

## Reproduction, utilitarianism and speciesism in *Sleep Dealer* and *Westworld*

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The West, a traditionally masculine space inhabited by the lone ranger and the cowboy as the emblematic figures in search of a quest, is recreated in a theme park called *Westworld* where visitors can liberate their instincts engaging in violent activities such as kill and rape without being punished, because the hosts are androids, not real human beings, created specifically for the purpose of enjoyment. The origins of this HBO series dates from the film released in 1973, based on a novel by Michael Crichton in which Yul Brynner plays the android who starts killing humans as a result of a malfunction in his circuits. The whole central system suffers a failure and androids and humans exterminate each other except for the only human visitor who has not submitted to the pleasures of the park who escapes successfully. The moral of the story warns against the dangers of relying too much on artificial intelligences at the time they were developing and makes the viewers become alert to the multiple possibilities the future brings about.

The classical Western motive of the domination of nature in terms of taming the wilderness seems out of the question in this computer laboratory designed space. Everything has been created from artificial matter: androids, animals, and even landscapes. Inspired by Mary Shelley's novel in Dr. Frankenstein's attempt to create life from death matter, *Westworld* eliminates the danger of death because the humanoids are designed to be unable to inflict any pain on humans. Humans hold complete control over the landscape and the androids that inhabit it, but this ambitious project will finally turn back against its creators. Ynestra King (1990) blames this uncontrolled development of technology and the irresponsibility of human beings towards nature on how "capitalism is dependent on expanding markets and therefore ever greater areas of life must be mediated by sold products. From a capitalist standpoint, the more things that can be bought and sold, the better." Anthropocentrism also justifies the assertion that "human beings are entitled towards the dominion of nonhuman nature." (108) At the same time, it affirms that human beings dominate nonhuman nature to obtain true freedom, regardless of the fact that this domination in the case of *Westworld* and *The Sleep Dealer* makes the audience develop a sympathy for the android and the

cyberbraceros instead of the human beings, contrary to what the viewer could experience watching the 1973 version.

In *Westworld*, androids' motor functions have been designed to be deactivated at the request of those in power so that they do not represent a danger in case of malfunctioning. When failure to respond at the command occurs, human technicians discover that the androids have started to take control of their lives. William S. Haney (2006) affirms that "one difference between machines and organism noted by the physicist Jean Burns, however, is that human beings have volition or free will, which is associated with consciousness, while machines do not." The awareness of this lack of volition and its later acquisition, a key question in both visual materials analyzed here, mark the development of the characters in order to gain agency and independence from the orders of their superiors in rank and to run away from the spaces of oppression where they have been confined.

It is mainly two android women: Dolores and Maeve, who supposedly rebel against their creators, Arnold and Robert Ford. It must be noticed that the name of the latter makes clear reference to Henry Ford and the innovation he introduced in the car industry with the chain production and the popularization of the automobile as well as the control exerted on his factories. Parallelism between the car industry and the production of these androids for leisure can clearly be stated as well as the reference to assembly lines and low cost effected on mass production of goods as compared with the job of cyberbraceros at the "maquilas" in Tijuana. Whether their rebellious behavior belongs to one of the narratives associated to the park, so it has been planned by their creators, or it is a true acquisition of agency and independence on their part remains a mystery through the entire first season of *Westworld*. In fact, the sentence "These violent delights have violent ends," repeated and passed along as if the androids were victims of a contagious disease, as Christopher Orr (2016) points out in "Sympathy for the Robot," becomes a mantra in their consciousness that triggers this insubordination against their oppressors. As the sentence belongs to Act 2, Scene 6 of Shakespeare's tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, the feeling of revenge can be appreciated from the beginning.

Apart from the distance created between humans and androids, the difference between men and women is also openly established from the first episode: women have been created to satisfy clients and, thus, we find Maeve taking care of customers at the brothel and Dolores showing her charm to visitors while Teddy has only been programmed to love her and dies once and again unable to protect her from the visitors

that kill her family and rape her. The consideration of these androids as bodies deprived of a conscience, of feelings, or will reinforces the idea of the necessity to break this oppression and to introduce the ecofeminist tenet of breaking hierarchies between the human and nonhuman world as it is made explicit from the first episode when the characters are introduced. At the same time, there is no trace of ecological minds in any of the two species: nature and natural resources belong to the ones holding power, to the owners and designers of the park who manipulate and dominate them at their will. There is even a central control overlooking everything that happens in all the scenarios so nature, androids and technicians are oppressed in the same terms. Kordecki (this volume) analyses the description of human beings done by the Runa, provided by Russell in *The Sparrow* which reminds the thoughts Maeve and Dolores experience towards technicians and visitors, first surprised about the treatment inflicted on them and, later on, of rebellion and revenge against the oppression they have been submitted to.

These two heroines, however, do not belong to the same social class and this establishment of a hierarchy even among the androids is made explicit from the beginning of the series. It is necessary then, to introduce at this point a critique to the social hierarchy established that contradicts ecofeminist goals. In a sense, they are presented as opposites; while Dolores, which in English means pain, is a blonde and one of the first androids created by Arnold; Maeve, a mulatto prostitute, has been designed and programmed to satisfy men's sexual desires and, thus, she runs a brothel. With a special configuration that allows her to predict what her clients would require, Maeve provides the most satisfying pleasures to her customers as it is expected from a prostitute. As Plaemenitås (this volume) states when discussing *The Stepford Wives*, they become perfect market products themselves: Maeve and the female robots from Stepford reproduce a behavior prepared for immediate male satisfaction of his desire of women's domination.

Because of her condition and most likely her race, Maeve's naked body is constantly exposed during repairs while Dolores' body always appears covered in suggestive ways to avoid showing her most sexualized parts. Etzler (this volume) argues that this situation also takes place in *Alraune*, where women's bodies are the object of abuse and disrespect and used for commercial purposes until they die and their corpses end dissected for medical studies. Another clear difference between one woman and the other is the class of people with whom Dolores interacts, such as Bernard Lowe or

Robert Ford: the men in charge. Besides, she has been in Arnold's house and she is often required for conversation with the head of the organization: William, son in law of the first owner, Mr. Delos, who becomes obsessed with her and the park. Maeve only talks to repairers, stating that class separation is important to establish a distance between them. She rebels in episode 8 after a repeated series of repairs provoked by her to understand why she had memories from a previous destination and decides to take control of her life. Apparently, she has the opportunity to be free but it seems that she has been programmed differently and her choices have also been established for her in advance, so she returns to the park in search for her daughter whom Felix, a technician, has located in another section of the park. She starts experimenting strong feelings of attachment towards this girl that acted as her daughter in a former narrative. The question of reproduction as it is addressed by Kordecki (this volume) also resembles the treatment that procreation receives in *Westworld* and *The Sleep Dealer*; she wonders what is a paradise without reproduction, when this is exactly the idea: to create a space of immortality eliminating the need to bear new human creatures, who, grow up, age and finally die.

Feelings and emotions have traditionally functioned as the justification to oppress women positing them at the side of dualisms where they stand for the body, inferior and irrational confronted to the superior mind, to reason. In the words of Greta Gaard (1993, 5) "for example, the way in which women and nature have been conceptualized historically in the Western tradition has resulted in devaluing whatever is associated with women, emotion, animals, nature, and the body, while simultaneously elevating in value those things associated with men, reason, humans, culture and the mind." In the case of *Westworld* and *The Sleep Dealer*, this dualism that serves to retain Maeve in the park and Luz in Tijuana breaks apart after their rebellion and points out that social and ecological revolutions can happen parallel as Ynestra King (1990) points out in "Healing the Wounds: feminism, ecology and the nature/culture dualism."

*The Sleep Dealer* tells the story of Memo, a Mexican young man whose father is killed by a drone suspected of terrorist actions against the US because Memo himself has installed a radio station that intercepts private governmental frequencies. Running away from Santa Ana del Rio, Memo meets Luz and arrives to Tijuana where he starts working as a cyberbracero in a maquila, known as sleep dealer. Lisa Rivera (2012, n.p.) explains that "the word 'cybraceros' alone signals the future of borderlands labor as a type of "cyborg labor" (dehumanized and invisible), as well as the history of migrant

labor along the border, specifically the midcentury practices, that initiated the rapid industrialization of the borderlands.” There, workers are connected through nodes previously attached to their bodies to electronic devices that transport their manual work to construction machines in the US. Humans and androids in *Westworld* and Memo and Luz in *The Sleep Dealer* establish relationships in which the most technologically advanced being uses and abuses the one who is left behind and ignores how to profit from this technology. Rebeca Lemov (2015, 46) argues that the situation portrayed in these two visual documents responds to the fact that social relationships have been accepted to take place through machines:

A growing body of research explores the question of how users interact with their gadgets and media outlets, and how in turn these interactions transform social relationships. The defining feature of this heavily mediated reality is our presence “elsewhere,” a removal of at least part of our conscious awareness from wherever our bodies happen to be.

In the case of *Westworld*, relationships not only take place through social networks but with machines themselves. Thus, transforming humans into cyborgs enhances the distance between them and the rest of the human beings which allows inflicting an inhumane treatment on them, since they technically become less human and more machinelike. Bernard Lowe serves as an example of the transformation of humans into machines. He has been designed by Ford after Arnold, to work as his replacement, programmed with the same memories that tormented him, like the loss of his son that made him miserable. Before his human death, he tried to deliver androids a conscience but the discovery of his failure took him to desperation and to put an end to his tormented life with the help of Dolores. Later, in the third season, it is revealed that he hides the key to the destruction or salvation of the human world after the android’s riot breaks out. Lemov (2015, 49) complains about the lack of research and preoccupation on “The status of the body that holds these devices, the body as platform—the body that is vacated—is curiously invisible;” probably ignoring the extensive work done in ecofeminism by Karen Warren or Val Plumwood who from their understanding of conceptual structures of domination have attacked value hierarchical thinking and reacted against the patriarchal models of domination based on the superiority of a race, gender, class, sex or species: “A conceptual framework is a socially constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes and assumptions that shape and reflect how one views oneself and others. It is oppressive when it explains, justifies,

and maintains relationships of domination and subordination.” (Warren 1996, xiv) Through this new ecofeminist criticism, the bodies of cyborgs or androids acquire visibility as they are rendered the importance they deserve without lessening the value of their labor. The progressive aging of humans versus the eternal youth of androids reveals as another weapon against the former. All of a sudden, the bodies of androids acquire the dimension of vessels for immortality without the need of perpetuation through descendants. Plaemenit s in her study about *The Stepford Wives* (this volume) explains how the substitution of human women for female robots transformed them into perfect bodies which do not age and as they are deprived of a human brain, of a will, therefore, they have lost the capacity of autonomous thinking.

More recently, Braidotti’s thesis exposed in the third part of her work *The Posthuman* (2013) also focuses on how anthropocentrism has shaped the relationships between androids and humans which is a concept that perfectly describes the situation of cyberbraceros in *The Sleep Dealer*. The abuse of the worker is represented as an objectification, as inhuman treatment inflicted on what can be considered as just disposable bodies:

As a critical analysis of this historical moment, Marxism and its socialist Humanism taught us that objectification is indeed a humiliating and demeaning experience for humans in that it denies their full humanity and can thus be truly called inhuman at a basic social level. The commodification process itself reduces humans to the status of manufactured and hence profit-driven technologically mediated objects. This insight constitutes the core of the humanist heart of Marxism, which I analysed in chapter 1. Subsuming human relations into the nexus ‘money-power’ is for Marxists a form of inhumanity and the key social injustice of capitalist modes of production. (106)

*The Sleep Dealer* shows how Mexican cyberbraceros have to be constantly substituted because of sudden high voltage or malfunction in their nodes. They die electrocuted and no one comes to help; the other cyberbraceros are only requested to disconnect the deceased one so that another one can be put in his place. A replacement worker is always found easily as the demand surpasses the offer both in the film and in real maquiladoras. Braidotti in *Posthuman Knowledge* (2019) regrets the position that humans have adopted towards technological developments, how we experience excessive joy, “euphoria” as she calls it or suffer from “anxiety” in alternative periods of time “in view of the exceedingly high prize that we- both humans and non-humans- are paying for these transformations” (13)

The model of Italian Renaissance and emblem of Humanism is the Vitruvian Man; created as the perfect measurement of its time, it acquires instead of a liberating character, one of bondage in contemporary times. Rosi Braidotti addresses its complexity in *The Posthuman* and its model is reproduced both in *The Sleep Dealer* and *Westworld*. The position that cyberbracers adopt when they are connected through their nodes to the wires that send their virtual work simulates that of the Vitruvian man within the circle: oppressed by the nodes and in constant danger of being electrocuted. As to *Westworld*, it is clear from the beginning that the androids are designed from the model of the Vitruvian man: the 3D printers that create their bones, muscles and tendons are connected inside the circle that turns around. It is as if they were spinning from there:

It is the image of Man as a rational animal endowed with language. Anti-humanists over the last thirty years questioned both the self-representation and the image of thought implied in the Humanist definition of the Human, especially the ideas of transcendental reason and the notion that the subject coincides with rational consciousness. This flattering self-image of 'Man' is as problematic as it is partial in that it promotes a self-centred attitude. (Braidotti 2013, 23)

Dolores, who paradoxically has been programmed by Arnold to destruct the park, appears in the first episodes of the series as an innocent being, carrying the pain and frustrations, the corruption of her creators in their abusive behavior towards other humans and nonhuman beings whom they consider their inferiors. She is always taken advantage of until she rebels killing Arnold and Ford. Eztler (this volume) discusses how Alraune, the creature born from a prostitute and the semen of a hanged murdered, also rebels against her creator, Ten Brinken, upon discovering how she was made. The novel *Alraune* and the later adaptations made for the cinema reflect the same idea of male oppression over bodies of other human beings or more than human ones that appears both in *Westworld* and *The Sleep Dealer*. In the latter, Luz, Memo and Rudy Ramirez feel trapped in a network of abusive situations and people who take advantage of their innocence since they acknowledge their absolute ignorance of the manipulation they are suffering. The external networks that connect the three of them use their nodes to exert a firm control on their bodies and minds. Thus, Luz makes money out of telling stories about Memo; she betrays the poor man who has deposited in her his most intimate secrets. She connects through her nodes and shares, in an internet based virtual space called Truenode, aspects about Memo's experience escaping from his home village to Tijuana which Rudy Ramirez buys, unknowingly of their connection. Luz is

forced by the nodes to tell the truth and to talk about her relationship with Memo, so intimacy gets broken and private lives become full of interferences. Braidotti (2013, 109) refers to these exchanges as:

The relationship between the human and the technological other, as well as the affects involved in it, including desire, cruelty and pain, change radically with the contemporary technologies of advanced capitalism. For one thing, the technological construct now mingles with the flesh in unprecedented degrees of intrusiveness, as we saw in the previous chapter. Moreover, the nature of the human–technological interaction has shifted towards a blurring of the boundaries between the genders, the races and the species, following a trend that Lyotard assesses as a distinctive feature of the contemporary inhuman condition. The technological other today – a mere assemblage of circuitry and feedback loops – functions in the realm of an egalitarian blurring of differences, if not downright indeterminacy.

As to Maeve and Dolores, they take control over the men who accompany them in Episode 6, in the first season. It is very interesting how both become aware of their condition as part human part machine, and how they learn to use their physical and intellectual attributes at the same time. This is how, Maeve and Dolores, initially secondary characters, androids created for the satisfaction of human beings, take the reins of the narratives in the park, transforming them into an attack against whoever threatens them. Dolores's awakening starts when she shoots Robert Ford; it is a kind of trigger to a series of events that will culminate with her as the leader of a group of bandits who try to destroy William at first and the human race at large as it is announced in the third season.

Maeve is obsessed with recuperating her daughter even though she knows that, as an android, she lacks reproductive abilities and the girl has been created in a laboratory exactly the same as her. Thus, her role as mother imposed by her gender codification prevails over her desire to obtain freedom from her creators and the rest of the humans that have used and abused her. In ecofeminist terms, following essentialist theorists, this response could be conditioned by her nature as woman which makes her a caring, loving and nurturing figure and supports the thesis that biology is destiny. On the other hand, Dolores and Maeve react against this essentialism as they attempt to eliminate all the masculine human power, the conception itself of a park created for masculine enjoyment in which, among many other advantages presented to male visitors, the danger of pregnancies has been eliminated. Following this patriarchal configuration, sexual relationships rarely take place under mutual consent: rape and



abuse represent a constant, a repeated humiliation exerted on the bodies of female androids. Dolores is repeatedly and brutally forced to engage in sexual relationships but she has a consented relationship with William and another with Teddy. Therese and Bernard apparently enjoy a healthy sexual relationship that takes place under mutual consent but Therese ignores he is an android so the consent is questioned as in the case of Dolores. From the first episode, the difference between men and women is clearly set: customers' satisfaction is the key. Women must be at the disposal of male visitors for sexual relationships while men cannot protect their women from the human advances towards them. Abuse and oppression are repeatedly exerted on them and their lives only make sense through this exploitation they are subjected to. Luckily, they apparently forget their suffering every day at dusk since their memory gets erased at a regular basis by technicians in the hub.

Gaining consciousness through awakening to memories implies misery and rejection towards the mistreatment inflicted by technicians and visitors. Humans in the park feel they can use the androids at their convenience and they find their punishment: human technicians are killed by androids as a revenge for having abused them or having enjoyed with them. In episode 6, human workers are shamed by Maeve about the fact that they enjoy sex with androids while they are being repaired. She makes them regret the fact that they use the bodies for their own sexual pleasure. During episode 10, one of the technicians is surprised masturbating in front of Héctor, the bandit that accompanies Maeve, so he gets killed by him. Their stories unite making ecofeminist practice evident in their vindication of their rights to be respected as living entities with the same value as human beings. The destruction of their creator acquires the symbolism of eliminating the oppression, the patriarchal linkage they attempt to escape from, both physically and intellectually. The pattern of oppression seems to find a repetition in both visual materials: those human/cyborg/androids perceived as inferior can be used and abused for the profit and enjoyment of those who hold the power in capitalist terms, in terms of money.

In a tour de force, in episode 3 of the second season, Dolores identifies herself in front of android confederate soldiers as Wyatt; she assumes the identity of the bandit whose narrative had just been inaugurated before she killed Ford. *Westworld* plays with gender roles and with the assumptions of the characters and the audience who does not expect a woman to lead a revolution like the one she initiates. Dolores transcends the roles imposed on her as a woman created to satisfy men and reveals as the hero, the

leader of the revolution of androids but also the center of the new narrative created by Robert Ford for the delight of the new visitors. Just as Ynestra King (1989, 118) predicted: “There is no reason to believe that women placed in positions of patriarchal power will act any different from men.” Dolores submits and oppresses animals and Teddy for her own benefit because she considers them weaker than she is. As she is an android, the codes she has been imprinted can be changed from a sweet, pleasing woman ready to become a wife to the ones of a warrior defeating human beings and other opponents.

Dolores becomes the center of the labyrinth; she has been created after Arnold’s son who died as a child and she has been given special qualities. However, she has been trapped in a loop of events that get repeated again and again. She is named pain because she holds all of Arnold’s suffering and she carries the key to the suffering of the rest of the male protagonists of the series, both human and android: William, Ford, Theodore and Bernard. Dolores reverts the suffering of the androids by rebelling and taking the reins of the revolution. She is the sweet Dolores and the bandit Wyatt who will take revenge for all the androids of the park in season two and the machine whose existence must be ended in order to save humanity during the whole third season. This ambiguity she exhibits manipulating androids and humans at her convenience will transform her into a non-reliable character for the other heroine, Maeve, as they fight each other in the decisive battle of saving or destroying the human race.

William, Dolores’ nemesis, reveals himself as a controller, as the embodiment of the patriarchal relationships of domination that happen in the series. All his relationships have been planned in advance, even his marriage with Mr. Delos’ daughter is a business contract to acquire the company from his father in law, to be the main heir displacing and disabling his brother in law. William and Dolores confront each other in season two after he falls in love with her: he realizes she is not a human being and regrets having had feelings for her. He desires to use her to show other people the way to find themselves, their own reflection. In this same second episode in season two, Dolores has taken command and refuses to be used and abused anymore. Reversing this situation of inferiority also implies the change of male androids so that manipulation of them can be useful to obtain their aims. Dolores convinces Teddy to march with her and then, transforms him to serve her effectively. At the same time, Maeve uses Héctor as well to help her fulfil her purposes. Both men have been reprogrammed to love these women and obey their orders, so they blindly follow the revolt started by their lovers

who now command the actions in the park. From passive to active, from submissive to rebellious these two android women succeed in transgressing traditional gender roles and social stereotypes to become leaders of their own revolts.

Rosi Braidotti (2013, 103) defines how relationships between humans and non-humans should take place: what kind of bonds can be established within the nature-culture continuum of technologically mediated organisms and how they can be sustained. Both kinship and ethical accountability need to be redefined in such a way as to rethink links of affectivity and responsibility not only for non-anthropomorphic organic others but also for those technologically mediated, newly patented creatures we are sharing our planet with.

In *The Sleep Dealer*, Rudy Ramirez realizes he is part of the oppressed when he buys Memo's story from the network Truenode and travels to Tijuana trying to amend his error. At the same time, Memo discovers his condition of inferiority when he learns that Luz has sold the history of his family on the internet. When Rudy shows Memo his nodes, the three of them realize their condition of puppets directed from above through a control system configured and programmed to make them obey without questioning. A reflection from Braidotti sustains the idea that a new reconsideration of the concept of what entails to be human seems necessary: "We', the dwellers of this planet at this point in time, are interconnected but also internally fractured. Class, race, gender and sexual orientations, age and able-bodiedness continue to function as significant markers in framing and policing access to 'normal' humanity" (2019, 114). In this sense, Memo is deprived of any decision capacity from the beginning of the story in Santa Ana del Rio. Rudy Ramirez drives a drone from the US pointing at Mexico where, as Braidotti (2013, 123) points out, the enemy must be killed in cold blood. With drones or robots,

*The Economist* points out other advantages of posthuman warfare and argues that autonomous robot-soldiers could do more good than harm: they would not rape women, burn down civilian dwellings in anger or become erratic decision makers under the emotional stress of combat.

He has been told what to aim at without questioning orders. At the same time, he experiences that the distance provided by drones between him and his target works as a protection from involvement with the victim; to prevent the development of any kind of empathy although he learns too late that he has made a mistake:

"Questioned on this issue by *The Guardian* (Carroll, 2012), RPA or drone pilots argue that their jobs involve different types of courage from conventional warfare, not only because they have to

take the consequences of possible mistakes, but also because a different degree of rigour and accuracy is needed to kill by remote control”. (Braidotti 2013, 126)

Braidotti (2013, 126), however, sustains how Jimmy Carter used to defend that robots must be always controlled by humans. Alex Rivera projects his agreement with this sentence at the end of *The Sleep Dealer* and reveals his desire to establish poetic justice: the three protagonists, Memo, Luz and Rudy use the technology that oppressed them to liberate Mexican people: breaking the dam which controls the water stolen from Mexican lands becomes symbolic of the break of the US hegemony. Returning the resources to their lawful owners belongs fully to the aims of ecofeminist criticism, crossing the borders of imposition and oppression to envision a new sustainable future for the wretched people that live across the border from the US, a future now more in danger than ever because of the current pandemic that we are suffering in the year 2020. The crashing of the train that takes the visitors inside the park in *Westworld* at the end of the second season also holds the symbolism of acquiring free will and consciousness for the androids; it represents taking the reins of their own present and future while breaking the last connection with the structures of power and domination imposed on androids in the park as it announces a new organization possibly based on more equal principles different from the ones exerted from the external control of the human race. As the third season shows, the androids led by Dolores threaten to exterminate the human race as if to end the cycle of destruction that Arnold and Ford started with the creation of the park itself but what ends being exposed and debated once more is how “such a hasty recomposition of an endangered Humanity reinstates anthropocentrism and fails to do justice to the violence humans are visiting upon other species, the planet included.” (Braidotti 2019, 157)

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