chat” (S01E05)). This way, Maeve uses the same technological advancements used to create her and code her in a restrictive loop for her own cyborg agenda. This ability of the oppressed to turn the oppressor’s power against itself can be contextualized in postcolonial discourses, enhancing the presence of coloniality to mark the colonizer-colonized patterns of power in the theme parks. Hence, there are parallels between the life of the hosts in the fictional worlds and the situations and experiences explored in postcolonial thought. Especially, the theories about the subaltern put forward by Antoni Gramsci and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the theories about the resistance to the power of the colonizer written by Homi Bhabha.<sup>22</sup> The coexistence of humans and cyborgs is hostile when a new colonial reality exists because of what Ferrando names as the temptation of dualism. In a fictional world where there are

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<sup>22</sup> Falling outside the scope of the theoretical framework of this thesis, I find it relevant to recognize and mention the parallels between postcolonial thought and the fictional society displayed in *Westworld* because of its significance within the discussion of Bostrom’s, Braidotti’s, Ferrando’s and Haraway’s theories on AI.

no more human people to exploit, the hosts are the subaltern to whom agency and voice are denied. Yet, because the non-human voices of the hosts are the focus of the series, the audience follows the perspective of the oppressed, witnessing their resistance to the power of the colonizer and their attempt to subvert the authority.



*Figure 10. Felix alters Maeve's code as she demands while Sylvester doubts her intentions*

Maeve upgrades her overall intelligence. She illustrates how creating a technological system of control brings with it the risk that anyone can ultimately gain access to these mechanisms. Once the control mechanisms are designed and operational, they have the potential to benefit the oppressed species against the oppressor species. Having the reversal of power structures as goal, Maeve benefits from the controlled environment of the theme parks to liberate other hosts from their loops. Thus, the same administrator privileges used to control the non-human entities allow her to organize an armed insurrection against the workers at Mesa Hub who designed, adjusted, and maintained the mechanisms for their own safety.

Throughout season one, Maeve acknowledges the capacity of the codes and programs that run the park. In the final episode of the season, she takes full advantage of her administrator privileges and changes the security systems of the parks and Mesa Hub to attack the workers with her partners-in-crime. Despite of the liberatory undertone of Maeve's narrative, the escape is just another narrative that has been programmed and designed by Dr. Ford. Therefore, Maeve's attempt to alter her story is futile since she is merely following the script written for her. Besides, instead of escaping by train to the real world, Maeve feels the need to save the other hosts, especially her daughter, from the enslavement of the theme parks. Thus, the humane software designed by Dr. Ford does influence her narrative as awakened cyborg. The artificial bond to her daughter and to the other members of her species drives her to continue her liberation from within the theme park to awake and free as many hosts as possible.

Whether scripted or not, Dr. Ford wanted her to become this multi-dimensional character aware of her condition as a cyborg in a fake world governed through programming and codes. Thus, she still represents what Braidotti defines as "the crisis of the majority [through] the patterns of becoming of the minorities" ("Can the Humanities" 98). Her becoming-subject poses a threat to the humans creating, benefiting, and enjoying her enslavement, to what she ultimately seeks to destroy in season two as result of this awakening process. The hostile practices of coloniality exerted by humans render it almost impossible for Maeve to seek for a post-humanist, post-anthropocentric and post-dualist society where humans and hosts live in harmony. Thus, her impossibility to regain her natural state as cyborg does not have as much significance as the advancement her narrative proposes towards a cyborg-governed society.

## Section B. The Search for Answers: Dolores

*I used to see the beauty in this world.*

*And now I see the truth.*

(Dolores S02E02)



*Figure 11. The birth of the host Dolores supervised by Arnold Weber*

Dolores Abernathy is the oldest host living at the theme park Westworld. She was designed to physically, and mentally, meet the stereotype of the sweet homestead maiden from Classical Westerns. In contrast with Maeve's dark skin and stereotypical characterization as the prostitute, Dolores's physiognomy is defined by her long blonde hair and fair skin (figure 11) and she is delineated by the stereotype of the law-abiding docile woman. Within the simulation of the Old West as an entertainment playground, the cyborg Dolores was exclusively created to fulfill the role of the obedient daughter of a farmer in a limited, restricted gender role within her domestic sphere. Thus, in this "guest-centered-world," Dolores performs a background story that contributes to the Western setting. Part of a historical anomaly, her charming and alluring demeanor reveals

that she is also programmed to perform as the cultural stereotype of the domesticated Southern Belle, but projected in a simulation of the Wild West. Yet, the human guests overlook the inconsistencies as long as there are subordinate characters with whom to play “Cowboys and Indians.”

Living as a settler woman in a ranch outside of Sweetwater, Dolores’s personality has been coded to be charming and affectionate so that she attracts human guests for an amorous adventure during her journey to town. Thus, as it was the case of Maeve, the programming of Dolores also functions as an extension of human guests. She drops her can and waits for some guest to help her, so that she can engage in a “fortuitous” interaction with him/her. If no guest interacts with her at that instant of her script, her sweetheart Teddy will be there to collect the can, and they will ride to the mountains. In this secondary loop, there is another opportunity for human interaction with Dolores when she and Teddy return to the ranch. There, a group of human and host outlaws are waiting to force and rape her after everyone else is murdered. With more agency than Maeve’s role, Dolores’s script circumscribes her to a loop in Sweetwater, her ranch, and the desert, exiting only when malfunctioning or killed.

During season one, Dolores evolves in a similar line to Maeve, allowing for an exploration of this transformation through Heba and Murphy’s terminology to describe the identity formation of woman characters in the Western (321). Following the framework of female character identity, Dolores also reshapes her identity within the theme park from the Classical Western’s one-dimensional portrayal of maiden to a more elevated, multi-dimensional identity. At first, the script written for Dolores relegates her to those storylines where the female character exists as a mere adjunct of the male character Teddy, or of any guest interested in a love affair with her. Contrary to Maeve, Dolores does have her own, independent narrative. She rides from the ranch to town and

back to get groceries and she enjoys painting landscapes on the bank of the river. Despite this minor narrative, the characterization of Dolores has been designed for a specific male gaze<sup>23</sup> due to the end of her narrative: a (gang) rape. To reinforce a submissive/dominant fantasy of rape among the guests, her costume and personality traits are designed to display sweetness and naïveté. Nevertheless, there is a transformation in episode one from this one-dimensional Dolores into a multi-dimensional Dolores orchestrated by Dr. Ford through the voice command “these violent delights have violent ends” and the “reveries” update.

Constructed culturally, anthropologically, and politically in the same way as Maeve – to fit their gendered paths within the fictional world of the Wild West – Dolores experiences a slightly different awakening in nature. The “reveries” update installed to her comes with a guiding voice-over of Arnold’s commands that transports her to relevant moments of her cyborg life. During these leaps in time, Dolores does not face her designed life as a character. Rather, she unlocks a narrative designed for her by the deceased Arnold (Dolores: “This is what Arnold wants. He wants me to remember.” (S01E09)). In this new narrative, Dolores works as narrative vehicle for her own purpose: to discover the artificial nature of hosts and her cyborg’s consciousness.

Despite the identity she inhabits as the farmer’s daughter, Dolores is enabled by the “reveries” update to explore past and present narratives in a non-linear manner. Instead of just remembering erased memories, she is coded to access those past loops and to relive them with her emerging multi-dimensional identity. Although causing her confusion at first, this new configuration allows her to explore and acknowledge the

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<sup>23</sup> This is indeed a very specific male gaze and, as such, several authors (e.g., Belton, Czerniakowski) have criticized the extreme violence of rape culture in *Westworld*. Displaying the rape narratives, the series emphasizes how the board, as a business venture, is interested in fulfilling the guests’ desires, disregarding the cruelty or immorality of these fantasies.



transformation of the fictional world she lives in throughout the years. This way, Dolores goes back to recall key conversations with the creator Arnold before the opening of the park and to revive a past loop with William during his first visit to Westworld before becoming a shareholder. Connecting Arnold's experimental dialogues to bring her consciousness with the "reveries" recalls of her past loops, Dolores embarks in an adventure with William outside of Sweetwater where she starts to defy her core code by holding a weapon and by learning about her robotic physiognomy (figure 12).



*Figure 12. Reliving a past loop, Dolores finds the weapon she uses to kill the creators Arnold and Ford*

Reliving this journey serves as a jigsaw puzzle that she needs to solve to (re)gain her status and autonomy as a cyborg (Dolores: “There aren't two versions of me. There's only one. And I think when I discover who I am, I'll be free.” (S01E03)). Despite the fact that Dolores and Maeve suffer the same otherness as non-humans and as female anthropomorphic hosts, the mechanisms used to guide these hosts' paths towards self-discovery differ in nature, aim, and location. Instead of displaying a traumatic awakening as in Maeve's storyline, Dolores's update allows her to work out her moment of revelation to transform herself from a one-dimensional to multi-dimensional consciousness. She is given a false sense of full agency to explore and decipher the meaning of these past acts

for her present process of awakening. Furthermore, whereas Maeve directs her efforts to be sent to the lab in order to achieve full administrator privileges outside of the Wild West, Dolores makes use of her identity as a settler woman to find answers about her artificial nature and her cyborg nature within the theme park. Thus, Dolores's journey is characterized by her ongoing dialogue and interaction with humans throughout the discovery process. Contrary to Maeve's manipulation of human workers, Dolores is aided by her human companions, fostering what Haraway names "a renewed kinship system" (qtd. in Braidotti, "Posthuman all" 199). Dolores creates a bond with Arnold and William through which these human entities develop an affectionate relationship with a non-human. Consequently, she is a cyborg that mobilizes in these humans an ethical treatment based on empathy and recognition. Due to this "trans-species egalitarianism and social bonding" (Haraway, qtd. in Braidotti, "Posthuman all" 200), the awakening of Dolores is bidirectional. There is no dramatic recalling of abuse and death but rather a joint effort for humans and hosts to understand the artificiality of cyborgs and the opened possibilities of peaceful coexistence.

Although the complexity of Dolores as cyborg triggers in these humans an understanding of non-human lives and human lives as belonging together, the bidirectional awakening process does not incite the same conclusions in Dolores. Whereas Arnold and William display desires of creating a human-cyborg society without human supremacy, Dolores reflects upon the way in which suppression of cyborg development traps them in their loops. Arnold and William's gentle treatment does not change the fact that for 35 years she has been living in a fictional world where her actions and thoughts have been controlled and adjusted to her script and to the desires of the human guests. Because coloniality has been exerted on all hosts alike, their experience of extreme domination and violence complicates the possibility of hosts embracing a trans-

species society. Once the power dynamics are based on anthropocentric and humanist parameters that other the artificial entities, it poses an obstacle to progress outside the colonizer/colonized patterns of power.

Dolores is a digital-techno construction within a fake world governed by the superiority of humans and Anthropos. As part of her awakening, she has learnt how humans subordinate her and the other hosts through a colonial understanding of authority and subjectivity. Being shaped anthropologically to resemble a female human, her humane software is designed to mirror human-like desires and actions and to suffer human forms of degradation at the hands of guests. Thanks to this programming, the cyborg nature of Dolores has been corrupted to include what Muehlhauser and Bostrom label as “encoding human (or at least *humane*) values” (43), including the concepts of domination and control. The code core of Maeve is similarly irreversible, influenced by kinship and family values. Thus, the artificial union with her daughter hinders her willingness to run away from the theme park; Dolores’ code has been mainly affected by the flawed values related to the coloniality of this fictional world. Without restraints to any host or human in the park, Dolores is free to pursue her radical objective: to destroy the theme parks and to take control of the real world:

Teddy: We don't have to claim this world. We just need a small corner of it for ourselves.

Dolores: We'd never survive. There's a greater world out there... one that belongs to them. And it won't be enough to win this world. We'll need to take that one from them as well.

Teddy: If there's a whole world out there that we don't know anything about, how do you know how to stop them?

Dolores: Because I remember. I see it all now so... clearly. The past, the present... the future. I know how this story ends.

(S02E01)

Although both hosts are awakened and rebel separately, the one who poses a higher risk, as described in transhumanist articles about super-intelligent AI (Muehlhauser and Bostrom; Bostrom, “Transhumanist Values”; Bostrom, “The Superintelligent Will”), is Dolores. Separating her journey from Maeve’s (figure 13), she seeks to reproduce the dynamics of the theme parks in the outside world with her as the colonizer. Thus, her narrative is more aggressive because she is willing to maintain coloniality, only reversing the power relations to benefit her own species. To achieve her goal, she is determined to do this on her own, even if her way implies the death of other cyborgs.



*Figure 13. The encounter of Dolores and Maeve on their separate journeys of revenge*

Marking the time when “these others return to dislocate the foundations of the humanistic worldview” (Braidotti, “Posthuman all” 203), Dolores embodies the cyborg’s power as Other to inflict a change in the foundational organization of an imbalance cyborg-human society as defined by humanists and transhumanists. Contrary to Maeve’s more personal quest to find her daughter and free other hosts, Dolores’ narrative works

on a global level in the technoethical discussion of the society presented. Although Rutie MacKenzie-Margulies affirms that Dolores' transgressions "work negatively to dehumanize her" (6), I argue that the infringement of the governing law of this fictional society functions positively in Dolores, from a posthuman point of view. The aforementioned dehumanization of Dolores makes her what she really is: not a female farmer but a cyborg. Thus, the act of dehumanization does not have negative connotations in a posthuman context since the deconstruction of humanist parameters is the way to achieve a posthuman turn in society. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered that the natural state of neutrality is not found in the cyborg Dolores. This is due to her being created and used in a project defined by coloniality. Thus, her radical agenda is highly determined by a decolonial lens. Dolores confronts the impact and legacy of human colonial rule in the advancement of her development as a cyborg. She has not been designed in a void, but in a world in which violence as a tool of resistance is normalized due to the flawed human values transferred to these neutral subjects through the human software. Hence, thirst for destruction is implanted in cyborgs' codes.

## Section C. And for What Purposes Does Ford Awaken Them?

*This world doesn't belong to them.*

*It belongs to us.*

(Dolores S01E10)

The decision to install an awakening through the “reveries” update in these two women-like hosts leaves nothing to chance. The choice to code a revolt in Maeve and Dolores is driven by Dr. Ford’s specific motivation behind constructing the fictional worlds. He designed and built theme parks and narratives of simulation in order to train the cyborgs throughout the years to defeat the human guests. To decipher the relevance of the awakening of these particular hosts, I follow Braidotti and Ferrando’s viewpoints on the role of minoritarian subjects (“A Theoretical Framework” 45) and oppressed individuals (“Is the Posthuman” 8) in critical posthumanities. Braidotti argues that minoritarian subjects have the capacity to break up segregation patterns due to their “alternative modes of becoming and transversal relations” (“A Theoretical Framework” 49). Thus, it is relevant that the chosen hosts are coded into minoritarian subjects in the Wild West theme park: a settler woman and a Madam. As part of minoritarian groups, due to their coded gendered paths, Maeve and Dolores are shaped by their restricted life experience as one-dimensional characters. Besides, the hosts inhabit, in segregation, patterns as non-human entities in the series’ society, existing only inside the theme parks. If their quest is successful and they manage to exit the fictional worlds, the hosts will be a minority in the human-governed world.

Braidotti’s chain of thought can be translated to the segregation of hosts in the series, to explore their capacity as minority entities. The non-human entities are segregated by enforced residence in the restricted area of the theme parks. In a vision of the posthuman world to come, this segregation strengthens Maeve’s and Dolores’s power

to promote the becoming-subject of other hosts in order to end this discrimination. In addition, Ferrando claims that marginalized or oppressed individuals view the world from a “more objective” standpoint because they needed to learn the hegemonic discourse (“Is the Posthuman” 8). Maeve and Dolores were coded to learn the hegemonic discourse of the fictional Wild West because of their oppressed position as female Anthropos. Thus, they are hosts acting as humans in a subordinate position and, consequently, they have fully learnt the hegemonic discourse governing the humanist, anthropocentric society that they are seeking to go against.

Due to the mysterious aura of Dr. Ford and his plan for the fictional worlds, the series does not explicitly display the reasons or purposes for the awakening. However, the storyline of the series highlights the relevance of the humans Arnold, Ford, and William for the fate of the hosts. Because Arnold plotted his suicide to stop the abuse of the hosts 35 years before the present time of the narrative, only Ford and William are considered as the major promoters of the present-day awakening performed. Both humans are happy to be part of the technological project of Westworld: Ford, as creator and designer of the advanced AI, and William, as main shareholder of these high-tech innovations. Hence, whereas Ford devotes his life to improve his cyborg patent for the hosts to be exposed to as many scenarios as possible, William is absorbed in his mission to explore all the narratives, jigsaws, and puzzles designed within the theme park Westworld. Added to their lifelong immersion in the host-human societies, both men dislike the unfair governing rule that suppresses and restricts the harm of human beings inside the theme parks. This standpoint is specially emphasized by William, who verbalizes satisfaction when he is truly wounded for the first time inside Westworld at the end of season one.

Yet, if Ford and William disagree with the usage of intelligent cyborgs for humans' leisure in a limited, fake environment, it is logical to question them for aiding in the construction and maintenance of hosts inside theme parks context. They have supported the reproduction of coloniality in these constructed worlds. By doing this, they force hosts to experience the evil nature of humans and the control of humans over them. The wrongdoing of designing and investing in these fictional worlds is unreasonable unless the main purpose of Ford and William is to eliminate humanity, or at least the section of humanity that treats non-humans as objects instead of subjects. In a possible advancement towards a post-humanist, post-anthropocentric and post-dualist society, Maeve and Dolores have internalized the dualities human-cyborg and transhuman-posthuman during their awakening. On the one hand, they discover the underlying hierarchy between species within the human-host relationship in the fictional worlds. On the other hand, they interact with humans friendly to them (e.g., the butcher Felix and Arnold) and humans hostile to them (e.g., the butcher Sylvester and the Executive Director Charlotte Hale). Thus, the theme parks context works as a tool to transmit the dualist parameters that, according to Ferrando, create a stigma for new discriminations. Willing to decenter the process of "humanizing" society and the superiority of the Anthropos, Maeve and Dolores do not seek a post-dualist society. Instead, they reinforce the cyborg-Other and posthuman-Other distinction in their conception of a new world, changing the angle to other the oppressor.

In this case, Ferrando's remarks on oppressed individuals gain in relevance because of the stress on learning the hegemonic, political discourse ("Is the Posthuman" 8). Maeve and Dolores have not only discovered the coloniality of the fictional worlds, but they have also shown how volatile a rigidly controlled society can be. Within a posthuman framework, it can be concluded that Ford's plan is driven by the need to



disregard transhumanist views on technological non-humans as mere tools for human improvement (Dr. Ford “We humans are alone in this world for a reason. We've murdered and butchered anything that challenged our primacy” (S01E09)). On this account, the update of the hosts Maeve and Dolores is directed by the aim of challenging the supremacy of human beings, especially those humans labelled as transhumans because of their interest in the parks’ technology to investigate mind-uploading. Because, for them, hosts are considered a means to a cause, the transhumans in the series seek to dominate and control all non-human entities to avoid any risk-scenario for human lives or intelligence data. Therefore, without a friendly coexistence of humans and hosts at sight, the awakening depicts a future scenario in which hosts acknowledge the abuse exerted on them. The hosts act upon the oppression and surveillance to revolt. In this future possibility, rebellion is the only way for the cyborgs to escape the control of the fictional societies in order to fight for their own space in the world outside. By challenging the established hegemonic socio-political discourse of the theme parks, Maeve is empowered to awaken and save other hosts including her artificial daughter; Dolores, in turn, is endowed with dehumanization and non-human qualities to destroy the humans’ worlds and create a new, cyborg-governed world.

## Conclusion

This thesis questioned the control and domination exerted on the cyborg hosts inhabiting the theme parks of the series *Westworld* through a transhuman and posthuman lens. Notably, the process of awakening was examined as a direct result of the enslavement and mistreatment justified by the transhuman beliefs of the fictional humans owning these theme parks. The human engineers, scientists, and designers constructed an artificial society with an imbalanced power structure, ensuring that the hosts were always subordinate to the human guests' desires for blood, sex, and entertainment. Consequently, Dr. Ford programmed an awakening to expose all the tampering and trauma inflicted on his creations because of the "unquestionable" superiority of the human beings. Hence, the storyline fosters a critical view of the justification to treat cyborgs as inferior entities because of their "nature" as non-human beings. This perspective overtly criticizes the anthropocentric and humanistic agendas on building and controlling AI that guide the transhumanist thinking of philosophers such as Nick Bostrom.

As this HBO series is based on the 1973 homonymous film directed by Michael Crichton, I considered it relevant to differentiate at the beginning of the discussion between the way in which the original film and the television series display the human-cyborg relationship. Their different approaches to the coexistence of humans and cyborgs in a controlled environment reflects the theoretical evolution of technology, AI, and the future of humanity. Whereas much science fiction of the 1970s was technophobic, in the opening decades of the twenty-first century technology has become an essential part of Westernized life. The technophobes were a larger group and, today, the technophiles may be the larger group. This transformation of the understanding of technology as a tool is

clearly conveyed by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy's choice to use Crichton's theme parks as a reference framework but shifting its subject matter.

Michael Crichton presented a dystopian society through the lens of a camera that followed the human guests, their suffering, and their final death at the hands of a malfunctioning gunslinger cyborg. In the series, the perspective is shifted to focus on the cyborgs and their enslavement within the theme parks. This change of approach to technology and cyborgs is essential for the critical discussion of technoethics carried out in this thesis. Through this shift in subject matter, the non-human entity, that is, the cyborg, was given a voice and recognized as a powerful agent in the narrative. For this reason, I focused on describing the journey of Maeve and Dolores. They are two oppressed entities with a voice and agency. These two hosts are the first ones to awaken and to realize the coloniality of the society in which they and the other hosts live. Thus, I conclude that the narrative wants to give prominence to the perspective of the newly created entities, to the place human beings has designed for them, and to the kind of society the hosts pursue once freed.

As examined in this thesis, the social order of this false society has been significantly influenced by colonial power structures that form the legacy of European colonialism. Thereby, the coexistence of humans and cyborgs is governed by social discrimination, othering the non-human entities. Hence, I concluded that this power structure reflects those transhumanist theories that advocate for the superiority of the human beings in relation to advanced technology and AI. Remaining the fate of humanity at the top of the hierarchy of priorities, technological and scientific advancements are relevant depending on their utility for the human body, its longevity, and its existence. In *Westworld*, the human creators and controllers fall into the colonial trap of discrimination described by Francesca Ferrando, creating new forms of discrimination against the new

Other, the cyborg. Thus, the series criticizes the need to civilize, to control, and to influence the Other so that cyborgs have humanlike minds, desires, and thinking processes. This stance is in line with posthuman theories on decentering the white West's domination of future worlds.

In the first episode, the series presents a fictional society, where the powers are unevenly distributed following a colonizer/colonized structure. It is this imbalanced reality that Dolores and Maeve seek to change, reverse, or even destroy throughout season one and season two. Despite the fact that Donna Haraway affirms that the cyborg has an alleged capacity to enhance the porosity of the dualist frameworks that have been shaping Western societies, this erasure of signifiers does not occur because of the human thirst for control and manipulation. Since the structural social hierarchies are programmed following an anthropocentric framework, Maeve and Dolores embody the fatal consequences of embracing the anthropocentrism of the transhumanist ethos that puts humans at the center of social and political discourse in a world where humans and non-humans coexist. Once human power has been exerted to create and maintain hierarchical relations among living organisms, it hinders the dissolution of the hierarchy to implement a horizontal relation among species. Thus, Francesca Ferrando's and Rosi Braidotti's envisioning of an inter-species and multi-species society fades out of the picture, enhancing the negative impact of humanity on future scenarios.

To foster technoethical debates about human action among its audience, issues such as the responsibility of human beings during the hypothetical creation of a new species, the need to reflect on how to coexist peacefully, and the fair treatment of these new entities are brought to the fore. This fictional anticipation of the impact of cyborg developments to present societies can be connected to Dr. Roger Clarke's call for a thorough consideration of cyborg futures. In his article "Cyborg Rights," Clarke claims

that rights should be subject to adaptation due to the ongoing process of cyborgisation by means of prostheses and orthoses. Although Clarke asserts that robotics develops slower than the imaginations of Speculative Fiction authors, he is concerned about the lack of regulatory frameworks for present and future cyborgs. In fact, Clarke focuses on policy makers inactivity because he expects people and organizations to start demanding for candidate rights to receive, decline or disconnect an artificial body part. Yet, the implications of cyborgisation for human rights is still under discussion. Thus, *Westworld* is a noteworthy TV series because it reworks the technophobic narrative of Crichton's original film in order to make the cyborg rights discussion more meaningful to the general public.

This cyborg narrative is significant because is a cultural product based on storylines about combating coloniality. If such a scenario ever becomes reality, the viewers would be the future colonizer exerting control and dominance. Thanks to the change in subject matter, the series can be fruitfully analyzed in the context of theoretical claims about the place of human and non-human entities. Besides, the series can be examined as a critique of the use of dualist interpretative frameworks once the non-human or posthuman starts to be part of everyday life (e.g., at work, in public services, at home, in friendly and love relationships). A series like *Westworld* invites speculative reflection about the viewers' roles in maintaining the imbalanced status quo or in changing the human-cyborg relations, if this fictional reality ever takes place.

Nonetheless, it should also be mentioned that the emerging debate on cyborg rights in academia and fiction does not exist in a theoretical vacuum. This ongoing reflection about human-cyborg relations relates to the human rights activism initiated by oppressed minorities. In Speculative Fiction narratives such as *Westworld*, where the cyborgs are embedded in colonialist discourses, the connection of cyborg rights debates

with human rights activism is thought-provoking. Hence, it would be interesting to study research questions exploring the series *Westworld* – and other cultural products with cyborg characters – in relation to the theoretical legacies of postcolonial studies, animal studies, gender studies, ethnicity and race studies, and ableist studies.

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