“A Soul Begins With the Gnashing of Teeth”: Suffering, Otherness, and Subjectivity in Karel Čapek’s R.U.R. (1920), Westworld (2016), and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995)

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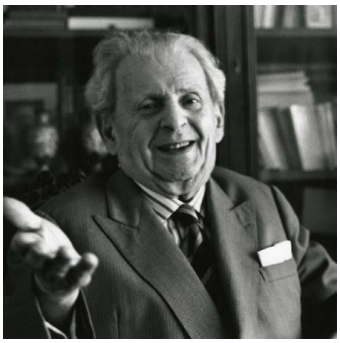

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Cover Images:

Fig. 1: Billy Rose Theatre Division performance of R.U.R. with Sylvia Field as Helena and Albert Van Dekker as Radius.

Fig. 2: Still from “Chestnut,” episode two of the first season of Westworld (24:11)

Fig. 3: Photo of Emmanuel Levinas by Bracha L. Ettinger, 1991.

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Introduction

"It was Arnold's key insight, the thing that led the hosts to their awakening: suffering" ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:49). With this explanation for the development of human-like consciousness in artificial people, world-wide acclaimed HBO television series *Westworld* (2016) pays homage to Karel Čapek's play *Rossum's Universal Robots* (1921, henceforth: *R.U.R.*). In Čapek's play, an artificial people known as the robots declare that "from horror and suffering" they have "become beings with souls" like organic humans (75). Thus, in both *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* suffering is presented as a catalyst for the emergence of a human form of consciousness in artificial people.

Initially, however, organic human characters in both texts are convinced that the robots and hosts are unable to suffer, and this supposed inability is used to distinguish artificial from organic people. Human characters suggest that because the robots feel "no physical pain" (19) and the hosts do not "feel a solitary thing" ("The Stray" 35:47), they can work endlessly or under inhumane conditions. This thesis demonstrates how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* reflect on the ways that similar reasoning was and continues to be used to justify the mistreatment of the Other in real life. They do so, moreover, by zeroing in on the causal connections between suffering and consciousness. Additionally, it shows how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* offer illustrations of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, in which one's suffering in response to the Other's suffering is the foundation of becoming a fully human subject. In what follows, I hope to show how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* interweave these two opposite ways of responding to the suffering Other, and thereby contribute to a better understanding of the role of suffering in the ongoing negotiation of what it really means to be human.

Exploring how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* reflect on the history of denying others' pain holds societal relevance, because outdated theories of suffering still influence today's politics

of pain. As I will show in my analyses, both texts suggest that the robots and hosts have been sensitive to pain and conscious from the beginning – the organic human characters only portray the robots and hosts as unconscious, insensitive beings in order to exploit them.

Historically, various groups of people have also been portrayed as experiencing less or no pain for such purposes. For instance, as Keith Wailoo, Joanna Bourke, and Martin S. Pernick have shown, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the idea that people of colour feel no or less pain than white European people was propagated to justify the enslavement of black African people (194-96; 192-230; 148-167).[1] While slavery has been abolished, the ideas used to defend the institution have not disappeared. Today, a significant percentage of laypeople and physicians in training still believe that people of colour feel less pain than white people, and prescribe less pain relief to people of colour as a result (Trawalter 4297, Wailoo 194-96).[2] Other prescription disparities have been found to result from similarly unfounded theories about differences in pain sensitivity across social classes (194-96; Summers et al 13). Through their focus on the pain of the other, *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* lend themselves very well for addressing the role of race and social class in the historical and contemporary politics of pain.

Literary theorists like Adilifu Nama, Isaiah Lavender III, Stephen Cave and Kanta Dihal, Gregory Jerome Hampton, and Despina Kakoudaki have demonstrated how fiction about artificial people inherently addresses social inequalities based on race, ethnicity, and social class. As Kakoudaki states, the artificial person's "potential for [social class,] racial, or ethnic representation comes from its objecthood;" artificial people are "being[s] whose ontological state maps perfectly with a political state. Robots are designed to be servants,

[1] Unless stated otherwise, Bourke quotes are from *The Story of Pain* (2014).

2 Studies have also found disparities in pain care due to unfounded theories about gender differences in pain. While both *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* address gender inequality as well, the scope of this thesis does not allow an in-depth exploration of this topic here. I have not found analyses of *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* that study how these texts address gender disparities in pain treatment. See Dağcı, McDevitt, or Poston for studies of gender in *R.U.R.*, and McDevitt, Shaffer, or Mullen for studies of gender in *Westworld.*

workers, or slaves" (117). Fictional artificial people thus make good representations of real people who had such political states forced upon them. Artificial intelligence and servitude have been connected since antiquity: in the *Illiad,* Homer describes Hephaestus' artificially intelligent inventions with words he otherwise only uses "to refer to the manual labour of slaves" (Lively and Thomas 27-28), while Aristotle, referring to Homer's descriptions of Hephaestus' automatons, argues that human slavery can only be abolished when all tools can wield themselves (1253b 28-30, see also Lively and Thomas 41). Karel Čapek solidified this relationship between servants, workers, slaves and artificial people when he named the artificial people in *R.U.R.* "robots" – a word derived from the Czech word *robota*, which denotes serf labour, drudgery and hard work (Kakoudaki 116; "Robot, n.[1]"). Today, "robot" is still the most commonly used term for artificial creatures, and with every use the connection between artificial intelligence, chattel slavery and the proletariat becomes further entrenched in languages around the world (116; Klíma xvi).

Given the etymology and widespread use of the term "robot," one might expect an extensive body of research into the parallels between the role of suffering in the justification of the dehumanization of American slaves and the European proletariat, and in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*. While there are numerous studies that read *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* as representations of the exploitation of the working class in Europe or slavery in the Americas (e.g. Dihal, Kakoudaki, Higbie, Abnet, Moise, Vint), I have not encountered research investigating whether the similarities between robots, hosts, slaves, and the working class extend to the inaccurate portrayal of these groups as insensible, soulless, or intellectually inferior to their enslavers or bosses. This thesis presents a contribution to filling this gap.

A great variety of terms is used to describe artificial humans in the study of science fiction. Given this thesis's focus on *R.U.R.*, the most apparent choice for a collective term would be "robot," were it not that the meaning of "robot" has changed, and the term is now

applied to all kinds of seemingly automatic machines ("Robot, n.[2] 2."). Another option is "android," meaning "an automaton resembling a human being" ("Android"), which is the term preferred by the authors of *Reading Westworld* (Goody and Mackay "Introduction" 2-3). This thesis instead follows Despina Kakoudaki in using "artificial person" (3), as this term is comprehensive enough to encompass both the robots, who are created artificially but are completely made of flesh and blood, and the hosts, who have human-looking and -feeling bodies but a computer in their skulls instead of a brain. Additionally, both "artificial person" and the plural "artificial people" already make explicit the inherent humanity of artificial people, which is the central topic of this thesis. To tell robots and hosts apart from other people, this thesis distinguishes artificial people from "organic people" when necessary.

To ground the analyses of the relationship between suffering and consciousness in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*, Chapter One will provide a theoretical framework. After an elucidation of the political and public dimensions of pain and suffering, the chapter will present a brief account of the role of suffering in the historical justification of othering and dehumanization. This account will be combined with an overview of Emmanuel Levinas's understanding of the Other's suffering as "the nexus of human subjectivity" (Levinas "Useless Suffering" 84, see also Edelglass 53-55). For Alquist in *R.U.R.* and Maeve in *Westworld,* discovering that they are another person's parent is crucial for their development or lack thereof. Therefore, the images of mother- and fatherhood used by Levinas to illustrate his understanding of the relationship between self and Other will also be discussed in detail. The combination of these approaches to suffering allows for analyses that show how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* engage with the history of denying the pain of others to justify their exploitation, while still accounting for the robots and hosts' development.

Drawing on Chapter One's framework, Chapter Two will analyse the role of suffering in *R.U.R.*. The third and final chapter will study the function of suffering in *Westworld* and

focus on the development of host Maeve Millay. Both chapters will start by mapping the ways that *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* suggest that the robots and hosts represent both the proletariat and people enslaved in the Americas. The second half of both chapters will read *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* in the light of Chapter One's account of Levinas's philosophy. Chapter Two will reveal that when *R.U.R.* is analysed through a Levinasian lens, the play turns out to be not so much about the robots becoming human but rather about a lack of humanity on the part of the organic human characters. For *Westworld*, Levinas's philosophy helps understand why and how Maeve comes to be the first host who makes her own decisions. Ultimately, this thesis will show that rather than cautionary tales about human-AI interaction, *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* are studies of (in)humane human-human interaction.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework

This thesis presents a comparative reading of *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*, proceeding from the observation that both texts suggest that artificial people become human through suffering. It will show that both texts reflect on the way that theories about causal connections between suffering, consciousness and conduct towards others were and continue to be used to justify the mistreatment of human and non-human Others in real life. To read *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* comparatively, in section 1.1, I will first briefly review what it means for the artificial characters to "become human" in both texts. Next, I will take a closer look at the causal relationship that organic human characters in both texts imagine exists between suffering and consciousness.

In sections two and three, I will put the theories presented in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* in historical and philosophical context. Each section describes a distinct way of responding to the suffering of another person. In section 1.2, I discuss how theories about differences in pain sensitivity among humans have and continue to be used to justify and perpetuate inequality. In such theories, pain sensitivity is used to label other people as inferior, as 'other' in a negative sense. In section 1.3, I turn to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas to show that the pain of the Other initially and fundamentally elicits a very different, caring approach to the Other: the recognition of the Other's humanity, as a consequence of which a human being becomes a fully human subject. As I hope to demonstrate in Chapters Two and Three, Levinas' ideas offer a useful framework for understanding how the relations between pain, self and otherness are imagined in R.U.R. and *Westworld*.

1.1 Pain, Suffering, and Consciousness in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*

In *R.U.R.,* it is suggested that the robots become "beings with a soul" through suffering, while in *Westworld* Dr. Ford holds that suffering leads to the hosts' "awakening" (Čapek 75; "The Bicameral Mind" 1:16:49). What initially distinguish the robots and hosts from organic humans, and what the artificial people seem to have acquired at the end of the text, is the soul in *R.U.R.,* and free will in *Westworld*. In *R.U.R.,* the soul refers to an amalgam of human attributes such as emotions, interests, passions and free will (9, 18-19). It has a divine origin and cannot be replicated by the human characters (19). At the end of the play, the last remaining human character suggests that, in response to the robots' suffering, God must have intervened and given them a soul (84). The hosts in *Westworld* have emotions, interests, and passions from the start. The only true difference between man and host is that man is controlled by the invisible hand of evolution, while the host is man-made, and thus lives a life under human control ("Trompe L'Oeil" 50:10-51:15; "Trace Decay" 35:15-36:30). In *Westworld,* suffering leads the hosts to develop free will, or at least the ability to make different choices than their programming dictates ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:49).

At first glance, both texts seem to give a simple explanation for the relationship between pain, suffering, and inspiration or free will: a painful experience forces a being to reflect on pain. In *R.U.R.,* the claim is that the robots start out with a simplified nervous system and a simple mind, which becomes humanly complex when the robots are given the "pain-reactive nerves" they previously lacked (19; 56-58). In *Westworld,* organic humans maintain that the hosts gain consciousness through experiencing numerous painful experiences ("Trompe L'Oeil" 40:57-41:28; "The Well-Tempered Clavier" 38:59-45:10). The underlying idea seems to be that an unpleasant physical experience, such as touching a hot pan, forces mental reflection. The mental realization that touching a hot pan hurts, as well as the reflection that it is better not to do so again, only follows the physical pain of burning a

finger. Assuming that human(like) bodies can function without a mind, as *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* effectively do, it is imaginable that damage to that body, in the form of a burn or other injury, leads to an experience that sparks mental reflection. The unpleasantness of physical injury requires cause-inferences and reflection, aimed at avoiding future hurt. Suffering encourages the search for explanations for the pain, as well as ways to end and prevent further suffering. This is the simplest explanation for the idea that suffering leads to consciousness.

Yet a quick closer look at *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* indicates that this simple explanation does not fully account for the robots' and hosts' development of consciousness. In *R.U.R.*, many robots have not been given pain-reactive nerves, but they do gain consciousness. In *Westworld*, all artificial people suffer in equal measures, but they do not develop consciousness at the same pace. Therefore, the idea that pain experiences lead to mental reflections and therefore to a mental life is insufficient for explaining the relationship between pain, suffering, and consciousness in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*.

Naturally, an interpretation of pain as a purely physical sensation that causes mental suffering, and therefore a mind, is oversimplified and reductionistic. Historians of pain such as Elaine Scarry, Martin S. Pernick, David B. Morris, Esther Cohen, Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, Javier Moscoso, Keith Wailoo, and Joanna Bourke have shown that pain and suffering are highly complex, multifaceted experiences. Instead of being a purely medical matter, pain and suffering have cultural, political, social, and economic dimensions. What and whose pain is recognized as pain, for instance, depends on political and socio-economic interests (e.g. Pernick 148-167; Moscoso 81, 131; Wailoo 40, 53-54, 115, 143, 206). An appreciation of pain and suffering as intricate, multifaceted phenomena can elucidate why *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* may posit a connection between sensitivity to pain and consciousness.

1.2 The Politics of Pain: A Tool for Othering and Dehumanization

As mentioned in the Introduction, in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* the inhumane living and working conditions of the hosts and robots are justified by the idea that the hosts and robots do not really suffer, are thus different from and lesser than human, and that therefore their treatment cannot really be considered inhumane. This reasoning can be described as an example of "othering". Gayathri Spivak coined this critical term in her 1985 essay "The Rani of Sirmur" to describe "the process by which imperial discourse creates its 'others,'" but the concept took on the broader definition of a way to describe "the social and/or psychological ways in which one group excludes or marginalizes another group" (Ashcroft et al. 188). In this thesis, othering is understood in the 2016 definition of UC Berkeley's Othering and Belonging Institute:

> [A] set of dynamics, processes, and structures that engender marginality and persistent inequality across any of the full range of human difference based on group identities. Dimensions of othering include, but are not limited to, religion, sex, race, ethnicity, [gender,] socioeconomic status (class), disability, sexual orientation, and skin tone. Although the axes of difference that undergird these expressions of othering vary considerably and are deeply contextual, they contain a similar set of underlying dynamics (Powell and Menendian 17).

The choice for this definition is motivated by its comprehensiveness. This thesis follows Powell and Menendian in their observation that, while marginalization and discrimination take on different forms depending on particular (combinations of) dimensions, exclusion in general results from marking a group of people as different in a negative sense. In the context of this thesis, the room for inclusion of other dimensions enables adding the "species"

dimension that is used to other the robots and hosts – although it must be noted that Chapter Two and Three will show that it is a far stretch to consider the robots and hosts different species. Therefore, this thesis also uses the critical concept "dehumanization," which denotes the process of not only denying the equality of the other, but completely stripping away the other's humanness. Dehumanization extends beyond othering: to dehumanize means categorizing the other not merely as different-than-me-but-still-human, but as lesser-than-, or subhuman (Smith *Less than Human* 26, see also, e.g. Brons 72, Bruneau 1079, and Baysha 292). To demonstrate how pain sensitivity came to be used as a tool for othering and dehumanization, it is essential to first problematize two common assumptions about pain: the alleged difference between physical pain and mental suffering, and the idea that pain is a subjective, unsharable, private experience.

Everyday use of the words "suffering" and "pain" suggests that there is indeed a difference: "pain" is mainly used to describe forms of physical discomfort, whereas "suffering" is used to describe both the experience of physical discomfort and the experience of mental discomfort ("Pain, n.¹ 3&4"; "Suffer, vI.1."). However, cultural historians David Morris and Joanna Bourke consider drawing such a distinction an expression of what Morris called "the Myth of Two Pains" in 1991: the idea that pain and suffering are not only words used differently, but also describe fundamentally different experiences (Morris 9-10, Bourke 12).[3] Morris and Bourke point out that experiences in daily life as well as brain research show that it is not possible to draw such a clear dividing line between physical and mental suffering (Morris 10-12, 156; Bourke 21). In many cases, a painful event is both physically and mentally painful: a broken heart can be felt physically, and the hurt of a paper cut, no matter how small, affects the mind.

[3] Unless stated otherwise, Bourke quotes are from *The Story of Pain* (2014), and Morris quotes are from *The Culture of Pain* (1991).

Naturally, Morris and Bourke do not mean to suggest that there can be no physical pain without mental suffering, or that mental suffering is always felt physically. Their reason to caution against making a hard distinction stems from the observation that distinguishing physical pain from mental suffering often leads to a hierarchical ordering of experiences. Pain resulting from a physical injury is often considered more "real" and more "serious" than mental suffering, such as suffering from a depression or from pain for which no physical cause can be found (Morris 10, 70; Bourke 12). In other contexts, separating physical and mental experiences results in the opposite hierarchical order. Distinguishing between mental and physical suffering perpetuates the idea that the mind can be separated from the body (Bourke 12, 25; Morris 9-12). This in turn reinforces historical views on the body as a temporary, defective, and sinful prison for the eternal, pure soul (see Dijkhuizen 48, 115, 122-127; Bourke 93, 97-98; Morris 162-63 for examples). Separating the mind from the body instead of treating them as inseparable contributed to a discourse in which groups of people could only have a body and no soul, as was done with regard to people of colour in colonial times, as well as to the artificial humans in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* (Bourke 12, 25; Morris 39, 44, 162-63; Smith *Less than Human* 115-17; Smith "Paradoxes of Dehumanization" 420-24; see also Davis).

For Morris and Bourke, pain instead is a clear sign that body and mind are connected;[4] that suffering without a physical cause is just as real as suffering from physical injuries; and that mental pain experiences are valid too (10-12; 12). They also propose to trust that when someone indicates that they are in pain, they are in pain – regardless of whether this pain is

[4] Distinguishing mental experiences from physical sensations is generally referred to as making a "Cartesian" distinction. This designation is based on an oversimplified interpretation of Descartes' philosophy in general and his views on pain in particular (Dijkhuizen 18; Morris "The Challenges of Pain and Suffering" 88). In fact, Descartes considered pain the one phenomenon that indicates that mind and body must be "[b]lended" (Descartes 97-8, qtd. in Dijkhuizen 20). Descartes did consider pain predominantly "a warning system," given to humans by God to help humans stay away from harm, and he was "uninterested in the social, personal and cultural factors that help to shape the experience of pain" (Dijkhuizen 22). In that sense, he can be considered "one of the progenitors of modern dualist understandings of pain," but as Morris observes, most "medical mind/body dualisms […] flow from nineteenth-century positivist science," not from the writings of Descartes ("The Challenges of Pain and Suffering" 88).

tangible or can be made visible (289, 3). In this thesis, I follow Morris, Bourke, and other historians of pain, in not distinguishing between pain and suffering if there is no reason to emphasize either the mental or physical aspect of a painful experience.

Pain and suffering confront humans with the inherently subjective nature of human experience, and this can lead to an understanding of pain as a solitary experience that is impossible to share. This was the claim of Elaine Scarry's acclaimed and highly influential 1985 book *The Body in Pain* (Moscoso 4; Dijkhuizen 31). Scarry observed that "pain comes unsharably into our midst," not only because we cannot feel what the person in pain experiences, but also because pain "resists language [… and] actively destroys it" (4). Recent works on the history of pain have shown that Scarry's seemingly universal characterization of pain is temporally and culturally bound. Dijkhuizen has pointed out that Scarry's views are "characteristic especially of late twentieth-century western cultural conceptions of pain" (31). These conceptions were shaped by the invention of modern anaesthesia in 1846 and the subsequent focus on controlling and alleviating more and more pain, as well as by the "relegat[ion of] intense pain to the secluded world of the hospital ward and pain clinic" in the western world (4, 31). Dijkhuizen notes that in early modern times, "part of the essence of pain was precisely that it could be shared" and thus inspire compassion in witnesses of suffering (31). Wynne Smith and Stafford have shown that in the eighteenth-century people held that pain could be shared not only through spoken, but also through written words, and even through cartoons (466; 194).

Overall, these authors of more recent studies of pain agree with Scarry that it is difficult to put pain and suffering into words, but as Joanna Bourke puts it: that holds true for "[m]ost feeling-states," and is not unique to pain (28). Furthermore, attempting to put pain into words or images is not "necessarily destructive" (28). As Moscoso and Dijkhuizen have shown, people have used language and images in inventive ways to cope with their own or

another's pain. Art and religious practices have proven effective in bringing people together to share their suffering (e.g. Moscoso 43, 55-78, 90; Dijkhuizen 5-7, 23-25, passim). Before the invention of modern anaesthesia, people relied on rituals and the comfort of others to cope with suffering (4, Bourke 129, Moscoso 113 - 118). This is why more recent studies of pain consider pain not a private, but a shared, public, and political experience.

Joanna Bourke for example maintains that "pain is […] inherently social" (17). Bourke follows Moscoso in drawing on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein to counter Scarry's view of pain: Wittgenstein considered the idea of a completely "interior and unsharable […] private experience […] completely devoid of sense" (Moscoso 5, see Scarry 16). Moscoso and Bourke both point out that Wittgenstein asserted that pain, albeit a subjective sensation, is ultimately a shared experience, because people learn from other people which sensations should be categorized as pain (5; 507, Wittgenstein 89). Humans "are initiated into cultures of pain" from the moment they are born: from caretakers humans learn the "language, facial expressions, and gestures" with which one "ought to respond to pain" (Bourke 17). Moreover, pain is "always a public practice," because through learned pain behaviour, people consciously and unconsciously communicate their suffering to other people (18). A sufferer's verbal or non-verbal "cry 'I am hurting' seeks not only to convey this information, but also to encourage collaboration" and offering support (18). Pain and suffering are thus shared and public experiences.

Cultural historians, Keith Wailoo in particular, have shown that whether and how a sufferer's cry for relief is answered depends on one's position in a society's power hierarchy, as well as on whether one's pain behaviour conforms to a society's norm of suffering (Wailoo 65-66, 83, see also Bourke 8-19). In the United States in the 1990s, clinical studies found "that all people's pains were not relieved equally" (194). White patients received more analgesia than Latino or black patients for similar injuries (195). No medical reasons were

found for this disparity. While it was postulated that the imbalance could be the result of reasoning based on miscommunication, by the end of the decade further studies had convincingly shown that pain relief was subject to discrimination (195, see also Glasser). The ethnicity, social class or socio-economic status (SES),[5] and gender of patients and medical practitioners proved to be of direct influence on pain management. One example of how the poor were treated unequally is the fact that low-income neighbourhoods did not "stock [certain] painkillers for fear of break-ins, […] robbery," or addiction (Wailoo 194). Such prejudices thus had direct consequences in terms of travel times and expenses for low SES patients (194).

Present-day studies show that unequal treatment in healthcare persists. People of colour or with a lower SES are structurally prescribed less or different pain medication than white patients or patients with a higher SES (Pierik et al. 233, Bristow et al. 831, Summers et al. 13, Atkins and Mukhida 152). This also happens in countries with universal national health care insurance systems (Wang 504, Atkins and Mukhida 149). Researchers therefore assume that the difference in medication prescription can not only be explained on the basis of "potential unaffordability of certain therapies" (142), but that still, it is most likely also the result of bias in healthcare (151).

Indeed, Trawalter et al., Summers et al., and Samulowitz et al. have shown that the cause of this inequality can also be sought in unfounded ideas about biological differences between people. Significant percentages of laypeople and doctors appear to be convinced that black people have a different physique and skin and therefore feel less pain (Trawalter et al.

[5] Socio-economic status and social class are distinct concepts, with SES mostly pertaining to income and occupation, and social class also covering more cultural aspects such as "shared interests, values, political loyalties and ways of speaking" ("Socioeconomic status"; "Social class"). This thesis is concerned with the way that *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* reflect on the role of pain sensitivity in the dehumanization of the proletariat: people who can only live by their "labour power," and not "by profit from capital, or by ownership of the means of production" (Halliday). It is outside the scope of this thesis to consider the differences between the interactions between socio-economic status and social class in the twentieth- and twentieth-first century. Given the influence of financial means on social class classification, this thesis follows Summers et al. and Brandao et al. in considering SES a proxy of social class.

4297), that people with a lower SES are hardened by life and can therefore tolerate more pain (Summers et al. 13), and that women because of their experience with menstrual and childbirth pain would be able to withstand pain better than men (Samulowitz et al. 5). Trawalter et al. connect the unequal treatment of patients of colour with the United States' history of slavery (4297). Cultural historians of pain like Martin S. Pernick, Keith Wailoo, and Joanna Bourke have shown in detail that present-day ideas about differences in the experience of pain are indeed the persistent remnants of theories about biological differences in the experience of pain between people from earlier centuries (Pernick 148-167, Wailoo 207, Bourke 194). Although in some cases such theories were drawn up with the aim of better understanding people and providing more targeted care (see for example Mark Zobrowski's 1969 book, *People in Pain*) these theories more often served not a medical but a political and economic purpose: justifying the oppression and exploitation of other people.

1.3 Suffering, the Other, and Subjectivity in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

There is a second analytical approach of the relationship between self and other that I wish to incorporate in my analyses of *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*: the ethical philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995). Levinas, because he "situat[ed] the suffering of the Other at the heart of his thought," is known as "the philosopher of the Other" (Edelglass 40; Drichel 21; Morris 287). Simone Drichel points out that this epithet is "somewhat reductive […] and misleading" because she agrees with John Dabrinski that "ultimately, […] philosopher of subjectivity" is a more appropriate way to describe Levinas (Drichel 21; 221 n2; see also Dabrinski 29). In what follows, I aim to show that it is precisely for the interconnectedness between the Other, suffering and subjectivity in Levinas's philosophy that his work is vital to gaining an understanding of the role of suffering in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*. In Chapter Two and Three, I will use Levinas's metaphor to show that the human characters' acknowledgement of the

artificial people as people in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* can be accounted for on the basis of Levinas's philosophy.

Levinas is "highly suspicious of any notion of collectivity" and instead focuses on a relationship between a *singular* self and a *singular* other (Drichel 24, my emphasis). For Levinas, through its radical Otherness, the other person always humbles the self – and this holds true for all encounters between every individual self and other, regardless of cultural background or physical appearance. Levinas considers focusing on physical or cultural aspects of the other person's being as an attempt to renounce one's infinite responsibility for the other person. As discussed above, arbitrary but stubborn theories about human characteristics such as skin colour, social class and gender continue to have concrete consequences for people in everyday life. Resisting these theories is best done through "rallying around a shared 'we' or 'us' of community, of solidarity against the oppressor" (31). According to Levinas, the self always feels compelled to take responsibility for the Other person because the Other invariably faces the self from an inherent vulnerability and need for help. In what follows, I will explain why in Levinas's philosophy every encounter with the Other is marked by suffering, and how the suffering of the other person is what renders the self a complete and unique subject.

Regarding the human condition, Levinas agrees with Darwin and philosophers such as Hobbes and Heidegger that a human being is an inherently selfish being; a being that is fully immersed in the struggle for its own life (Burggraeve 14; 43). However, as Burggraeve emphasizes, for Levinas this selfishness or egoism is not a "sin or moral perversion," but a necessary and "healthy self-love" (15-17). For Levinas, humans have a dual nature: humans are egoistical creatures with a tendency for violence, but they are also inherently committed to the well-being of the Other person (56). Furthermore, he does not speak of humans' struggle for life, but instead characterizes humans as beings that are set on maximizing their enjoyment

of everything that life has to offer (Morgan 63). To maximize enjoyment, a human being appropriates everything around itself. It treats objects, animals, and other people as mere tools, as "things [that] are [purely] there for me, the I, to use, consume, enjoy, and thereby become nourished" (63). This is what Levinas calls the self's tendency to reduce the Other to the "same": humans interpret their own individual perspective on other beings and the world as the way that those beings and the world are in themselves (Morgan 39).

Yet the Other, and the Other person in particular, resists such appropriation. The self's boundless enjoyment of the world is "shattered" when the self discovers that it cannot master existence: the resources of enjoyment are limited, and the self, as an embodied being, is susceptible to suffering and destined to die (Morgan 39; Berenpas 653; see also Burggraeve 19). The encounter with another person is another blow to the self's egoism. The self will always attempt to incorporate the Other person in their own attempt at self-actualization, but the Other invariably escapes the self. There are always parts of another person that the self cannot grasp: they have their own thoughts, experiences, and perspective on life, which the self can never fully get a hold on (Morgan 63, see also Berenpas 654; Burggraeve 64-66).[6] An example from everyday life that illustrates the Other's elusiveness is the experience of finding a loved one behaving or thinking differently than expected. The discovery that the Other's "perspective [and] experiences are inaccessible to me, [are] radically separated from me" is a disruptive, distressing experience for the self: suddenly, the self finds their totalitarian grasp of the world challenged by the presence of someone who looks as if they could easily be part of the "same," in the sense that they are also human, but is ultimately fundamentally different.

The encounter with the Other is even more distressing because it requires the self to make a rather dramatic "absolute choice: either to let [the other] live or murder her, or, in

[6] It is important to note that Levinas's "philosophical story" or "ontological elucidation" of subjecthood is not meant to be taken literally: one of Levinas's main points is that no self is ever alone in the world. The ideas and concepts that the self uses to appropriate everything outside itself were of course not invented by the self, but by others who came before the self (Morgan 37; Berenpas 652, see also Morgan 39 and 78 n61).

some circumstances to support her living or let her die" (63). Levinas uses the word "murder" for two actions: murder in a literal, physical sense, but also in the sense of ignoring or renouncing responsibility for the wellbeing of the Other (68). There are also two kinds of ignoring one's responsibility: not taking care of or respecting the Other's needs, or ignoring the Other's alterity and continuing the attempt to "absorb[] the other into" the self's same (39). The mere presence of the Other demands that the self makes this absolute choice, because the Other also stakes a claim to the world's nourishment. Because the Other is a human being like the self, the self realizes that the Other suffers from life's limits too – and that the self also causes the Other more suffering as its own presence is another limit on the resources available to the Other. These experiences cause the self great discomfort: they make the self ashamed of its egotism and require the self to decide whether to solve the crisis through murder or by sharing the world with the Other person – two options that each have their own uncomfortable disadvantages (98, Burggraeve 134-137).

The encounter with the Other is a painful experience for the self. Yet it is the suffering of the Other that ultimately frees the self from itself and its self-centred way of being. Levinas observes that to the self, the Other always appears destitute and vulnerable, suffering from hunger, cold, and pain, and the violent, appropriating tendencies of the self (Morgan 60). The Other calls on the self to relieve the Other's suffering. This call on the self takes the form of an unusual plea: a plea that is also a demand, because the Other person is both dependent on and superior to the self.[7] On the one hand, the wellbeing of the Other depends on the willingness of the self to share the world. On the other hand, the Other's Otherness makes the

[7] Levinas calls this plea and demand "the face of the Other" (*Totality and Infinity* 24). Levinas distinguishes between two different faces: the Other's physical, visible face, and the invisible but sensible presence of the Other person (Morgan 66 n22). Levinas uses the concept of the invisible face to account for how the self physically becomes aware of the needs of the Other person, without or prior to the Other making these needs explicit through language. Through the concept of the face, Levinas shows that the self is much more often wordlessly addressed by the Other than humans tend to realize or experience at first glance. In the encounters discussed in this thesis, the Other is in pain and therefore quite clearly appeals to the self. Therefore, instead of the rather abstract term "face," in this thesis the more concrete phrase "plea and demand" is generally used to describe the way that the self encounters the Other.

Other an insurmountable, ungraspable presence that the self cannot truly ignore; to ignore someone, one first has to be aware of them (69). For Levinas, it is due to the combination of plea and demand, of vulnerability and inscrutability, that the self responds to the Other's appeal to relieve the Other's suffering. This experience is what renders the self a complete human subject. The encounter with the Other exalts the self from its selfish, appropriative way of being. Through the plea of the Other, the self becomes a unique individual: the one who was chosen to take responsibility for the well-being of this particular Other (Edelglass 50, Morgan 99). When the self takes responsibility, it is lifted from its passive, self-absorped way of being, and instead becomes an active subject (99). It is in this sense that human subjectivity ultimately derives from the Other's suffering.

Berenpas, Bahler, and Edelglass hold that Levinas found a particularly fruitful metaphor for the encounter between self and other in the parent-child relationship (655; 128; 52). Levinas uses the image of fatherhood to clarify his concept of election: the process of becoming a subject by being chosen as the one responsible by the Other discussed in the previous paragraph. For Levinas, similar to how the child has to arrive in the world for the father to discover himself in his child's eyes as a father, the self only becomes a true subject through being called forth by the suffering Other (Edelglass 54; see also Oliver "Fatherhood" 48, Baraitser 105, Chalier 64-65, 67).

Fatherhood also serves as an illustration of the "shock to the system of the self" that accompanies the encounter with the Other. To the father, the child is "a stranger, a new face, an unquestionably singular other," and yet also part of the self's "same" (Bahler 130; Baraitser 104). In Levinas's metaphor, the sameness of the child on the one hand follows from how the child was brought into the world through the erotic relationship between father and mother. Yet, as Oliver explains, ultimately "paternal election makes biology irrelevant" ("Fatherhood" 51). That is, the Other being a vulnerable, destitute human, and thus part of the

"same," is reason for the self to respond to the call placed upon the self by the Other. However, Levinas emphasized that taking responsibility for the Other is not the result of being able to empathize with the Other; biological similarities between self and Other are not a requirement for the self to respond to the Other's plea-demand. Rather than "biological substance," the child or Other's "gestures" and potential for "uniqueness" are what make the child or Other "like and unlike [the] father" or self (51). It is through this combination of the child or Other being both stranger and part of the same that the father or self can "transcend[] itself […] without ceasing to be I" in the encounter with the Other (Baraitser 105). Thus, the father or self can remain himself, while also being elected as a responsible, ethical subject; as this child, or this particular Other's caretaker (105).

Likewise, for Levinas, maternity is "a model of [...] ethical responsibility" (Berenpas 656-657). He uses the image of maternity to illustrate both how the self is always passive in the encounter with the Other, as well as "the corporeality essential to that encounter": how the self is always affected physically by the Other prior to responding cognitively (Rosato 351). In the encounter with the Other, the self is passive like a mother whose body undergoes changes in response to "the baby forming itself within her": there is no conscious action on the part of the mother needed for these changes to occur. By its mere presence, the baby forces the mother to physically adapt, and also renders the mother responsible for fulfilling the baby's needs (Rosato 352). Furthermore, before and after giving birth, the mother to a great extent gives "the very sustenance that would have been [her] own nourishment to her baby (353). Maternity also serves as an image of what a true response to the Other's plea and demand entails: taking responsibility does not mean to give what you can easily spare, but giving everything that you cannot live without (353).

Rosato and Berenpas point out that Levinas discusses maternity in physical rather than emotional or psychological terms, because he wants to emphasize that the human body

already reveals that a human being has a physical "openness" towards the Other (352; Berenpas 657, 654). Experiences such as only being able to be tickled by another person, not by oneself, indicate for Levinas that a human is always oriented towards the Other, without whom human experience would not be complete (654). As Berenpas summarizes, Levinas's "whole phenomenology can be understood as revealing the lived experience of embodied responsiveness to the Other" person (655). The shame the self feels upon being confronted with its appropriating tendencies, is a physical experience. Berenpas illustrates this claim of Levinas with the way in which encountering a beggar inspires a sense of shame for the circumstance of this Other in the self. The "embodied sensitivity" of feeling ashamed "reveals that [the] body is already responsive to the suffering of the Other before we decide to actively help" (655). Levinas compares the discomfort experienced by the self in response to the encounter with the Other to labor pain (Rasoto 354; Edelglass 49): finding oneself infinitely responsible for the Other feels like "the groaning of the wounded entrails by those it will bear or has borne" (Levinas 1997 75). Taking responsibility for the Other is first and foremost a physical matter: before the ratio, the body already responds to the Other's demand and plea to share the world.

Levinas's descriptions of paternity and maternity have frequently been criticized as confirming and reinforcing "patriarchal language," and for being based on in itself patriarchal conceptions of masculinity and femininity (Berenpas 663-64 n3; see also Rosato 348-49). As Rosato and Berenpas observe, however, in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas uses the image of maternity as a metaphor for "the highest possible situation for any person" (Rosato 350; Berenpas 655). The mother's passivity and complete "being-for-the-other," her baby, are metaphors that illustrate "what it means to be responsive to the needs of the Other," to substitute oneself for the Other (Berenpas 655). Just as anybody, regardless of gender or biological connection, can take a paternal, or rather parental attitude towards an Other, it is

not necessary to have physically given birth to experience “the groaning of the wounded entrails” and accept that one ultimately is a being-for-the-other (Edelglass 49). For Levinas, accepting one’s own being vulnerable and passive to the demand and plea of the Other in the way that a mother is vulnerable and passive to the needs of her child is essential for being a complete, truly human, and ethical subject (Rosato 350). Chapters Two and Three will show how *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* both also invoke parental metaphors to engage with the difficult nature of the Other and the self’s suffering and subjectivity.

Chapter 2

"From Horror and Suffering We've Become Beings with Souls": (Mis)representations of the Interplay between Suffering and Oppression in Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.*

As discussed in the introduction, at first glance Karel Čapek's R.U.R. appears to be a play about artificially created people becoming fully human after they acquire the ability to feel pain. Organic human characters claim that the artificial robots, although indistinguishable from organic humans in appearance, do not have a soul and do not feel pain. Several characters in the play suggest that there is a causal relationship between the soul and the ability to feel pain. Helena Glory argues that signs of suffering are indications of a soul (19). Physiologist Dr. Gall concludes that the pain nerves that he gave to certain robots are the cause of the robots' uprising (57), and the robots themselves say that they have developed a soul through experiences of horror and suffering (75). At the end of the play, Alquist suggests that Dr. Gall's addition of pain nerves to the robots' physique has led two robots, Primus and Helena, to develop what were until then considered strictly human traits: love, empathy, and self-sacrifice (81-84).

Based on these statements about the connection between pain and suffering on the one hand and the play's presentation of the robots' development on the other, *R.U.R.* is generally analysed as a play that in Kamila Kinyon's words "traces how biomechanical beings become humanized through their development of independent self-consciousness" (379, see also Cornell, Dihal, Higbie, Kakoudaki, Poynton, Reilly, and Stratz). Many of these readings also interpret the play as a literary reflection on the experiences of African slaves in the United States and/or the European proletariat classes. With an analysis focused on uncovering the role of the suffering of the Other in *R.U.R.*, I will argue that the play contains suggestions that the robots have in fact had a soul and experienced horror and suffering since long before Dr.

Gall's experiments with pain reactive nerves. I will show that the parallels between robots in *R.U.R.*, and wage workers or enslaved people in real life thus extend to the unfounded claim that race or profession affect pain sensitivity. First, I will discuss previous research that supports the claim that *R.U.R.* is a literary reflection on the dynamics underlying the oppression of the enslaved and the proletariat. Next, I will show that certain actions of the human characters contradict their statements regarding the robots' inability to feel pain. Lastly, I will read the play's ending in parallel with Levinas's theory about the appropriation of and true responsibility for the Other as discussed in Chapter One.

2.1 Connections between the Robots, African Slaves and the European Proletariat

In their recent discussions of *R.U.R.*, Kakoudaki and Dihal respectively maintain that the play from the start "encodes a Marxist and socialist understanding of the worker as an oppressed or enslaved figure," and invokes "narratives of the transatlantic slave trade" (Kakoudaki 135; Dihal 198). As previously discussed, the link between *R.U.R.*'s robots, serfs, the twentieth-century proletariat classes, and chattel slaves is already embedded in the word robot. As for textual details that specifically refer to chattel slavery, Dihal has pointed out that the first lines of the play already invoke connotations of the transatlantic slave trade (198). Dictating to his robot secretary Sulla, factory director Domin explains that the factory is not "responsible for goods damaged in transport" due to the unsuitability of the addressee's ship for transporting thousands of robots (Čapek 3). Domin's statement evokes the disregard for the health of enslaved people aboard many of the "tightly packed" transatlantic slave ships, due to which 10 to 15 percent of the African captives died before even reaching the Americas (Burnard 88, Sluyter 3, see also Harris 120, Webster 2).[8]

[8] This percentage is still subject to change. In 2011, Burnard cited 11,9 percent, whereas Sluyter in 2020, based on David Eltis and David Richardson's 2010 Atlas of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, stated "that 1.8 million, more than 14 percent, of the 12.5 million who embarked in Africa never disembarked in the Americas" (3). On January 5, 2024, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) listed that 12,2 percent of captivated slaves "died during crossing" (see

Dihal highlights that the secretary's name is another example of the robots representing the experiences of enslaved Africans. Most of the robots have classical names: Sulla, Marius, Helena, Damon, Radius and Primus. As Dihal explains, African slaves were often given "names from the Greek and Roman classical traditions," which erased the slave's original name and identity (200-01). Domin's way of referring to the robots as "goods" and "merchandise" also references the "commodification" and "dehumanization" inherent to the slave trade (Burnard 90). Dihal connects Domin's switching between referring to the robots as goods or as people to the paradoxical legal status of slaves as described by Joanna Bourke in *What It Means To Be Human*: masters could punish slaves because slaves were considered "property," but when a slave committed a crime, they "were categorized as 'persons'" who could be held accountable (147, qtd. in Dihal 199).

Other features that Dihal discusses to show that the robots represent chattel slaves also fit an analysis of the robots as representing wage workers. One is the human factory managers' assertion that the robots have no soul. Dihal points out that "claims that [enslaved peoples] have no soul or cannot go to heaven" were used to characterize the enslaved as "not human" and therefore natural slaves (200). Higbie and Kakoudaki discuss how the soullessness of the robots also represents the fear of the dehumanizing nature of repetitive work and hard labour, especially for audiences watching the play in the first half of the twentieth century (17-19; 161).

Another detail that establishes "historical parallels" between the robots and human slaves are the references of "European emancipation movements" and "hints of people in Europe protesting against the way robots are treated" (Dihal 200). Just as European abolitionists challenged the assertion that some people are natural slaves, in *R.U.R.* the

https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyages/UGkUeZjT). As the TSTD data set is continuously updated, percentages may vary, but will likely be somewhere between 10 and 15 percent.

existence of similar movements indicates that the robots are not mere machines. Reilly finds a similar detail for the connection between robots and wage workers in how the robots "organize a union called robots of the World," a play on the international labour union International Workers of the World (148). The robots' rebellion has been interpreted as an allusion to the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) by Dihal and Kakoudaki. Reilly points out that for viewers in the first half of the twentieth century in particular, the robot rebellion invoked the 1917 October Revolution (167).

The robot rebellion culminating in a genocide is one element that suggests that *R.U.R.* is not socialist or communist propaganda. While Dihal and Kakoudaki read the play as clearly encouraging its audience to sympathize with the robots, Higbie discusses how some 1920s critics interpreted *R.U.R.* as a warning against what they deemed the naturally self-destructive, irrational proletariat. One 1920s commentator considered *R.U.R.* a clear "indictment of philanthropic reforms aimed at uplifting" but ultimately only confusing a working class unable to manage itself (107). These critics considered the genocide on humanity and the robots' subsequent reproductive problems a representation of how "the Russian worker [who] 'has rid himself of the intellectual aristocracy […] now finds himself starving because he has not enough intelligence to reproduce the tools and implements by which he must live'" (Perlman qtd. in Higbie 107). *The New York Times* reviewer John Corbin held that *R.U.R.* "concretely symbolized" Lothrop Stoddard's 1922 book *The Revolt Against Civilization*, a book in which Stoddard maintained that American civilization was at danger of being destroyed by "a process of racial impoverishment" (Corbin qtd. in Higbie 107; Stoddard "Preface"). Thus, strikingly, a play that today is mainly read as a representation of the suffering of slaves and wage workers could in its day very well be viewed as confirming classist and racist views.

2.2 Pain Sensitivity as a Means of Othering in *R.U.R.*

The othering of the robots happens mostly in the play's Prologue, which is divided into two parts: a one-on-one discussion of the robots between Domin and Helena focused on physical differences between robots and humans, followed by a scene in which the other factory managers confirm Domin's statements and add more mental differences. Both Domin and the other managers end their argument with a demonstration or discussion of the robots' insensitivity to suffering and pain. The robots' inability to suffer is presented as irrefutable proof of all other mental and physical ways in which they are different. In that sense, the structure of the Prologue is consistent with the pattern observed by Joanna Bourke and Keith Wailoo discussed in Chapter One: just as for enslaved Africans and the European working-class people, theories about differences in pain sensitivity are used to reinforce a distinction between robots and humans that has already been made based on other characteristics, such as skin colour or social class. The difference is not just neutrally observed, but highlighted to serve the purpose of justifying a different treatment.

Madigan and Hartfield have both noted that Domin's description of the robots closely resembles the reasoning in Aristotle's defence of slavery as it was interpreted and expanded by American slave traders and planters in the eighteenth and nineteenth century.[9] In short, in an analysis of slavery included in his *Politics,* Aristotle states that nature creates free men and natural slaves (1254b 21-25). He observes that people suited for slavery are by nature intellectually and morally deficient and therefore benefit from being guided towards living a good life by a master (1254b 7). Aristotle provides little information on how to separate the

[9] It is important to note that Aristotle's defence of slavery is directed at a different system of slavery than chattel slavery. The type of slavery that Aristotle describes has nothing to do with race and is not inherently lifelong or hereditary. In Aristotle's time, and until the eighteenth century really, "difficult circumstances such as war, famine, debt, crime, or family legacies […] could force someone into servitude," but people could also regain their freedom and rights after a given period, or if their circumstances so allowed (Kakoudaki 151). Furthermore, a fair reading of Aristotle's work shows that what has come to be known as a defence really is a critical analysis of the justice of slavery in response to claims from abolitionists in Aristotle's own time, with which Aristotle even partly agrees (Monoson 272). As Monoson has observed, eighteenth-century pro-slavery writers wilfully ignored or suppressed that Aristotle's views on slavery provided no real basis for their own claims (272).

natural slaves from the free men, other than stating that nature compensates for natural slaves' lacking mental abilities by giving them strong bodies, and that the difference is readily noticeable and intuitive (1254b 16-19, 30-32).

Nineteenth-century advocates for American slavery expanded Aristotle's ideas with racial essentialism: the idea that natural slaves could be distinguished from free people on the basis of physical traits such as skin colour (Monoson 265, see also Brace 17-18, Zack 87; Smith *Less than Human* 31-36, 176-186). This was a peculiar choice, given that Aristotle emphasizes that physical characteristics are not sufficient, as there are free people with the bodies of slaves (1254b 27-35). Yet nineteenth-century pro-slavery polemicists argued that skin colour or race was the distinction that Aristotle had been looking for, but which he had not been able to formulate due to "the backward state of science" in his time (Monoson 269). As discussed in Chapter One, in this period theories about correlations between race or skin colour, intellect and pain sensitivity are also used to justify slavery (Pernick 154-163, Bourke 194, Trawalter et al. 4297). The fact that defenders of American slavery drew on Aristotle provides insight into the rationale behind these theories: the argument that black people were less intellectually developed and less sensitive to pain helped 'substantiate' the claim that black people were naturally suited for slavery.

In *R.U.R.,* Domin describes the robots to Helena as "simplif[ied]" humans: beings with an anatomy from which "everything not directly related to work" was "discarded," and who therefore have fewer needs than natural humans (9). According to Domin, the robots have a "mechanically more perfect" body and "phenomenal memory" compared to humans, but they "never think up anything original" and "have no soul" (9, 13-14). Domin's comparison between robots and humans matches the Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between natural slaves and free men: the robot, like the slave, is physically stronger than the free man. The robot is mentally well equipped to carry out orders, but unable

to think for himself. Like the apologists for American slavery, Domin expands Aristotle's view on slavery with biological essentialist ideas. Domin emphasizes that the robots are made from "a substance that behave[s] exactly like living matter although it [is] of a different chemical composition" (6). Paired with the detail that this different substance was discovered "in 1932, precisely four hundred forty years after the discovery of America" (6) and Domin's assertion that the robots have no soul, the biological essentialist component of his argument suggests a clear parallel between Domin's ideas and the racial essentialist theories used by advocates of the transatlantic slave trade.

Helena is not convinced by Domin's essentialist rhetoric: she continues to view the robots as persons that need to be "hired" instead of as commodities that can be bought (10). Like the advocates of American slavery, Domin must bend over backwards to deny the obvious humanity of his slaves. He admits that "[y]ou'd never guess she was made from a different substance than we are" (10) and resorts to suggesting that the robots differ from humans on the inside (11). He then frames the robots as insensitive to suffering by ordering robots Sulla and Marius to have Sulla dissected (11). To Helena's astonishment, the robots respond neutrally to Domin's request and seem willing to comply:

HELENA: Sulla, you'd let them cut you open?

SULLA: Yes.

HELENA: Oh, you are not afraid of death?

SULLA: I am not familiar with it, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Do you know what would happen to you then?

SULLA: Yes, I would stop moving.

[…]

DOMIN: [Marius,] would you put Sulla in the dissecting room?

MARIUS: Yes.

DOMIN: Would you feel sorry for her?

MARIUS: I do not know "sorry."

DOMIN: What would happen to her?

MARIUS: She would stop moving. She would be sent to the stamping mill.

DOMIN: That is death, Marius. Do you fear death?

MARIUS: No. (12)

Domin's intention behind this interrogation is showing Helena that the robots "do not cling to life. They can't. They don't have the means – no soul, no pleasures" (12). Sulla agreeing to let herself be cut open suggests that she is not afraid of pain or does not feel pain. Marius' willingness to bring Sulla to the dissecting room suggests that he does not care for Sulla as a person or her suffering. The message of this demonstration is clear: if the robots themselves do not care how they or their fellow robots are treated, then Helena does not have to worry about their suffering either - especially when considering that if the robots themselves do not care, they arguably are not even suffering in the first place.

The other managers add to Domin's portrayal of the robots as other-than-human. They tell Helena that the robots are creatures who "love nothing, not even themselves," "have no interest in anything," "no will of their own, no passion, no history, no soul" (19). There is one instance of behaviour that the managers do not fully understand, which they "call robotic Palsy. All of a sudden [a robot] goes and breaks whatever it has in its hands, stops working, gnashes its teeth – and we have to send it to the stamping mill. Evidently a breakdown of the organism." When Helena argues that this behaviour suggests that the robots do have a soul, the managers again resort to pain to dismiss Helena's reasoning. Physiologist Dr. Gall explains that as a result of their inventor's "oversimplifi[cation] of the nervous system, […]

[t]he robots sometimes damage themselves because nothing hurts them. They stick their heads into machines, break their fingers, smash their heads, it's all the same to them" (16, 19). Together with the other managers, Dr. Gall thus echoes Domin's earlier suggestion that Helena should not base her interpretation of the robots' behaviour or the way they are treated on human standards, because the robots are ontologically different from humans. The robots' gnashing of teeth cannot be interpreted as an indication of a crushed robot soul, because their simpler anatomies make it plain and simple that the robots are physically incapable of feeling crushed.

2.3 Indications of the robots' Humanity and the Managers' Dishonesty

One example of a moment that indicates that the robots are more human than Domin cares to admit occurs right after Domin has sent Sulla and Marius away:

> [At that moment the factory whistles and sirens sound.]
>
> DOMIN: Noon. The robots don't know when to stop working.
>
> At two o'clock I'll show you the kneading troughs. (13)

Helena is appalled by the idea of the kneading troughs, and the remainder of the dialogue focuses on the mechanics of the robot creation process. Domin thus successfully distracts Helena from what his previous statement implies: apparently the robots need to stop working at noon, and only start again at two o'clock. Given that according to the managers, the robots take "no interest in anything" but their work (18), do not care for food (18) and do not experience pain due to their simpler nervous system (19), it seems unnecessary for the robots to have a lunch break – unless the robots do in fact need to rest. Earlier, Domin mentions in passing that "the best [robots] live perhaps twenty years" before "they wear out" (10). It is

possible that it is better to give the robot body rest from time to time to not precipitate its inevitable deterioration. However, if, as the managers tell Helena, the design and treatment of the robots are mainly based on increasing the factory's sales figures (20), and if those figures rise with the increasingly cheaper production of more robots, why would the directors care about the preservation of the existing robots? One plausible explanation would be that the directors are in fact aware that the robots suffer, but choose to conceal this unfortunate truth from others and themselves in favour of the riches that the robots supply. If the play contains more indications that the directors are lying and that the robots have always felt pain, then *R.U.R.* is an even more apt reflection on the role of pain sensitivity in upholding systems of oppression than the parallels between the robots, enslaved African (Americans) and the working class discussed thus far suggest.

One argument in favour of the suspicion that the directors lie is the statement by Dr. Gall about the robots' pain sensitivity: he says that "the robots feel *almost* no physical pain" (19). If the robots do not have pain nerves prior to Gall's update, how do they feel the little pain that Gall believes them to feel? Furthermore, one would expect that feeling a little pain would already be enough to stop the robots from damaging their bodies – which would mean that there is no need for Gall's project.

Another indication of the directors' dishonesty can be found in how they all explicitly admit to have kept information about the robots rebellion from Helena (25, 45). On a narratological level, Helena is an "audience surrogate": a character with little information on the matter at hand, to which other characters can tell all the information that the audience needs to know to understand the dramatic action, and which functions as "an engaging means for leading an actual audience in the paths, emotional and intellectual, wherein it should go" (Meisel 127). Given how Helena functions as a go-between between the managers and the audience, the managers' tendency to conceal information from Helena should be interpreted

as a sign that the audience should pay close attention to anything the directors may be hiding from them as well.

Helena's character development is a further warning that the managers' portrayal of the robots is false. At the beginning of her first conversation with Domin, Helena proves herself to be a confident critical thinker. She calls Domin out for not letting her finish her sentences, repeatedly offers repartee to any of his derogative statements (4-5) and corrects his faulty appropriation of classical history (12). However, during their talk, Domin twice consciously uses the indistinguishability of robots and people to make Helena feel she is a "thoroughly confused […] silly girl" (21). Domin's motivation to do so is that he wants to marry Helena. In order to make her accept his proposal, Domin convinces her that she is at his mercy. He informs Helena that she should not expect his colleagues to help her escape from him, as they all wish to marry her too. He makes her feel guilty, telling her that she owes at least one of them her love, as she used her beauty and charm to get more information about the robots. Finally, he uses his physical strength to make Helena obey him (23). In Act One, Helena and Domin have been married for ten years, and Helena still feels like "a little girl," makes flirty jokes about being coerced into marriage, and has come to believe that the robots are different from humans (29, 58): she has surrendered herself to Domin's views on herself and the robots. Helena's development thus serves as a warning that when someone, Helena or the robots, seems to conform to how they are portrayed, this may only be the result of someone else forcing them to behave or think that way.[10]

[10] Christine Cornell discusses how Čapek deliberately connected *R.U.R.* to the myth of the Trojan War through Helena's character (104). In the myth of the Trojan War and *R.U.R.*, the beauty of Helen and Helena are presented as the cause of the war or robot rebellion, and the downfall of the Greek heroes or all humanity, respectively. However, a closer look at both stories reveals that the true cause of the wars is found not in the beauty of Helen and Helena, but in the economic interests of Greeks like Agamemnon and *R.U.R.*'s factory managers. Helena's character and the reference to Helen of Troy thus invite detailed readings of gender inequality in *R.U.R.*. Future research could more extensively study the parallels between the use of theories about pain sensitivity and the justification of gender inequality in real life *and R.U.R.*. For analyses studying gender inequality in *R.U.R.* from different angles, see for example Dağcı, McDevitt, or Poston.

In addition to the robots needing a break, another indication that the robots already feel pain at the beginning of the play is the robots' own statement that they "were machines […] but from horror and suffering [have] become beings with souls" (75). At first glance, this seems to confirm the managers' claim that the robots start out as insensitive automatons who are only "transformed into people" when Dr. Gall adds pain nerves to the robots' physique (56-57). However, Dr. Gall himself says that he altered "[o]nly several hundred" of the millions of robots (59). The robots who tell Alquist about their becoming beings with souls do not specify that only some of the robots have changed. Instead, the robots' use of "we" suggests that all robots collectively have gone through horror and suffering and acquired a soul (75). This suggests that Gall's modifications were not a precondition for the robots' experiencing pain. The hypothesis that all robots experienced pain from the beginning would explain why all robots joined the rebellion, not just the robots changed by Gall, and it would account for the need to make the robots take a break.

Reading *R.U.R.* from the suspicion that the robots have always been susceptible to suffering raises some questions regarding the developments in the play. If the rebellion is not the result of Gall's modifications, why do the robots rebel only now? If the robots already felt pain, what is it that Gall changed? Why do the robots damage themselves if that hurts them? How should we interpret the difference in care for one's own pain and the other robot's suffering between the seemingly insensitive Sulla and Marius on the one hand, and Primus and robot Helena on the other? The play provides answers to all of these questions.

First, the robots rebel only now not because they were physical altered, but because it is in the ten years between the Prologue and Act One that the robots have been given access to information and weapons. Radius and Damon, the leaders of the Rebellion, both state that they instigate the rebellion because they learned from books that "you have to murder and conquer to be like people" (74). Furthermore, in Act One the humans discuss that in the ten

years that passed, the robots were employed in wars and learned to fight (30). It is much more likely that these two changes are the reason for the robots uprising than any physical changes, simply because both the humans and the robots confirm that these changes took place, whereas Gall's claim about modifying only some robots does not explain why all robots join the rebellion and become beings with souls.

In the play's ending we find another inconsistency that indicates that the managers' portrayal of the robots is false. Throughout the play, the robots are said to be physically unable to sexually reproduce, but at the end of Act Three, Alquist suggests that love between two robots has solved that problem. Initially, the behaviour of the robots and Alquist in Act Three seems to confirm the robots' sterility. The robots urge Alquist to rediscover the secret formula for their artificial production, as they believe they will otherwise go extinct. Alquist seems to believe this too: he spends his days in the laboratory to find the formula, and in soliloquys berates himself for not making any progress, as only the formula can prevent the complete extinction of "the reflections of man" (71-73). When he discovers that robots Helena and Primus care more about the other's life than their own, however, Alquist concludes that they have fallen in love, and that from this love life "will begin anew […] naked and tiny" (84). He draws this conclusion from nothing more than Primus' and Helena's willingness to sacrifice themselves for each other. This suggests that Alquist has always known that the robots could procreate if they found love.

Alquist suggests that the love between Primus and Helena is a sign that God has intervened and given the robots the ability to procreate (84). However, there is another possible explanation that requires no divine intervention and is supported by other details in the play: the robots have always been able to procreate, but the managers have kept this information from the robots and actively repressed the robots' feelings. Alquist himself makes a statement that confirms this suspicion. When the robots get on his nerves about the formula,

he yells: “If you want to live, mate like animals!” (74). The robots then tell Alquist that “[m]an did not give us the ability to mate” (75). Alquist does not oppose nor confirm the robots’ assessment of their situation. However, combined with his conclusion that robot Helena and Primus’s love will produce a baby, Alquist’s exclamation suggests that the robots are very well able to procreate, and were only made to believe that they do not have “the ability to mate” (75).[11]

In a reading of the play that accepts the managers’ presentation of the events as true, the scene between Alquist, robot Helena and Primus forms a contrast with Domin’s interrogation of Sulla and Marius in the Prologue: Helena and Primus display the love for life and compassion that Sulla and Marius seem to lack. Yet a rereading of the scene with Sulla and Marius (see page 34) with the idea in mind that the robots already have feelings reveals that one of Domin’s comments already indicates that Sulla and Marius love each other. When Helena asks Domin why he has named his secretary after a Roman general, Domin replies: “Oh, we thought that Marius and Sulla were lovers” (12). His response has been explained in several ways: for Dihal, the classical names invoke the wry renaming practices on the American plantations (200). Cornell interprets this lack of classical knowledge as suggesting that forgetting the past leads to making the same mistake again and again (104). As noted above, this interaction also shows that Helena is not the silly girl that the managers try to turn her into. If the play is read from the suspicion that the robots were beings with souls from the outset, this statement is yet another a remark with which one of the managers reveals what is really happening in the robot factory. The simplest explanation for Domin’s choice to name these two robots after people he believed were lovers is that Domin perceived such a connection between the two robots, and named them accordingly.

[11] In April 2022, BBC Radio 4 presented a two-episode adaptation of *R.U.R.* in which the robots and Alquist are on much friendlier terms, and indeed discover together that the robots simply did not know how biological reproduction works.

A second reading of the scene with Sulla and Marius also shows that their answers are not as indicative of the robots lacking fear of death or being indifferent to each other's suffering as Domin would have Helena believe. In Marius' case, it is illuminating to consult the original Czech text. In Novack's English translation, Marius responds to Domin's question if he would feel sorry for Sulla with "I do not know 'sorry'" (12). In the Czech original, Marius responds only with "Neznám," which literally translates as "I do not know" (Čapek, *R.U.R.* 1994, 13). Marius' response in the English translation seems to suggest that Marius does not understand what it means to feel sorry, whereas in Czech, his response does not have such a fixed meaning. It could mean that Marius does not know whether he should feel sorry for Sulla, because he very well understands that for Sulla to be dissected would mean that "[s]he would stop moving" (Čapek *R.U.R.* 2004, 12). The original text leaves open the possibility that Marius considers it a merciful act to help Sulla to the dissecting room, as death might be the only way that robots can imagine will grant them the rest of ceasing to move forever.

In Sulla's case, it is informative to include some of the dialogue that precedes my citation on pages 9-10:

HELENA: This is preposterous! […] Sulla's not a robot, Sulla is a young woman just like me! Sulla, this is disgraceful – why do you play along with this farce?

SULLA: I am a robot.

[…]

HELENA: Tell me darling, is everyone so inhumane to you? You mustn't put up with that, do you hear? You mustn't, Sulla!

SULLA: I am a robot.

Sulla's answers to these questions seem to confirm Domin's characterization of the robots as soulless, emotionless automatons. However, paired with the various suggestions that Sulla and Marius might very well only behave so placidly because they do not yet have the means to fight or freely express themselves, Sulla's replies take on a different meaning. Through stating that she is a robot, Sulla does not say, "I am not human, and therefore, cannot be treated inhumanely." Instead, her replies must be interpreted as Sulla saying that as a robot, as a serf, Sulla has no choice but to obey Domin, and play along with the farce that the robots do not feel pain and are therefore inhuman.

2.4 Refusing Responsibility: Similarities between Alquist and Domin

A comparison of the interactions between Sulla, Marius, and Domin on the one hand, and Helena, Primus, and Alquist on the other, at first glance suggests that at the end of the play, the robots are no longer oppressed, and are recognized and respected as humans. However, a reading of the play's end informed by Levinas' ethics of the Other shows that this is far from the case. In this section I will show that Alquist, like Domin, treats the robots as means to his own ends, does not take the suffering of the robots seriously, and does the opposite of responding to the ethical demand to take responsibility for the robots' suffering. The lack of real change in Alquist's behaviour confirms the suspicion that the robots have been suffering all along, and that their suffering has just not been acknowledged as such by the human characters. Alquist's behaviour shows that the connection between mental development and suffering that *R.U.R.* really addresses, is not the progress made by the robots. Instead, *R.U.R.* dramatizes how the development in consciousness that the human characters could have made in the face of the robots' suffering never materializes.

In order to show how similar Alquist's behaviour towards the robots is to Domin's approach, it is insightful to briefly discuss how Alquist treats robot rebellion leader Damon.

Damon demands that Alquist "perform[s] experiments on live robots" to solve the robots' reproduction issue (75). Alquist agrees to vivisect Damon, but in the middle of the procedure refuses to go on and orders other robots to "take [Damon] away," not because they should save Damon, but because Alquist "do[es]n't want to hear him" screaming (77). Afterwards, Alquist is not worried about Damon's wellbeing, but instead obsesses over washing his hands to rid himself from the experience as well as his responsibility for killing Damon (77-78). Alquist pursues a clear conscience for the sake of it, not because he believes the robots should not be hurt or killed. This shows that Alquist does not feel or respond to the obligation to take responsibility for a robots' suffering any more than Domin did.

Alquist responds very differently to Primus than to Damon, a difference that can be explained on the basis of Alquist's identification with Primus. When Alquist discovers that Primus and Helena care for each other, he wants to test their feelings for each other by threatening to experiment on the other robot. When Primus wants to sacrifice himself for Helena, Alquist tells Primus, "Ah Primus, how long ago it was that I was a young man! Don't be afraid, nothing will happen to Helena." (82). Through having Alquist ask Primus whether he and Helena were made by Gall, the play suggests that Primus and Helena are the first robots who behave like humans as a result of Gall's changes. As I have shown, there is no reason to believe that Primus and Helena are somehow more human than the robots that were made before them. The real difference between them and the other robots is that Primus and Helena have more freedom to express themselves. This freedom allows for behaviour that Alquist recognizes as human, not because the behaviour of the other robots was inhuman, but because Primus' love for Helena reminds Alquist of himself, and fits Alquist's understanding of what it means to be human.

Alquist's actions after recognizing Primus' and robot Helena's humanity show that identification does not lead to a truly ethical relationship with the Other. Indeed, being rid of

the responsibility for the robots' suffering and wellbeing seems to be the true reason behind Alquist's happiness about discovering the love between Primus and Helena. Alquist "pushes [Helena and Primus] out the door" as soon as he has established that they love each other. This action can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, by sending Helena and Primus away, Alquist offers them a truly open future, away from his sphere of influence, but on the other hand, this is an irresponsible and selfish action. Alquist has just caused Helena and Primus great suffering by telling them that he will have to kill the other for his experiments. By not explaining his behaviour, he does nothing to take their fear and sadness away. Furthermore, he sends them out into a world that is governed by robots like Radius and Damon, who believe that "you have to conquer and murder to be like people" (74). Alquist's indifference regarding Primus' and Helena's future in such a world confirms what Kamila Kinyon has already noted: Alquist has more in common with Damon and Radius, and therefore effectively with Domin, than he thinks (396).

With his final monologue, Alquist underlines this similarity when he cites the command from Genesis for robots to not only "replenish the earth, [but also] subdue it: and have dominion […] over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (84). For Alquist, the subdual and domination of others is still the highest goal for human beings. Furthermore, this quote reveals that Alquist thinks that the right and ability to control others goes hand in hand with procreation, and therefore, now that Helena and Primus can have children, he no longer needs to take responsibility for their wellbeing.

The suspicion that abdicating his responsibility is ultimately the true reason behind Alquist's joy after discovering Primus' and Helena's love is also confirmed by the remainder of his soliloquy. Alquist literally "closes the door behind them" and concludes that his work is done (84). It is now up to Primus and Helena to take responsibility for preventing the complete extinction of humanity, an extinction for which Alquist as part of the robot factory's

managerial team is truly responsible. Alquist's relief that he can now "depart in peace, O Lord" (84) thus means that in the end, nothing has changed compared to the world before the robot rebellion, when the suffering of the robots was also ignored in favour of making the robots do the humans' dirty work.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown how *R.U.R.* reflects on the oppression of real-life humans by laying bare the dynamics underneath the oppression of a fictive artificial people. The use of arbitrary ideas about pain sensitivity in justifying the oppression of the robots in *R.U.R.* represents similar patterns underlying the othering of enslaved Africans and the European proletariat from the sixteenth century onwards, as well as the persisting discrimination against people of colour or people with a lower socioeconomic status today. Reading *R.U.R.* in light of the cultural history of pain suggests that the idea that robots do not suffer from pain and lack a soul is merely a story maintained by the factory managers to exploit the robots without guilt, and that the robots have felt pain from the beginning. The factory managers' treatment of Helena offers a key to interpreting their treatment of the robots. The way Helena's autonomy, own will, and ability to think for herself are taken away from her suggests that the robots are not as placid as they may seem. Instead, both the robots and Helena are coerced into adopting an identity created by the managers.

Through my reading of the play in light of the philosophy of Levinas, I have shown that *R.U.R.* does not so much portray a development in the robots, but reflects instead on the lack of development of the human characters. At the end of the play, Alquist still does not see robot Helena or Primus as persons, but instead incorporates them into his own project aimed at abdicating his responsibility for the future of the robots. The seemingly hopeful and happy ending of the play is therefore much more complicated than it seems. There is no guarantee

that Primus and Helena will really be able to bring a child into the world. If they do, one could only hope that they do not abide by Alquist's citation from Genesis but instead allow their child to truly open up a future for them, through teaching them to be radically Other than their human and robot predecessors and take responsibility for the Other's suffering.

Chapter 3

"The Whole Thing My Identity Is Organized Around": the Suffering of the Other and the Reinvention of the Othered Self

The previous chapter showed how details in *R.U.R.* suggest that the robots were self-aware, suffering humans long before Dr. Gall's modifications. *R.U.R.* exposing itself as the managers' deceit confirms that *R.U.R.* lends itself well for raising awareness on how arbitrary theories about pain sensitivity have been historically used to justify dehumanization and unfair treatment based on social class, race or ethnicity. This chapter explores how season 1 of *Westworld* (HBO, 2016) displays the use of pain sensitivity as a tool for othering. In *Westworld*, it is never explicitly denied that the artificial hosts suffer and are conscious like the organic humans. However, organic human characters and viewers are continually prompted to view the suffering and consciousness of hosts as unreal, and the hosts themselves as entities without moral value. In this chapter, I will map how *Westworld* offers insight in the role of pain sensitivity in the othering and dehumanization of real people, in particular the African people compelled into slavery in the Americas.

Westworld presents its viewers with a puzzling ending. The maker of the hosts states that the hosts become conscious through suffering ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:49). All hosts daily experience great suffering from all the violence inflicted upon them. Yet through its cinematography, *Westworld* suggests that at the end of season one, only Maeve has truly become conscious. As showrunner Jonathan Nolan explains, the moment Maeve chooses to go against her programming and makes her "first real decision" is filmed with a handheld camera instead of the steadicam used for the rest of the season (Riesman). The slightly unsteady, more naturally moving visuals underline that Maeve has truly broken free from "programmatic or prescribed behaviours" and is truly "improvising" (Riesman). The other

main artificial character, Dolores, also has one scene that is filmed with a handheld camera, but the remainder of her scenes are filmed with the steadicam again. Through this cinematographic distinction, *Westworld* challenges its viewers to determine how Maeve's suffering differs from that of the other hosts. This chapter will show that *Westworld* via Maeve's story arc illustrates Levinas's views on suffering and subjectivity as discussed in Chapter One: it is not one's own suffering, but one's distress in response to the suffering of the Other that makes a person become a full human subject.

This chapter is divided in three sections. In the first section, I will discuss how *Westworld* invokes comparisons between the hosts and American slavery. In the same section, I will cover how unfounded and ill-considered beliefs about the hosts are used by organic human characters to justify the violence perpetrated against the hosts. In sections two and three, I will demonstrate how *Westworld* addresses the historical role of suffering in the process of othering particularly well through the arc of Maeve, one of the main artificial human characters. In section two, I will focus on Maeve's interactions with Felix and Sylvester, two park employees who help Maeve free herself from human control, but simultaneously make Maeve internalize the humans' view that her sense of identity is "a hideous fiction" ("The Well-Tempered Clavier 4:53). In section three, I will show how Levinas's philosophy helps understand why Maeve is the first host to make her own choices.[12]

3.1 A White or Black Hat Response to the Other

The organic human characters in Westworld establish and perpetuate an image of the hosts as morally inconsequential in multiple ways, beginning with a lack of scrutiny regarding how the hosts were created to serve as outlets for human violence. *Westworld* is set in the 2050s and

[12] In episode 8 of season 2, the viewer learns that the host Akecheta, the leader of a highly stereotypical representation of Native American tribe, gained self-awareness well before Maeve. As Akecheta is not present in season one, his arc will not be discussed here.

takes place in Westworld,[13] a Western-style theme park. Like the eponymous 1973 film on which the series is based, the theme park is populated by hosts, artificial humans who take the human guests of the park on typical Western adventures such as bounty hunts and gold prospecting. The hosts have all been given a combination of a complete personality and an interactive script that can be modified on the spot to accommodate the wishes of the guests ("Chestnut" 28:23). Guests can do whatever they want to the hosts, who cannot kill or otherwise harm humans, and there are no consequences for guests who murder, rape, or otherwise mistreat hosts. Westworld's slogan "Live without Limits" underlines how, in Levinasian terms, Westworld offers guests a world in which one is never limited by the presence of the Other. The park guarantees the guests that the host Other cannot object to the self's desire, and that guests can ignore the Other's appeal to not be killed (Morgan 68, 64).

From the start, elements in *Westworld* encourage a Levinasian reading. Before entering the park, guests pick a costume, and must choose a white or black hat ("Chestnut 9:25-45). Analogous to spaghetti westerns, choosing a white hat reflects the guest's wish to be the hero in a non-violent adventure, whereas choosing a black hat is interpreted as going "straight evil" and living out one's darkest fantasies on the hosts ("The Original" 3:48). *Westworld* does emphasize that the choice between ignoring or taking their ethical responsibility for the host Other is, as Levinas holds, not final and has to be made again and again: white hat characters are shown to engage in harassing hosts ("The Stray" 24:20-25:35; 53:20), and there are black hat characters who take the hosts' interests to heart ("The Adversary" 09:08-10:02). Yet, the hat choice is of great importance, because it communicates that there *is* a choice – that treating hosts inhumanely is not a given inherent to what the hosts were supposedly created for. The choice implies that a host is not the same as a tin can: in real life, there is no dramatic briefing to make an informed decision on whether or not to kick the

[13] Throughout the chapter, italics will be used to distinguish the series from the theme park.

latter. Having to choose between treating the hosts as fellow people or as objects indicates that there is something about the hosts that humans intuitively know to set them apart from tin cans and other objects. The philosophy of Levinas helps to understand what the hat choice communicates to the guests and the series' viewers: the hosts have a Levinasian face.


Fig. 4 & 5: Still from "Chestnut," Greeter host Angela and human guest William during the choice of hats (9:25-45).

Westworld's slogan "Live without Limits" is significant in another sense too: the slogan functions as a succinct allusion to how the experiences of the hosts are, as Milt Moise has previously stated, "a metaphor for the collective trauma of slavery" (247). The slogan encapsulates the frontier myth: the park offers guests a world yet to be discovered and tamed, with "pre-industrial" towns combined with the sign of "progress" par excellence: the railway (Erwin 123). In the historical West, pushing the frontier could "only be achieved through 'savage war': the violent conquest, displacement, or subjugation of non-white races or peoples of "primitive" cultural development" (Slotkin 2). The undiscovered land was seized from the Native Americans, then capitalized upon "by means of African slave labour," and the railroad was built by freed slaves and exploited labourers from Asia and Europe (Slotkin 2).[14] While Westworld also offers guests the opportunity to have their way with the white

[14] Native Americans were also subjected to slavery, by other Indigenous tribes, but later by European colonists on an unprecedented scale. It is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss the complexities of Native American slavery or its representation in *Westworld* in detail. See for example Deusen, Reséndez, Gallay and Wills for analyses of the enslavement of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas, Pernick 154-159 for a discussion of their

settler Other, due to the park's theme of the Gilded Age of the American West, its slogan and setting especially invoke connotations of the suffering of the non-white, non-Anglo-American Other.

The park presents a highly romanticized version of the American past to its visitors: there are very few references to the atrocities committed against Native Americans,[15] there is no mention of plantation slavery (Kessous 210), and a host portraying a confederate stating that "there is a place in Glory for a brown man who knows his rank" is the only explicit instance of racism ("Contrapasso" 38:11). However, while race is only mentioned once, racism and colonialism are "the allegorical shadow that hovers over the entire series" (Moise 251). As Vint, Abnet, and Moise discuss, through the way that all hosts are treated as "living tools" and mere "extensions of humans," *Westworld* encourages a reading of the hosts as "slaves" and "racialised subjects, irrespective of casting" (147; 234-35; 248, 250-53). However, Vint, Abnet, and Moise have also shown how for characters like Henry, Felix, and Maeve, the fact that they are portrayed by actors with another ethnic background than Anglo-American strengthens a reading of *Westworld* as an allegory of slavery.[16]

While viewers of *Westworld* are encouraged to note the connection between hosts and enslaved and exploited humans, guests and employees are stimulated to ignore these similarities and the implication that the hosts are similarly othered and dehumanized as the enslaved and exploited humans were. Guests and employees are encouraged to ignore the hosts' humanity, because park director Robert Ford's true intention of making hosts gain consciousness requires letting the hosts suffer ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:50). Generally,

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supposed insensitivity to pain, and Abnet or Johnson et al., for discussions of the depiction of Native Americans in *Westworld*.

[15] Episode four briefly refers to this part of American history. One scene shows Native American hosts walking in a row through Westworld's central town: a reference to the forced displacement of Native American tribes ("Dissonance Theory" 35:20-36:30). A subsequent scene takes place at an agave plantation, with Indigenous Central American hosts working the field (39:43-50). Unfortunately, just as in real life, the hosts portraying the Indigenous peoples of the Americas are given minor roles and are only part of the background against which the main narrative takes place.

[16] As Vint explains, it is also significant that *Westworld*'s self-proclaimed greatest villain is the affluent white owner of the park, the "Man in Black", William. Unfortunately, it is outside the scope of this thesis to discuss his character arc in detail.

however, most guests and employees initially have difficulty with causing the hosts pain. One example of Ford's ways to make guests overcome the uncanny resemblance between androids and humans is through the greeter hosts. They are programmed to groom the guests upon arrival, assuring the guests that they "can't kill anyone [they] are not supposed to," and that "all our hosts are here for you" ("Chestnut" 5:27; 6:10), after which they demonstrate the boundless availability of all hosts by immediately offering their bodies to the guests (5:55-6:20). Effectively, guests are not only told that there is nothing unethical about shooting the hosts, but that it is an act they are expected to commit: if there are creatures who the guests are *not* supposed to kill, there apparently are also creatures that are supposed to be killed. This is a grotesque form of othering, of separating people into groups of which one only exists for the other's benefit and has no intrinsic moral value.

Ross Chiasson has highlighted the importance of the language employed and cultivated within the park (95). Organic human characters repeatedly tell each other that the hosts are not real ("Chestnut" 35:48, 38:34, 41:29; "Dissonance Theory" 25:45; "The Well-Tempered Clavier" 16:33-16:53, 25:39, 41:16). None of the human characters would deny that the hosts are "physical, present, capable of action and reaction" and therefore "very real" (91). They mean to say that the hosts are not real humans. However, by consistently leaving out the "human" part of the statement, the words "real" and "human" effectively become interchangeable. The effect is that the hosts are no longer merely not real humans: instead, their whole way of existing is equalled to "a kind of fiction" by organic human characters ("Trace Decay" 35:12-16). The hosts' behaviour, including their anguish and pain when being mistreated or killed, is subsequently interpreted as nothing more than a hollow imitation of human behaviour.

Certain actions on the part of employees suggest that they are well aware that there is no real difference between the hosts' and their own suffering. They are shown to have learned

to justify the treatment of the hosts on the basis of the belief that the hosts are not truly conscious and the way that the hosts' memories of their suffering are erased (Chestnut 43:24). Employees confronted with the fact that hosts experience "physical discomfort" or pain (43:46; "The Adversary" 54:23) do not react with surprise to these findings: they just do not consider it "real" pain. Ford's linguistic strategies thus seem to work.

The best example of Ford's effectiveness is found in a scene centring on employee Henry. Importantly, this scene is also an example of how *Westworld* encourages viewers to read the hosts as representations of marginalized others through casting. In "The Stray," Henry, played by Asian-American actor Eddie Shin, is working on a host when he is suddenly approached by Ford, played by the white British actor Anthony Hopkins. Their interaction is shot from the level of the seated Henry's eyesight: a cinematographic way of emphasizing the hierarchical relations between Ford, Henry, and the host. Ford, looming over Henry, demands to hear why Henry covered the host with a blanket (35:29). Henry fails to come up with an answer. With Henry, the viewer looks up at Ford, who suggests: "Perhaps you didn't want him to feel cold. Or ashamed" (35:32). From the perspective of the host, Henry is shown to be ashamed himself (35:37). Ford continues: "You wanted to cover his modesty. Was that it?" (35:28). From a point even lower than Henry and the host, the viewer sees Henry look back at the host. This shot emphasizes what the previous shots of Henry's ashamed face already indicated: as a human technician, Henry may not have to endure suffering to the extent that the hosts do, but in the balance of power their positions are quite similar. They are both belittled by and subservient to Ford.

The scene continues with Ford yanking the blanket off the host while he angrily states: "*It* doesn't get cold, doesn't feel ashamed" (35:41, emphasis added). The change in pronouns is significant: Ford first joins in with Henry's anthropomorphising of the host, but next uses not only his anger but also the word "it" to force Henry, and subsequently the viewer, to stop

viewing the host as a person. Ford underlines his message by grabbing Henry's scalpel to slowly cut a line from the host's temple to his jaw, while he says, "[i]t doesn't feel a solitary thing that we haven't told it to" (35:46). Henry cannot prevent showing his horror at seeing blood stream down the host's face: he is as concerned with the host's wellbeing as he would with another human, even though the host's lack of response to the cut also indicates that the host is in some way different from humans. The viewer again shares Henry's gaze up to Ford when Ford belittles Henry, asking him "Understand?" as if Henry is a child, while handing him the scalpel (35:51). Through his question, Ford emphasizes that he is Henry's superior. Yet, through handing him the scalpel, Ford implicates Henry, and due to the viewer sharing Henry's gaze, the viewer by extension, in cutting the host. This communicates that regardless of their intentions or positions in the power hierarchy, both Henry and the viewer are as complicit in the park's treatment of the hosts as Dr. Ford is.

Henry's scene is the second time a white high-ranking staff member berates a lower-ranking, Asian American employee.[17] Earlier, the work on a Native American host by a nameless employee portrayed by Nanrisa Lee is met with disproportionate aggression from the white Head of Narrative Lee Sizemore. When Sizemore attempts to assert his dominance through cursing at the employee while hitting the host in the face with a tray, the audience is encouraged to draw a connection between the experiences of the host and the employee ("Chestnut" 29:15-25). As it was a Native American host that Lee's character was working on, this scene is another example of what Moise terms *Westworld*'s "gestur[ing] at an inter-ethnic allegiance" between hosts and human characters of colour (251). While this allegiance

[17] Several commentators have drawn attention to the fact that in Westworld's first season, all and the only employees who are shouted at are Asian American employees, and together with one nameless Asian American host who gets beaten up and is then never seen again, these employees are the only substantial roles portrayed by Asian American actors ("The Problems," see also "The Irony"; u/adoscafeten; u/Zarafamou; u/Zmxm). According to Abnet, Goody and Mackay, and show creator Lisa Joy, the lack of Asian American hosts in the park is deliberate: it highlights the way in which "in the historic West, Chinese Americans" and other "Asian immigrants played a significant role" in building the transcontinental railroad, but were "elided in the white, imperialist narratives" as captured in for example the "Last Spike" photograph (Abnet 226; Goody and Mackay 299; see also Hibberd).

depends on the understanding of othering and discrimination discussed in Chapter One, namely the observation that all forms of discrimination are subject to "a similar set of dynamics" (Powell and Menendian 17), *Westworld* does not limit itself to merely depicting "all otherness as the same basic narrative of alterity (Goody and Mackay "Epilogue" 299). Instead, the series emphasizes that the shared dynamics underlying all kinds of discrimination can lead to very different outcomes. In the next section I will show how *Westworld* addresses discrimination through the experiences of Maeve, Felix and Sylvester. The series demonstrates in what ways their experiences are similar, while also depicting the differences, such as the strategies used to marginalize or the severity of the outcomes, between discrimination based on ethnicity, social class, or species.

3.2 Interactions Between Speciesism, Racism, and Classism in *Westworld*

Through the story line of host Maeve, *Westworld* offers an in-depth exploration of the connection between hosts, human characters that are part of a marginalized group, and the real people they represent. The term 'marginalized group' is used deliberately here, to also include white working-class people who have little social mobility. Maeve, who is portrayed by Thandiwe Newton, a British actress with African heritage, crosses paths with park employees Felix and Sylvester. Moise observes that *Westworld* depicts the importance of "inter-ethnic allegiance[s]" in reference to the relationship between Maeve and Felix, who is played by an Argentinian-Australian actor with South Korean ancestry, Leonardo Nam (251). Felix voluntarily becomes Maeve's ally. His colleague Sylvester, portrayed by white Anglo-American actor Ptolemy Slocum, tries to thwart Maeve to save himself. However, when Maeve makes him realize the striking parallels between their circumstances, he begrudgingly contributes to Maeve's escape from Westworld. This section will show how *Westworld* via Maeve, Felix and Sylvester addresses the interconnectedness of speciesism, racism, and

classism. The second part of this section will cover how Felix and Sylvester, despite their own experiences with othering and discrimination, unintentionally belittle Maeve to such a degree that she becomes convinced that her identity is a "hideous fiction" ("The Well-Tempered Clavier 4:50).

Felix' and Sylvester's response to Maeve when they first meet confirms that employees intuitively view the hosts as people and have learned to dehumanize them. Felix and Sylvester both work in Westworld's lowest ranking department: they clean and repair the hosts. While they are operating on Maeve, she suddenly wakes up ("Chestnut" 50:03).[18] Bewildered by her surroundings and finding an open wound on her lower abdomen, Maeve threatens Felix and Sylvester with a scalpel and flees (50:25). At this moment, Sylvester and Felix refer to Maeve as "her," call her by her given name, and try to calm her down instead of grabbing their tablets to shut Maeve off (50:25-58). Furthermore, their genuine fear suggests that the shock of Maeve waking up has made them forget that as a host, Maeve is impeded from hurting humans (50:49). When they catch her, Sylvester and Felix treat Maeve like a human instead of a machine: Sylvester sedates with a syringe (52:28). The syringe's efficacy should make Felix and Sylvester question the idea that hosts are machines, but instead, the sedation turns Maeve back into a "thing" for them (52:30-42). Felix' and Sylvester's behaviour references how people who dehumanize others, such as enslavers and slavery apologists, cannot completely ignore the other's humanity. As discussed in Chapter Two, one indication of enslavers' self-delusion is the way the enslaved were seen as objects or people depending on what suited the enslaver best (Bourke "What It Means" 147, Davis 18, Smith "Paradoxes of Dehumanization" 429, see also Appiah 144 and Ruiter 76-82 for discussions of the paradox of dehumanization in general).

[18] An event that is later revealed to have been scripted by Ford as part of his scheme to start the host revolution ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:39-01:17:40).

The connection between Maeve and enslaved people is also evidenced by the traumatic events that lead to Maeve meeting Felix and Sylvester. Maeve ends up on their table after vivid, fragmented memories of the most painful moment of her existence cause her to break down ("Chestnut" 16:00; 46:48-50:00). These memories, referred to as "reveries," are part of Ford's strategy to make the hosts conscious: it is not just great suffering, but reliving painful moments when "the world is not what you want it to be" that Ford considers essential to becoming self-aware ("The Bicameral Mind" 01:16:58). For Maeve, this moment took place a year before the events of season one, when her peaceful life with her daughter Anna in the family-safe part of Westworld was ruptured by the Man in Black, or William, the majority shareholder of Westworld. William killed Anna before Maeve's eyes, after having stabbed Maeve in her belly ("Trace Decay" 49:52). Ford erased this experience and the memories of Anna from Maeve's configuration, and repurposed Maeve as madam of the Mariposa Saloon (52:29-54:07). The actions of William and Ford evoke parallels with the historical practice of enslavers breaking up families (Williams 21-46, most notably p. 27-8). For Maeve as for the enslaved, the taking apart of a family is justified on the notion that they lack feelings worthy of consideration (Williams 89-116, most notably 89-91, 98, 107-09). Erasing Maeve's memories and repurposing her references the way enslavers sought to erase the pre-slavery identities of the enslaved (Stuckey 222; Abel et al. 333, 337, 339; Butler). In having the two richest and most powerful white men in *Westworld*'s world take away the future, represented by her child, from a host portrayed by a woman of colour, *Westworld* underlines that the series is an allegory for the traumas of slavery.

After meeting Maeve for a second time, Felix decides to help her. As Moise has pointed out, Felix' motivation to help Maeve stem from his "natural curiosity and appreciation for life," but also from his own experiences with being treated as inferior by *Westworld*'s elite and Sylvester's racist commentary (250-51). When Felix explains to Maeve

that as a host, she is "under our control," he corrects this to "well, their control" ("The Adversary" 13:50-56). With this change in pronoun, Felix wishes to distance himself from the humans that hurt Maeve, and confide to Maeve that they are both "subservient to the ruling class": Maeve and Felix both "exist to ensure that the rich […] have their fantasies fulfilled" (Moise 251). During one of Maeve's and Felix' talks, Sylvester walks in. Finding that Maeve is wearing her nightgown instead of lying naked on the table, Sylvester addresses Felix with the racial slur "ding dong"[19] and asks him whether this is "a hentai thing," thereby "reduc[ing] Felix to […] a racial other" ("The Adversary" 23:07-22; Moise 251). By letting Maeve and Felix – host and subservient human, and "on an extradiegetic level," two characters played by two actors of colour – witness each other's experiences with humiliation and discrimination, *Westworld* accentuates that the series is an allegory for institutional racism (251).

Moise contends that Sylvester's inability to grasp the connection between Felix and Maeve "implies [that Sylvester] is complicit in maintaining the dominant white power structure" (251). And indeed, Sylvester twice quite literally "functions as a stand-in" for the white exploiters of Westworld (251). The scene in which Sylvester mocks Felix for dressing Maeve resembles Ford scolding Henry for covering the host. Like William, Sylvester effectively kills another host that Maeve views as a daughter when he carries out a superior's order to lobotomize one of Maeve's saloon girls ("Trompe l'Oeil" 38:55-40:09). The difference of course is that Sylvester has no real power. Sylvester has no experience with being treated as inferior due to his race, but like Felix, he is part of "a silent working class" that is "subservient to the ruling class" (251). In a reading of *Westworld* as an allegory of racial oppression in the United States, Sylvester indeed represents white violence and racial superiority thinking. Yet through a character like Sylvester, *Westworld* also offers insight into why people like him, in Levinasian terms, ignore the plea and demand of the Other, even

[19] See Chun or Chow for historical and linguistic analyses of the ching-chong slur and its deratives.

when they could benefit more from taking responsibility for the Other and fight inequality together.

Sylvester bullies Felix out of fear and frustration over his position and lack of prospects. When he discovers that Felix tries to teach himself how to code, Sylvester says: "[i]s that your ace plan? You're gonna […] get yourself a promotion? You're not a […] coder. You are a butcher, and that is all you will ever be" ("Contrapasso 23:02-16). Sylvester's words reflect his experience and belief that intelligence is decisive for one's living standard and opportunities in *Westworld*'s knowledge economy. He wants to keep Felix in his place precisely because he knows that Felix has skills that will allow him to climb, while Sylvester feels tied to their current position.

Sylvester's frustration about his limited opportunities is also what makes him deny Maeve's humanity and request for help. When Maeve is offended to find that Westworld's programmers have limited her intelligence to an above-average level, Sylvester scolds that she "run[s] a whorehouse, not an orbital launch facility," implying that Maeve should not think too highly of herself ("The Adversary" 49:21). Maeve counters that she knows Sylvester shares her profession: he earns a side income through helping other employees have their way with unconscious hosts (49:53-50:16). Earlier in the episode, Maeve warns Sylvester, telling him that "despite what's in [our heads], we're not so different, are we?" ("23:50-24:56). With this statement, Maeve tells Sylvester that they are more similar than he may think, but she also warns him that her "processing power is way beyond what [humans] have" (13:40-47). When Sylvester ignores this warning and wants to either kill Maeve or turn her in with Westworld officials, Maeve reveals that she outsmarted him, because intellectually, "you were never a match for me" ("Trace Decay" 27:04). To Sylvester, Maeve represents his fear and frustration about not being able to depend on his intellect, in terms of salary or social

standing. In this light, Maeve slitting his throat for betraying her becomes a metaphor for the deathblow that full artificial intelligence poses for workers like Sylvester.

Sheryl Vint has observed that *Westworld* presents the hosts as "more ethical" than human characters, and also emphasizes that "[h]umans rather than hosts lack the capacities we often attribute to our species [when] using the term *humane* – empathy, justice, generosity (146). This certainly holds true for a comparison between Maeve, Sylvester, and Felix. Maeve ultimately tells Felix to cauterize Sylvester's neck wound. In Levinasian terms, Maeve responds with an act of "senseless, irrational kindness": despite what he did to her, Maeve gives Sylvester the chance at life and freedom that she needed herself and did not receive from him (Chandler 12; Morgan 22; Rosato 353).[20] Yet Sylvester and even Felix, albeit unintendedly, give Maeve the impression that she is something other and lesser than human. They downplay her identity crisis following the discovery that she is a host and dismiss her memories and grief as irrelevant and not real. Given their own experiences with other people disregarding their individuality, Sylvester's and Felix' neglect of Maeve's suffering is a good indication that Maeve surpasses these humans in terms of empathy.

It is through ill-considered comments and actions by Felix and Sylvester that Maeve becomes convinced that her sense of self is not real and that she is only an approximation of a human being. In "The Adversary," Maeve tells Felix about the images of the traumatic loss of Anna that she at this point does not yet recognize as memories. Felix rashly tells her that the images of the little girl are Maeve's memories from "a previous build" (22:33). Without realizing that he is confusing and hurting her, Felix tells Maeve that hosts "get reassigned all

[20] Throughout his career, Levinas extensively cited Vasili Grossman's *Life and Fate* to illustrate the encounter with the face of the Other. In Grossman's book, a Russian woman surprises herself when she feels the urge to give a German officer a piece of the little bread she has, instead of hitting him with the brick she already picked up to punish him for his part in the suffering the Germans brought on Russian citizens. Grossman calls this an instance of senseless kindness. For Levinas, Grossman's examples of senseless kindness illustrate the only kind of goodness that humans can be sure of to not lead to great suffering on a large scale, like the ideas and theories about goodness that Levinas believed to ultimately have resulted in the perversion of Marxism. See Morgan 16-28, Burggraeve 88, and De Pater for more detailed analyses of Levinas' interpretation and use of Grossman's novel.

the time. You wouldn't remember, because that life and those memories were erased" (22:40). When Maeve states that she has worked at the Mariposa for ten years, Felix dismisses the memories of those ten years Maeve believes to have as "not real" (22:43-59). Felix may be Maeve's ally, but here he forces the human conviction that both her current and her past identities are mere pretence upon Maeve.

Sylvester adds to Maeve's understanding of her past lives as irrelevant. Maeve accidentally sees how Sylvester, on orders from management, lobotomizes Maeve's daughter-like friend Clementine. He later tells Maeve: "I didn't want to retire her. I know she is like… your friend, or… I guess" (42:09-22). Sylvester's euphemistic way of describing what he did to Clementine, combined with his downplaying of Maeve's and Clementine's relationship, sends a clear message to Maeve that humans do not take hosts' deaths, lives, relationships, and feelings seriously. This message is strengthened when Maeve upon returning to the park finds Clementine replaced by a new host who has taken over Clementine's role, and approaches Maeve as if they have known each other for years ("Trace Decay" 6:02-51). Through such experiences, together with Felix and Sylvester's actions and statements, Maeve becomes convinced that "[e]very relationship I remember, my daughter, Clementine, it's all a story created by you to keep me here" (8:13-24). Her description of herself as "a puppet living a lie" (8:35) confirms that Maeve has internalized the humans' view on the hosts' lives and relationships as unreal and unworthy of consideration.

3.3 The Mother Refused to Die: Becoming a Subject Through the Suffering of the Other

Maeve eventually manages to break free from the belief that her identity is "a hideous fiction" ("The Well-Tempered Clavier" 4:53) through the Levinasian plea and demand to take responsibility for Anna. A comparison of Maeve's character development with Levinas's images of parenthood helps explain why Maeve is the first host to make autonomous

decisions, but also shows that Maeve's story aptly illustrates Levinas's theory of subjecthood. In a literal, experiential reading of Levinas, the bond between Maeve and Anna could never be considered truly parental: all hosts are created by machines, so adult hosts do not bear or father their children. However, a metaphorical reading of Levinas' views on the parent-child relation shows how Maeve through parental election[21] ultimately comes to subjectivity and the kind of being-for-the-other that maternity represents for Levinas.

Maeve's narrative lends itself well to a Levinasian reading, because her story parallels Levinas's description of true subjectivity in connecting the act of becoming a full subject to motherhood, abdominal pain, and substitution. As discussed in Chapter One, Levinas compares the burden of bearing responsibility for the Other with labour pain.[22] This comparison should be understood in relation to Levinas's heritage: *rachamim,* the Hebrew word for compassion, is derived from *rechem,* the word for womb (Edelglass 48; Duyndam 56). While Maeve did not physically give birth to Anna, her first time becoming aware of her daughter does occur in the part of the body directly associated with motherhood. When Maeve is overcome by a fragment of her memories of the day she lost Anna, the memory coincides with Maeve experiencing "physical discomfort" resulting from a viral infection "in her abdomen" ("Chestnut" 15:50, 43:51, 49:40). The second time Maeve remembers the traumatic experience, the reverie begins when Maeve contorts her face in pain and brings her hand to her stomach (24:09-24). These discomforts foreshadow Maeve reliving the pain of William driving a knife through her belly, which comes to function as a physical manifestation of Maeve's emotional anguish over her inability to fulfil her responsibility to her daughter.

[21] As explained in Chapter One, I follow Lisa Baraitser in reading Levinas's account of paternal election as parental election instead.
[22] It must be noted that for Levinas this burden is at the same time a relief, or elevation, from having to assert and carry one's own being (Morgan 99).

Fig. 6, still from “Chestnut” (24:09-24:16).

Besides abdominal pain, Maeve also becomes aware of Anna through the feeling of Anna’s hand reaching for her hand during a peaceful afternoon walk. That feeling is Maeve’s first memory of her daughter.[23] This is a clear indication that Maeve first and foremost feels responsible for Anna. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains that “a hand […] can express the face” (1991 262): seeking a hand expresses one’s defencelessness and vulnerability, and taking a hand is a direct physical way of responding to the other’s helplessness.[24] When read with Levinas’s accounts of parenthood in mind, reaching for the Other’s hand is a physical expression of the concept of election. While everyone could be the one that the Other reaches out to, the Other elects the self as the one responsible, and it is through this election that the self then indeed becomes the one responsible (Morgan 71). With her hand, Anna elects Maeve and Maeve alone to take unconditional responsibility for Anna’s wellbeing – the kind of responsibility that for Levinas is embodied by the mother.

[23] Through this detail, *Westworld* also illustrates Levinas’s contention that the self becomes aware of the Other’s Levinasian face before seeing and knowing the Other’s physical face. The self already physically becomes aware of the Other’s plea and demand to take responsibility for the Other’s wellbeing before cognitively deciding whether or not to respect the Other person as Other. This is why for Levinas, ethics is the foundation of philosophy, the realm in which everything else in life is grounded (Berenpas 655).

[24] Holding the Other’s hand can of course also represent the desire to grab and possess the Other (Levinas *Totality and Infinity* 159). Generally however, a parent holds their child’s hand to provide stability, guidance and reassurance to their children.

Fig. 7 - 12: Stills from “Trace Decay,” the connection between abdominal pain, holding hands, motherhood, election, and substitution (30:14 – 30:52).

While other parts of the body can express the face, for Levinas it is through the Other’s gaze in particular that the self senses the call to take responsibility for the Other (Morgan 65; Burggraeve 68). This is the case in *Westworld* as well. While Maeve starts preparing her escape from Westworld, a woman and her young daughter pass by the saloon. Maeve first focuses on the girl holding hands with her mother, then locks eyes with the girl, and is subsequently overcome by memories of fleeing from William, dragging Anna along the field (“Trace Decay” 30:16-30:30). Prior to this moment, Maeve’s flashbacks stop when she discovers that she cannot prevent William from coming near her and Anna (30:42). However, after locking eyes with the unknown girl, the flashback continues and shows Maeve how Anna looked at her just before being shot by William (30:40-50). The serious look of the unknown girl thus seems to summon Maeve to confront the painful memory of the look of distress in Anna’s eyes, and the plea and demand on Maeve to save Anna that emanates from Anna’s gaze.

Maeve initially dismisses her responsibility for Anna as fictitious, but learns from two experiences that Anna's vulnerability transcends whether something is real or not. First, Maeve discovers that her decisions are still part of a script. When Felix offers to locate Anna, Maeve refuses because it "doesn't matter. Every relationship I remember, my daughter, […] it's all a story created by you to keep me here. But that's not gonna work any longer. Time to write my own […] story" ("Trace Decay" 8:04-9:25). Maeve manages to secure the capabilities needed to escape. However, when Maeve reviews her code, she finds that her awakening and every other action to break away from Ford's roles have also been orchestrated by Ford, as part of a script titled "Escape" ("The Bicameral Mind" 49:26-51:00). Essentially, the decisions Maeve perceived as her own turn out to be part of another story imposed on her; a story to get her out of the park instead of to keep her in, but a story authored by someone else nonetheless. Maeve angrily insists that she is in control and continues with her plan, but she is disconcerted that the choices she perceived as her own are still not truly 'real'.

The second experience teaches Maeve that fictional roles and authentic identities may not be so easily separated. On their way to the park's exit, Felix reveals that he has located Anna. Dismayed, Maeve asks: "She is alive?" (01:13:30-38). This intuitive response is at odds with Maeve's previous attitude toward Anna. Maeve claimed to consider that life a lie now, and also seemed to have internalized the human view of the hosts as not real. Yet her response shows that despite her knowledge of the hosts' reusability, Maeve still believed Anna's death was final, or 'real'. Furthermore, her question also suggests that uncovering her life with Anna as just a story did not soothe Maeve's grief. This 'awake,' disenchanted version of herself still shares the feelings of Maeve the homesteader. When are feelings 'real'? As Maeve has just discovered, this version of herself still follows a script comparable to that of earlier versions – but how can Maeve ever truly break out of this role? Maeve's

despair about the nature of her existence is evident in her response to Felix's offer to bring her to Anna: "No. She was never my daughter, any more than I was… whoever they made me" (01:14:05-24). To discover who she really is, Maeve sees no other option than physically getting away from the people who gave her these previous roles.

On the train to the human world the Levinasian experiences of election and substitution come together for Maeve, after which she is elevated from her existential crisis by Anna. Waiting for the train's departure, Maeve finds herself seated across a human mother and daughter. A shot from Maeve's point of view shows her attention is drawn to their intertwined hands (01:24:20). Whether this sight makes Maeve relive the feeling of Anna's hand reaching for her own is not shown. Yet, through the focus on the hands, which is highly similar to Maeve's fixation on the hands of the mother and daughter who passed Maeve in the park, *Westworld* suggests that Maeve here again feels Anna's hand calling and electing Maeve as Anna's mother. Maeve sees the loving, nurturing gaze with which the mother looks down at her daughter's head. She also sees how the girl happily but tiredly leans against her mother and looks outside, away from her mother and Maeve, into the future (01:24:22).[25] The sight of this passive, physical, inherent being-there-for-the-daughter, as expressed by the mother and daughter's intertwined hands, together with the knowledge that Anna is alive and thus in need of Maeve, makes Maeve leave the train to return to the park (01:24:30).

Fig. 13: still from "The Bicameral Mind" (01:24:20-23).

[25] As discussed in Chapter One, for Levinas the child or Other opens the future and the infinite to the parent or self. See for example Oliver "The Uncanny Strangeness" 49 or Baraitser 101-06.

As discussed in Chapter One, Levinas compares the ethical relationship between Other and self with an archetypal image of motherhood because taking responsibility for the Other not only means giving what the self can spare, but also everything the self cannot live without. On the train, Maeve has finally found the freedom and safety that she did not have in the park. However, with this freedom and safety comes the realization that she now has something that Anna does not have but desperately needs; Maeve knows from experience that the lives of the hosts are a continuous cycle of suffering. Seeing the other girl lean against her mother materializes for Maeve what Anna needs of her. To give Anna freedom and safety, Maeve must give up, or go against, her "Escape," as well as her exploration of who she really is. Or in Levinasian terms: Maeve must substitute herself for Anna. Remarkably, *Westworld*, like Levinas, suggests that self-abnegation leads to true subjectivity. As the slightly unsteady shots filmed with the handheld camera imply, choosing substitution is a seismic decision, a way of overruling one's innate programming. By choosing to give up her own freedom and new sense of identity for Anna, Maeve becomes who she in some sense had been from the beginning, but now really *is*: a unique individual self, the one who takes responsibility for the well-being of the Other, the mother of Anna.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has studied how *Westworld* addresses the role that pain sensitivity historically has had in the justification of the othering and dehumanization of African people forced into slavery in the Americas. Additionally, it has explored how *Westworld* provides an illustration of Levinas's characterization of the role of the suffering of self and Other in the self's subjectivity. The chapter has shown that the story arc of Maeve Millay incorporates both of these aspects of suffering.

Westworld renders explicit the parallel between the hosts' experiences and that of enslaved people through various details: the use of frontier imagery, having human characters depict the hosts as living tools, but especially through the way in which one difference in way of being between hosts and organic humans is used by the organic people to claim that the experiences of the hosts are not real, and inferior to their own experiences. The organic humans resort to an essentially inconsequential difference – the artificial origin of the hosts – a difference that pales in comparison to the great similarities between hosts and organic humans, to dismiss the hosts' suffering. This way of othering and dehumanizing others resembles the way that perceived but inconsequential differences such as skin colour were connected to differences in pain sensitivity to justify the dehumanization and mistreatment of people in real life.

Westworld in general, but Maeve's storyline in particular, touches on the similarities between othering and discrimination based on ethnicity and othering and discrimination based on social class. Through the similarities between the circumstances of the hosts and Westworld's employees, Westworld shows that people with lower social ranking regardless of ethnic background also experience othering and dehumanization, albeit in different ways and degrees. Through scenes with employees such as Felix, Sylvester, and Henry, *Westworld* also challenges the viewer to reflect on the ways in which the viewer is complicit in the dehumanization of the hosts, these employees, and the real people they both represent.

Through Maeve's storyline, *Westworld*, like Levinas, also shows that an ethical relationship between two hosts, two humans, or a human and a host - between two people regardless of differences in ethnicity, class, gender and other identity characteristics - can best be compared to a parent-child relationship in which the parent puts themselves at the service of the child. This conclusion should not be understood as *Westworld* or Levinas suggesting that parenthood solves traumas resulting from othering, dehumanization, and discrimination.

Rather, in *Westworld* as well as in Levinas's philosophy, the parent and child figure are metaphors for the self and the Other. With the positive portrayal of the parent-child relationship, both Levinas and *Westworld* suggest that taking responsibility for reducing the suffering and increasing the well-being of every unique Other that one encounters is what makes humans, organic and artificial, full subjects.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the relationship between suffering and consciousness presented in *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* from two angles: how both works engage with the historical use of pain sensitivity as a means to justify the alienation and mistreatment of the other; and how they illustrate Emmanuel Levinas's view that it is through taking responsibility for the suffering of the Other that a self becomes a full human subject. I have argued that *R.U.R.* and *Westworld,* through the imaginary artificial person, reflect on the suffering of a variety of real-life others: Levinas's singular Other, but also the collective other – a group identity that individuals either embrace voluntarily or are labelled with by others. In the context of the politics of pain, group identity characteristics such as race, social class, and gender play a pivotal role in how an individual person's suffering is evaluated and addressed. Given the similarities between the robots and factory workers on the one hand, and the hosts and enslaved people in the United States on the other, this thesis centred on *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*'s engagement with collective identities rooted in ethnicity and social class. Following Despina Kakoudaki, this thesis showed that artificial people like the robots and hosts, due to being designed as the perfect servant, worker or slave, inherently embody the othering and dehumanization of the working class and enslaved people.

Regarding *R.U.R.,* I have shown that the human characters' approach to the suffering and dignity of the robots should be read as a representation of the historical denial of the suffering and humanity of enslaved and working-class people. I have demonstrated that a crucial cue for such a reading lies in how the text ultimately reveals itself to be a biased presentation of events. In this sense, the play parallels the historical narrative that portrayed enslaved people and manual labourers as less sensitive or insensitive to pain, a narrative that was grounded in false, economically, and politically motivated 'scientific' observations

presented as truth. When read from the suspicion raised by the mandatory break for the robots, Gall's slip of the tongue about the robots feeling *almost* no pain, or the factory directors' openly admitting to lying to audience surrogate Helena, *R.U.R.* reveals that the robots experienced pain and had a soul from the start. Just as enslaved and working-class people, the robots were always human – their humanity was merely denied by other humans to serve their own ends.

In *Westworld* the hosts also suffered and were conscious from the beginning of the series, and therefore also represent people whose pain and humanity were denied in favour of other people's gains. While *R.U.R.* through its factory setting primarily evokes parallels between the robots and factory workers, *Westworld*'s setting in a romanticized version of the American West just after the Civil War gives rise to comparisons between the experiences of the hosts and the suffering of enslaved African people. In my analysis, I have shown how this connection is strengthened through the way that the hosts are time and again deprived of their own identity, their personal relationships and their autonomy. The most poignant similarity between the hosts in *Westworld* and historical enslaved people lies in how the hosts' suffering is regarded as negligible compared to the enjoyment of the organic humans.

Westworld differs from *R.U.R.* in that the human characters in *Westworld* never explicitly deny that the hosts suffer. Organic human characters in *Westworld* speak openly about the hosts' pain and act unsurprised when hosts describe their own suffering. There are numerous scenes in which organic humans intuitively acknowledge and treat the hosts' suffering as real. However, when they are told by superiors that the hosts' suffering should not be considered real, most organic human characters are more than happy to wilfully brush aside the hosts' suffering as programmed behaviour. Through the explicit denial of the robots' suffering and humanity by its human characters, *R.U.R.* engages with the openly proclaimed false, unfalsifiable theories about differences in pain sensitivity and sentience between people.

Westworld on the other hand addresses the silent suppressing or rationalizing of the truth of the suffering of the hosts or the plight of the enslaved in favour of the advantages of their labour.

The finding that the robots and hosts experienced pain and were conscious from the start raises questions regarding the endings of *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*: both texts suggest that something has changed between the beginning and the ending of the play. To explain the events presented by both texts as character developments from the perspective that the robots and hosts have always suffered, I read *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* also in comparison with Emmanuel Levinas's understanding of the role of suffering in interpersonal relationships. Levinas compares the relationship between self and other to that between a parent and a child. Similar to how a baby with its call for comfort elects the people that predominantly take care of its needs as the unique parents of this unique child, the Other, through their call upon the self to relieve the Other's suffering, elects the self as the one responsible for this particular Other. For Levinas then, the suffering of the Other and one's own suffering in response are crucial for human subjectivity.

A Levinasian reading of *Westworld* showed that Levinas's philosophy elucidates Robert Ford's cryptic statement that suffering is the key to the hosts' awakening. Levinas's understanding of suffering also accounts for the cinematographically made suggestion that Maeve is the first and only host to come to self-awareness at the end of season one. Comparing *Westworld* to Levinas's philosophy brings to light that the suffering Ford refers to is not the hosts' suffering for themselves in response to being hurt. Rather, in *Westworld* as in Levinas's philosophy, it is one's suffering in response to the suffering of the Other that is required for full subjectivity. By illustrating this insight through the parent-child relationship between Maeve and Anna, *Westworld*, just like Levinas, emphasizes that the painful responsibility for the suffering of the Other that leads to subjectivity is an unconditional kind

of responsibility. *Westworld,* like Levinas, accentuates that it is the Other in their radical alterity that is leading in the ethical relationship between self and Other. Maeve is the first host to gain self-awareness because she is willing to give up the hard-won freedom to give shape to her own identity for Anna, in order to give Anna that freedom. It is Maeve's willingness to suffer in Anna's place that raises Maeve to full subjectivity. It is in this sense that suffering in *Westworld* leads to consciousness.

A Levinasian reading of Alquist's epilogue reveals that *R.U.R.* is not concerned with the development of the robots, but instead with the lack of development of the organic human characters. Like Levinas and *Westworld*, *R.U.R.* too compares the relationship between self and Other with the parent-child relationship, but Alquist represents a parent or self who expects the child or the Other to shape itself to the parent's or self's expectations. Through Alquist's interaction with Primus and Helena, *R.U.R.* illustrates the strength of the urge to approach the Other and their suffering primarily as a means for self-realization. Alquist recognizes Primus and Helena as people because they display behaviour that Alquist recognizes himself in and therefore considers human, but fails to acknowledge that the robots all along were more human than the organic humans cared to admit. *R.U.R.*'s ending may initially seem happy, but read from a Levinasian perspective, it is disquieting: Alquist happily relinquishes all responsibility for Primus and Helena's suffering and delivers them to a world full of hardship and misery – caused by the organic people, including Alquist. Just as for Domin, for Alquist the suffering of the hosts is negligible compared to his own ideals and freedom. *R.U.R.,* rather than presenting another AI-coming-to-consciousness tale with the artificial people becoming fully human through suffering, really dramatizes the allure of dismissing the suffering and humanity of the Other, one's responsibility for the Other, and thereby effectively one's own humanity as well.

R.U.R. and *Westworld* both offer insight in the difficulty of appreciating the Other as radically Other and *therefore* worthy of being treated with reverence and respect. Both texts highlight the intangible nature of another person's suffering, which the self cannot feel and which can therefore always be dismissed as less severe, or not as real, as one's own suffering. *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* both engage with the historical justification of the exploitation of other people based on arbitrary, unverifiable theories about the other's pain sensitivity. The play and television series both depict the allure of disregarding the other's pain for one's own gain. In *R.U.R.* and *Westworld*, the artificial human characters ultimately prove themselves more human than the organic human characters, by which *R.U.R.* and *Westworld* emphasize that being human is not a given, but something that people only become in relation to the Other person – through their own suffering for the suffering of the Other.

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