Technologized Representations of Labour and Class from the Man in the Machine to the Machine (Wo)man in Science Fiction Film and Television

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Film Studies

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Abstract

This dissertation is about the implications, and iterations, of "the machine" as a tool and metaphor in science fiction (sf) — particularly within the media of film and television. Beginning with Karl Marx's depiction of an anthropomorphized, metaphorical, and, expressly, capitalist machine in "The Fragment on Machines," I take up the machine as a symbol of humanity at work, trapped in the various nodes and mechanisms of capitalism. The machine is described by Marx as a controlling force that mechanises the worker as much as it is itself personified: "[T]he machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso," writes Marx, "with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. … just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion" (693). Marx's description is of an overbearing, physically present machine that sources its power from human labour as though that labour were a living organ of the machine's body.

A move toward immaterial labour in the 1960s intensified capitalism's consumption of the human body and of human subjectivity. Around the same time, this immateriality began to be reflected in sf in virtual and cyber worlds, presenting the labourer as a mere fragment of code within the capitalist system. The machine metaphor has necessarily changed along with the nature of labour and labour technologies; we are now equally, if not increasingly, bound to (and within) the digital machine at which we work and live. Yet Marx's analysis of the machine as all-pervasive and controlling is still applicable today:

> The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness,

> but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself. (693)

The implications of this arresting passage have changed somewhat along with the dawn of the digital era and the advent of Internet technologies. Despite these changes, however, the concern remains the same, yet more urgent, as our connection to the machine becomes increasingly literal. The machine continues to regulate us from all sides, and its control is more pervasive, yet we must remember that the controlling machine is *not* the technological one, but the metaphorical one that uses the technology as a tool of exploitation.

Many of the texts examined in this dissertation demonstrate the ways in which digital technologies are used as tools of oppression and marginalisation within the capitalist machine. These ways are varied, so each of my chapters engages with a different aspect of control expressed through different kinds of technologized science fictional bodies. In each text, the technology is what facilitates capitalism's control over otherwise autonomous subjects, yet the subjects differ in how they interact with the machine in its dual function. These variations allow for an analysis of different systems of control that capitalism imparts upon its subjects, which are based on class, gender, and race.

What ties this dissertation's four chapters together, and the texts I examine within them, is that they demonstrate the ways in which capitalism's machine has become all-consuming of the labouring subject, and how its alienating power over the worker's entire life has extended beyond just her limbs.

For Echo

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my supervisors Imre Szeman and Harvey Quamen for the unique support they each provided me over the years. Imre, for his unwavering commitment to the project since I began at the University of Alberta, even through a dramatic change in thesis early on. Harvey joined me as an enthusiastic First Reader, but then graciously accepted the role of co-supervisor, which resulted in many long discussions about the project — sometimes with little notice. I also owe much gratitude to my First Reader, Michael Litwack: Michael provided invaluable assistance within a very concentrated period of time due to a shift in my committee late in the game that had me inviting him to come on board at the last minute. His constructive feedback has been essential to the completion of my dissertation, and I only wish we could have had more time to work together. I look forward to many more conversations with all three of these excellent scholars whose work, and work ethic, I admire greatly.

My appreciation goes out to my external examiners, Allison Muri and Nathan Kowalsky, for their valuable and rigorous contributions during my defence, which have given me *a lot* to think about as I continue to pursue my research on the machine metaphor and expand my readership. It is truly an honour to have had them both on my committee.

My heartfelt thanks go out to Lorraine York who has provided me with countless forms of support not the least of which included kind and understanding words of reassurance when I often (even in the final weeks!) felt like no one else understood what I was experiencing. Lorraine was also there for me in a way that felt like she was part of my committee — having read over several portions of the dissertation, including one entire chapter when I found myself in urgent need of a proofreader. I truly cannot thank her enough.
We need more Lorraine Yorks in this world!

I also want to thank Mark Bould for his friendship and support over the years. Despite his likely being the busiest person I know, he so generously lent me his ear, offered advice, and most importantly commiserated with me when, several times, I was at the height of my imposter syndrome.

My sincere gratitude goes out to the selfless Theo Finigan, Grant Dempsey, Sarah-Nelle Jackson, and Heather Larson, who each contributed valuable proofreading and feedback of the final dissertation draft despite their own very busy schedules. I owe (each of) you one!

My pursuit of a PhD was facilitated, and inspired, by many brilliant colleagues. There are far too many to name everyone here, yet a few stand out to me for their practical support and academic mentorship, as well as, in many cases, their friendship. These are the kind and brilliant people who kept me on track, motivated me, and made this feel like a worthy pursuit: Anthony Stewart, Jason Haslam, Pawel Frelik, David Higgins, Adam Carlson, Brent Bellamy, Jeff Diamanti, Andrea Hasenbak, Steven Shaviro, and Sherryl Vint.

Though it is widely known that graduate school can be lonely, I am fortunate to have had wonderful individuals to spend my occasional spare time (and often vent and complain to) during the best and worst of it all: Laura Wiebe, Angelica Torices, Birgit and Leif Esser, Chris Uren, Chandra London, David London, Jason Treit, Jean-Paul Fournier, Metteko Woebaloefie, Ida Klaire, Baertolt Braun, Snuffy Norton, Jed and Tito Bramwell, Sheepy (Del) Margolis, Kristin Lundgren, and the late DJ Dyer.

Most importantly, I thank Echo, Kevin, and Red for absolutely everything they have done to keep me going, especially this last year when I haven't been around near as much as I would have liked. Anything I might say here pales in comparison to what you're owed. Suffice to say that, of everyone named here, you know me best, as well as how much I actually hate machines!

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INTRODUCTION
Technologized Representations of Labour and Class from the Man in the Machine to the Machine (Wo)man in Science Fiction Film and Television

This dissertation examines the machine as a symbol of humanity at work, trapped by the mechanical and socio-political systems of capitalism. I am particularly interested in the machine's iterations and implications in science fiction (sf) — especially within the media of film and television — and how its representation has transformed to reflect developing technologies of work over time. The machine is without a doubt a central trope of the genre of sf, which arguably could not exist if machine technology had not arisen from the industrial era. It is unsurprising, then, that the machine has been written about at length, and its relationship to the human condition considered from many angles. My dissertation, however, embarks on an analysis of an aspect of this relationship that has not been heavily considered in science fiction studies: the link between labour and the fictional technologized body. I observe that the move in the 1960s toward what Maurizio Lazzarato calls "immaterial labour," which intensified capitalism's consumption of the human body and of human subjectivity, correlates with the nature of the immaterial virtual worlds that arose out of sf around the same time — presenting labourers as fragmented "identity units"[1] within an immaterial, digital system. A central claim of this dissertation is that the digital system is an apt metaphor for capitalism — a *system* that itself has mechanistic qualities. This metaphor positions "the machine" in relation to the digital system as a symbol that is multifarious in interpretive possibility, especially in how capitalism controls

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[1] This is what the inhabitants of the machine are called in the first texts I will discuss: Daniel F. Galouye's novel *Simulacron-3* and Rainer Werner Fassbinder's film adaptation of it, *World on a Wire.*

its subjects in terms of social hierarchy, hegemonic power, as well as the (increasingly nonexistent) division between labour and leisure time. It is through this lens that I approach my analyses.

THE LONG HISTORY OF THE MACHINE AS A METAPHORICAL CONCEPT

A lineage of mechanistic environments within fiction may be traced back as far as the *Divine Comedy*, if we consider Dante's mechanical depiction of the operational precision of Hell. Satan himself, standing in a frozen lake of Hell's Ninth Circle, keeps the ice frozen as he continues to flap his wings in an effort to escape, thus creating an "automatic mechanism" (Abrash 21). Even Minos assigns his eternal punishments in a mechanistic manner as he "receives data, processes it, and provides output in accordance with his programming" (Abrash 21). As Merritt Abrash argues in his contribution to *Clockwork Worlds*, "[t]he analogy between Minos and a computer is obvious [today],[2] but only pure intuition could have led Dante to such a concept in the early fourteenth century" (21). Yet Dante's intuition speaks perceptively to the ways in which, even centuries before the Industrial Revolution, the subject follows orders — being "programmed," or taught, to carry out particular functions. If the stories we have been telling for hundreds of years are any indication, it is not hyperbolic to say that human society has always functioned somewhat like a machine. Despite this long history of representation, my dissertation speaks to more contemporary transformations in the relationship between machines and society, as well as how these transformations are reflected in sf narratives about the machine.

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[2] *Clockwork Worlds* is an anthology of sf criticism that provides an excellent resource on mechanistic fictional worlds prior to the commercialisation of the World Wide Web. Though this work was published in 1983, Abrash's claim is no less relevant today.

I posit that, as the nature of machine-oriented technology has changed its form and function, so too has the society making use of it.

The philosophical concept of the "man-machine" has been around since the Enlightenment, from Descartes' description of the human body (but not its soul) as a machine, to *L'homme machine*, the well-known text whose author Julien Offray de la Mettrie credited Descartes as an influence. In *The Enlightenment Cyborg*, Allison Muri compiles an extensive list of Enlightenment thinkers, including those above, who utilized the machine as a metaphor to better understand the function of the human body. Amongst these thinkers are the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes and medical doctor Thomas Willis whom Muri notes additionally used the machine metaphor to understand the body politic: "In the tumultuous period in which Hobbes and Willis worked," argues Muri, "it is not surprising that theories of the motions of tiny corpuscular bodies circulating within the body and instigating motion as well as health and sickness were used metaphorically to describe the effects of civic movements and communications on the healthy operation of England's social body" (119). This understanding of the individual's bodily governance, and their relationship with societal governance in terms of the machine, approaches the way in which I understand the machine metaphor in my analysis, especially in terms of how governance is considered in terms of its (mechanical) components:

> In the philosophies of Hobbes and Willis both, free will may be possible but a healthy body, like a healthy society, requires an orderly system of designed offices decidedly situated in a system of hierarchical rule by an intellectual elite, commercial interests, and armed enforcement. It was a metaphorical inscription of order with a specific system of communication privileging the brain as sovereign over the muscles. (Muri 120)

As I examine the machine in the fictional texts that follow, I will similarly focus on the manner in which the societies depicted are structured and controlled, and the necessary components (sometimes more personally termed "roles") to maintaining the integrity of the capitalist system, as well as, in turn, that system's control over its components. In particular, though, I build upon the work of a philosopher that would come along nearly two centuries later.

KARL MARX AND THE CAPITALIST MACHINE

The human/machine convergence within the capitalist system, as I discuss it in this dissertation, owes much of its foundation to a small, though well-known, section of Karl Marx's writing from the mid-nineteenth century. As I discuss below, Marx's *Grundrisse* describes an anthropomorphized machine that runs on its human-organs' labour. This tension created between the human body and the controlling machine is an apt metaphor for capitalism's mechanistic quality and its functions. My primary texts, though, are not from Marx's time. The films, television programs, literature, and music I examine range from the 1960s to today, so all of them were produced at least a century after Marx wrote the *Grundrisse.* This does not make my analyses anachronistic, however, because my aim is to put texts of various kinds (fictional and theoretical) and from several historical periods into dialogue with one another, towards an understanding of the changing role of the human/machine relationship and how it speaks to capitalism's grip on society. Marx's metaphor is not always applicable to the current situation of labour and class exploitation I discuss, yet it provides an excellent symbolic foundation for analysis that can be easily adapted after the advent of the digital machine.

In the *Grundrisse*'s "The Fragment on Machines," Marx engages one specific component of the body politic as he investigates the machine as a metaphorical and literal link to humanity

at work: "[T]he machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it; and it consumes coal, oil etc. … just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion" (693). The implication is clear that there is a resource other than coal consumed by the machine, and that is the labourer herself. I argue that this insight is still — and, indeed, is perhaps even more — applicable today, as the machine at which we work is less frequently made up of cogs and conveyor belts than less tangible matter manifested as digital circuitry.

If we read the situation of labour under capital this way, I propose that we must also read the machine as cannibalistic here. After all, it feeds off the human limbs it usurps. Marx further states that

> The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself. (693)

The implications of this arresting passage have changed somewhat as the nature of the machine has changed and as, with the dawn of the digital era and the advent of the Internet in the late 1960s, so, too, has the character of labour. Despite these changes, the concern is the same, yet more urgent as our connection to the machine becomes increasingly literal. The machine at which we work and through which many in the West now identify themselves continues to regulate us from all sides, but its control is more pervasive; the worker's time has become more abstract and so more accessible for capitalism to consume it everywhere and constantly.

WHY SCIENCE FICTION?

As Steven Shaviro argues, "science fiction works to extrapolate elements of the present to push actually existing conditions all the way to the most extreme consequences. That is to say, science fiction is not about the actual future. Rather it's about *futurity*" ("Accelerationism"). Close reading sf texts about futurity, then, allows for a speculative perspective that I argue pure cultural theory, sociology, or any other discipline rooted in the past or present may not access on their own. This cultural analysis that foregrounds close reading pairs well with sf, which has long facilitated the imaginative investigation of the possibilities and limits of existing cultural, social, and political forms; the recent and growing popularity of the genre makes it an especially fertile space in which to explore changing understandings of both the body and social class and trace the futuristic capabilities of past narratives. I examine the multifaceted ways that technologically altered human bodies and humanized technologies in science fiction have come to encapsulate contemporary anxieties about technology's relationship to the labour force and the implications of that relationship on the social sphere.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical basis for my analysis owes much to Autonomist Marxist theorist Franco "Bifo" Berardi's work in his 2011 book *After the Future.* Being stuck in the metaphorical and literal system of capitalism and/or physically imprisoned by it causes subjects to suffer both as individuals and as contributing members of their societies. Berardi recognizes that the digital, technologized, nature of labour today has created a form of labour precarity through "the fragmentation of work" (128) that has jeopardized workers' connection to their communities. This "dissolution of community" (128) is reflected in what Berardi identifies as the current

absence of "[s]olidarity between the workers of the world [that had been] the main basis of democracy during the past century, and the only guarantee of workers' human rights" (129). Not only does Berardi theorize the situation of labour under a digital, highly technologized, capitalist society, but his descriptive terminology, such as "fragmentation," is relevant to the digitality of labour he is critical of. Further relevant to my objects of analysis, Berardi asserts that the "[technical] form of the labor process has changed the very foundation of exploitation, and has displaced the social landscape in such a way that any [sociocultural process leading to conscious subjectivity] seems impossible" (127).[3] I frequently return to this theorist's work in my dissertation because of the urgency of his implication as well as the visual machine metaphor that he applies to his criticism of labour and/under capitalism — such insight is invaluable to the analysis of my selected sf texts.

In adition to Berardi's, the work of several other notable scholars from various fields and disciplines is featured prominently in the chapters that follow. Autonomist Marxist theorist Maurizio Lazzarato's conception of immaterial labour is essential to this dissertation's understanding of the socially and technologically motivated change in common work modalities; sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman's tourist and vagabond analogy provides excellent fodder for considering the inescapable roles played by the wealthy and the lower classes under capitalism; and feminist science and technology studies scholar Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" reveals that there can be revolutionary potential in a collectivized form of feminism that embraces the technological in the face of patriarchal oppression. Haraway's generative theory marries well with that of feminist poet and civil rights activist Audre Lorde, whose 1970s

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[3] The apparently heavy amendments to this quote are for the sake of clarity for the reader in light of my lack of engagement, elsewhere in the dissertation, with two highly specialized terms of Berardi's. I replace Berardi's references to "recombination" (as recombinant) and "recomposition" with a paraphrased version of his definition of those terms which can be found on the same page as the quote.

call for a more inclusive feminism in answer to patriarchal capitalism anticipated the current call for intersectionality in all areas of the humanities today. These diverse academic approaches and social sensibilities speak to the various sf tropes of technologized bodies and spaces featured in each chapter and the perspectives they reveal. In one way or another, all of these thinkers are critical of capitalist mechanisms of control; yet, I would note that my dissertation's purpose is to examine how existing critique takes shape within the (mostly digital) machine worlds and machine bodies of the sf texts examined.

KEY TERMS

The Machine

This dissertation takes a multifaceted approach to "the machine" as a specific kind of metaphor that is not only symbolic but directly affiliated with that which is signified. I invoke Marx's depiction of the machine as a foundation for the relationship between mechanical technology and the worker as the most basic expression of capitalist production. When I speak of the machine, I speak of the *mechanisms* in place that enable the hegemonic labour conditions related to mass consumerism and the exploitation of the working class. When we speak metaphorically of the machine, we think of the capitalist *system* at work. For nearly a century the "cyborg"[4] and the robot in sf represented shifting attitudes and anxieties surrounding labour's relationship with technology. Yet in the 1960s, a new kind of technologized body — one trapped in and consumed by cyberspace — arose in the genre. The advent of this new figure parallels a key moment in the history of labour that intensified capitalism's increasing hold on its workers' lives. I contend that, as a dweller in the "Metaverse," "OASIS," "Simulacron," or whatever the

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[4] The term "cyborg" itself was not coined until 1960 as I discuss briefly in Chapter 4.

virtual space may be called in various fictions,[5] this new virtual human in a virtual space arose out of the Digital Revolution of the 60s and 70s to become increasingly popular in contemporary science fiction. This figure depicts how technological progress, coupled with myriad societal abuses, can bring about alienation, apathy, and disenfranchisement for the working class. This metaphorical invocation bears many implications for the project as a whole.

Each of my chapters discusses a different kind of machine and a very different human/machine relationship, especially regarding embodiment. I look at primarily digital forms of technology of the kind that can be imagined after the design of the home and office computer and Internet technology. Though the machine discussed by Marx exists outside of the body and affects the physical function of the worker, I will examine works where the worker lives and works inside the machine, where the machine exists within the worker, and indeed where the machine is the worker.

There is a dual function to how I use the word *machine*. On one hand, it is a practical technological tool and, on the other, it is a metaphor for a political system that uses that tool in its alienation of the human subject. When I speak of the machine I am talking about the circuits, and mechanisms in place that serve the current world order as well as the literal machines and systems portrayed in the fictions I examine. In the same way as the machine has a symbolic function in addition to its more literal, tangible function, other words that have a mechanistic object quality should also be read in their dual symbolic/functional sense. These include terms like *system*, *mechanism*, *circuit*, and *program*. I speak to these dual meanings when they are invoked, but I would like to alert the reader now that when these words are used, they should be

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[5] "Metaverse," "OASIS," and "Simulacron," are the virtual worlds named in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992), Ernest Cline's *Ready Player One* (2011), and Daniel F. Galouye's *Simulacron-3*, respectively.

read both ways so as to appreciate the importance of mechanistic symbolism in these texts as a central component to my analysis and understanding of what is happening in these texts.

Existing studies of the history of technology in science fiction are substantive, and I will certainly reference some of these works throughout the dissertation, though it is not my current task to catalogue how and what technology has appeared in fiction or even to trace the changes to technology and how it has been perceived. I draw on the works of others to outline these matters, however, to set up my own contribution to the field of science fiction studies. This contribution narrows in on texts that lend themselves to a pessimistic reading of technology, or at least to a reading of how human subjectivities are limited by human/machine interaction. This is not to ignore the many positive aspects of technology in the contemporary moment nor to suggest that science fiction has only read technology this way — that is simply not the case. Instead, my aim is to observe the ways in which certain fictional engagements with several kinds of technologies portray the fraught relationship humans have long had with the machine and how the machine affects human life within a capitalist system.

Class

It is useful to clarify for a non-Marxist reader what is meant by "class" and how I use the term. Simply put, class is about the rungs of capitalist society that are determined by, and reflect, who needs to work for money and who does not. The distinction of social class is determined through the defined roles respectively of the bourgeoisie as "owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour" and the proletariat as "modern wage labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live" (Marx and Engels 14). Yet there are many social factors that influence who gains access to the upper rungs of society: those that I discuss in this dissertation include (but are not limited to)

race, gender, and sexuality. I also use "class" as an umbrella term for these and other socioeconomic differences between the financially elite and virtually everyone else that struggles for control over their own leisure time in the face of overwork. This "everyone" includes the working class, the socially marginalised, and the hegemonically undervalued. When you see "class" listed alongside of terms like race, gender, and sexuality, it is not a redundancy but, in this case, it indicates expressly financial disparity that can be worsened by the other social factors.

Consumerism as Labour

Though there is an observable difference between the acts of labour and consumerism, the two are nevertheless deeply intertwined. Consequently, my analysis considers the capitalist machine's interactions with the consumer in addition to the labourer, as well as how the distinction between these two positions are increasingly blurred. The contemporary capitalist society is foremost a consumerist society. Though humans have always been consumers of various forms and to varying degrees, Zygmunt Bauman notes:

> The consumer of a consumer society is a sharply different creature from consumers in any other societies thus far. If the philosophers, poets and moral preachers among our ancestors pondered the question whether one works in order to live or lives in order to work, the dilemma one hears mulled over most often nowadays is whether one needs to consume in order to live or whether one lives so that one can consume. That is, if we are still able, and feel the need to, tell apart the living from the consuming. (80-1)

Bauman's argument that living in a consumer society means an indistinguishability between living and consumerism draws attention to the precarious function of labour in such a society. If

we do not work to live — that is, if we do not simply work to provide the necessities of life — then we must do the opposite, which means that consumerism is what fuels our need to work. If, as Bauman suggests, we may not be able to tell the difference between living and consuming, the texts I examine in this dissertation similarly identify the lack of discernable barriers between work-time and leisure-time. In some cases, this lack of discernibility means they are absent, indicating a society of people that may not know that they are always working in the service of capitalism. In other cases, these barriers are invisible, yet they extend to the social sphere, facilitating and reinforcing power hierarchies between the classes at social and economic levels.

Technology

Some explanation as to what is meant in this dissertation by "technology" is warranted for the sake of clarity. Most Westerners today tend to think of digital technologies, such as computers and artificial intelligence and smart technologies, when they use or encounter the term. Though the very *non-digital* wooden chair, for example, is no less a technology, it seems reasonable that we have come to this tendency given that the most culturally transformative technologies over the last century have been electronic and then later digital in nature. For the most part, this dissertation follows this recent trend in imagining technology as computer-programmed devices. But given that its theoretical underpinnings begin with Marx — considerably before the first computer was built — and because this project observes a change in the nature of labour alongside a change in workplace machine technologies, I also include within my definition of technology those mechanistic forms that came out of the industrial era. When I gesture briefly to these earlier technologies it should be clear that I'm talking about the same automation technologies theorised by Marx, as well as electrical or engine-based machines such

as the vacuum or the automobile. Technology, here, also comprises biotechnology, which is often facilitated by computerised or machine technologies of some kind.

Digital Capitalism: Culture in the Digital Age

The literal and metaphorical concept of *the digital* is nearly as important to my analysis as *the machine.* The texts I examine arose out of the digital revolution (at the end of the 60s) and, as I argue, they reflect a whole new way of envisioning labour. Thus, the digital does not only reflect the way we work but how that work affects our sociopolitical experience. Critical Digital Studies (CDS) scholars have taken up this dual manner of expressing how the current technological moment is not only about tools and how we use them but how the nature of those tools has come to affect us.

One concept often invoked in CDS is *digital capitalism*, first discussed by Dan Schiller in his book by the same name. Schiller confronts the instrumentality of digital communications media and the Internet's shift into a neoliberal tool that is tightly reflective of and linked to corporate financial gain. His central point is that this system may indeed support the growth and communication capabilities for many, but it really only benefits those who are already privileged, thus intensifying the disparity between the upper and lower classes. More recently, another CDS scholar, Robert Hassan, has described digital capitalism as a "digital logic, combined with a virulent neoliberal ideology [that] has transformed our world in … ways that reflect the instrumental intent of computerization and neoliberalization in what has been an unprecedented way."

In his account of this formation, Michael Betancourt describes immateriality as central to the shift in how Western culture imagines the nature of work:

The digital is a symptom of a larger shift from considerations and valuations based in physical processes towards immaterial processes; hence, "digital capitalism" refers to the transfer of this immateriality to the larger capitalist superstructure. Because the digital is a semiotic realm where the meaning present in a work is separated from the physical representation of that work, the "aura of the digital" describes an ideology that claims a transformation of objects into that semiotically-based immateriality. At the same time, the digital appears as a naturalization of the concentration of capital, since the digital itself poses as a magical resource that can be used without consumption or diminishment, leading to a belief in accumulation without production. This shift from a basis in limiting factors and scarcity is inherent to the immaterial form posed by the digital.

Thus, the term "digital" speaks to the nature of the technology and that technology's effect on humans within the capitalist system. As both a technological medium that arose out of the 1960s, and a symbol for the condition of the workforce that has resulted from it, the digital provides an aesthetic representation of the fragmentation of the worker's experience of time while paradoxically symbolizing social connectivity. This fragmentation is facilitated by digital technologies that facilitate an employee's ease of access to work tasks (and her work's access to her) at any time from anywhere and exemplified by such things as "flextime" work schedules and mobile offices. When I speak of the digital as a metaphor in this dissertation, I mean to invoke an understanding of fragmentation of the work schedule and an aesthetic vision of the dissolution of the boundary between work and leisure under the current technological state of capitalism.

Virtual Space and Cyberspace

The term "Cyberspace" was first coined in 1982 by sf writer William Gibson in his short story "Burning Chrome," then defined in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer* as "A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation. ... A graphic representation of data abstracted from banks of every computer in the human system" (51). Though, after Gibson, most sf scholars will opt for this term to describe the digital networked space in which characters "jack in" (*Neuromancer* 37) and exist outside of "meatspace," I tend to favour the phrase "virtual space" while using the two terms interchangeably. My preference here has little to do with specificity and more to do with connotations. Cyberspace efficiently describes and connotes a specific computer-networked virtual space. Gibson's reference to its hallucinatory nature pairs well with the deceptions under which many of the characters dwelling in the spaces I discuss. Yet the term "virtual" emphasizes the *simulated* nature of the reality it presents. When I invoke the phrase "virtual space" I am thinking of virtual reality, which is commonly understood today as a digital medium. The virtual, as I discuss it, looks and feels like reality and therefore one who dwells within it might not know the "true" nature and condition of her existence. Cyberspace *may* feel real, but that point isn't always clear in sf narratives. In fact, many contemporary fictions present cyberspace as a locale with possibilities that exceed those of their diegetic "real" worlds.[6] The virtual, linked in this dissertation to the "digital," is a precarious place because it is perceptively realistic and compositionally designed to have unstable boundaries.

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[6] Examples of such narratives include Neal Stephenson's novel *Snow Crash* as well as Ernest Cline's novel *Ready Player One*, which has been adapted to film by Steven Spielberg (2018).

Robots, Androids, Fembots, Gynoids vs./and Cyborgs

In sf, robots are usually similar to humans in form. Fembots, of course, are robots that are female — and that is expressed in the form of the body. An android is a robot that explicitly has a convincing human form and a gynoid is its female iteration. In Chapter 4, when I take up these kinds of figures I use these terms more or less interchangeably. Since all of the mechanical characters discussed in that chapter are female, "robot" may seem redundant but I keep it in my lexicon because one of the characters I analyze is purely AI — without a human form — so "bot" seems to best fit her description; it is also the most broad ranging in its definition so it best applies to all the varieties of electronic females in the chapter. In the case of Janelle Monáe's androids, however, I use that (non-gender specific) term because that is what they are called in Monáe's *Metropolis Saga*.

Cyborgs differ from these former figures because, by definition, they are not purely technological beings but living human bodies that are technologized to varying degrees. There are various sorts of cyborgs — many will argue that the chronic use of smart technology, especially smart phones, makes us all cyborgs of a fashion. The term cyborg was coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in an article they wrote for the journal *Astronautics*. The term is "a neologism of 'cybernetic' and 'organism' … to emphasise how entities such as the human would have to be radically assimilated by technology to allow them to adapt to their future environments" particularly in outer space (Campbell np). Since the characters in Chapter 4 are not technically cyborgs, then, I avoid referencing them as such, though the term does get taken up as I use Donna Haraway's famous "A Cyborg Manifesto" to theorize some of my analysis.

The Singularity

Scholars from various disciplines have considered and theorized the "man-machine" and figured the import of humanity's relationship with the machine. Today, computerized technologies such as smartphones are inseparable from the human bodies that carry them, so much so that some see the attachment as an addiction, that jeopardizes our bodies and our societies (Berardi) where others argue it is a part of human evolution (Kurzweil). To both positions, sf offers a concept known as the Singularity. The (Technological) Singularity is an imagined future moment during which, facilitated by techno-scientific progress, there will be a confluence between human and machine. In his 1993 paper, "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era," Vernor Vinge coined the term, and since then the Singularity has been prevalent in science fiction narratives.[7] Vinge defines the Singularity as the "imminent creation by technology of entities with greater than human intelligence" that effectively will arrive because technology has become smarter than the human brain (Vinge np).[8] Other thinkers have speculated at length about how the Singularity might look, whether the event might be utopian or apocalyptic, and, by those believing the former, how to facilitate its arrival.[9] All forms of sf media (literary as well as film and television) have engaged creatively in this debate as well.

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[7] Not unlike the term "science fiction," which certainly existed conceptually before having a name, the concept of the Singularity also predates its naming.

[8] There are various approaches to theorizing the Singularity. After Vinge, Damien Broderick called this event the "Spike," arguing that it "looms ahead of us: a horizon of ever-swifter change we can't yet see past. The Spike is a kind of black hole in the future, created by runaway change and accelerating computer power. We can only try to imagine the unimaginable up to a point" (Broderick). Broderick's definition sounds rather anti-utopian — almost apocalyptic; Ray Kurzweil, on the other hand, sees the Singularity as a life-changing (rather than ending) event, the arrival of which will allow for his own immortality by allowing him to "upload[ ] his mind to the net" (Shaviro, "The Singularity is Here" 105). The Singularity takes numerous fictional forms, related to machines surpassing human intelligence and declaring war on human society (as in *The Matrix*), the successful uploading of the human brain into a computer interface (as in Wally Pfister's 2014 film *Transcendence*) or, conversely, a computer demonstrating human-like characteristics (as in Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, respectively).

[9] The list of thinkers engaging with the technological Singularity is great and continues to grow, yet some notable theorists include Ray Kurzweil, Eleizer Yudkowsky, Michio Kaku, Vernor Vinge and Steven Shaviro.

Though it is not always explicit in my analysis, there is an implicit presence of the Singularity in the texts I discuss. The presence speaks to the physical inextricability of the human and the machine, and its parallel with the inextricability of work and leisure within the capitalist system, since the 60s when the machine lost its own body made of lead and steel and traded it in for a series of ones and zeros. My chapters take the reader through narratives engaging various kinds of machine technologies that for the most part do not currently exist; yet the ways in which these technologies are used, experienced, and how they reflect human society elicits very real considerations about labour exploitation and class disparity.

ANALYTICAL FOCUS AND LAYOUT

Primary Texts

This dissertation examines narratives that engage disembodied and embodied existences facilitated by imagined applications of what, for the most part, are already existing technologies. In each, the technology is what facilitates capitalism's control over otherwise autonomous subjects. I argue that despite the utopian promise of digital media and Internet technologies, the (capitalist) system — represented by different iterations of what could be called "Machine" — maintains a hegemonic control over all classes, genders, and races. What ties this dissertation's four chapters together, and the texts I examine within them, is that each demonstrates the ways in which capitalism's machine has become all consuming, intensifying its alienating power over its workers and those that would consume the products of that labour. In my dissertation, I critically examine how several notable sf texts engage with imprisonment within the digital Machine. In so doing, they carry on with the sf tradition of engaging the sciences and their technologies in order

to speak to problems in the social sphere related to class and its interconnections with technological progress.

Dissertation Structure

Each chapter looks at a different way the machine is reflected in sf to represent the human experience of labour and class precarity in contemporary capitalist society. The dissertation is presented in two parts, each comprised of two chapters.

Part One: "The Virtual Space Narrative and the Immaterial Labouring Body," observes a new kind of science fictional body — the cyber body — within cyberspace, whose advent coincides notably with the early days of the Internet and the popularisation of computers in the 1960s and 1970s. This transformative era for labour in Western countries marked a move toward immaterial labour that was celebrated by some and a source of great concern for others who saw — and continue to see — in its form an intensified opportunity for capitalism's consumption of the human body by commodifying human subjectivity. Because a virtual space is immaterial, like the labour I argue it reflects, the subjects within it are limited in how they see the state of control in which they live and the degree to which they are controlled.

Chapter 1 focuses on a detailed analysis of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *World on a Wire*,[10] his 1973 made-for-TV film adaptation of Daniel F. Galouye's 1964 novel *Simulacron 3.* The film offers up a diegetic society that is seemingly stable yet next to no one knows that its people, and everything in it, are actually just code in a computer system. Not only has this film inspired the Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003) and many, many other films and television series, but it may well be the first text to associate a virtual environment — a Singularity — with

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[10] The film originally titled *Welt am Draht*, aired as a two-part miniseries on West German Television.

worker exploitation; to say that it is influential would be an understatement. Not only do I argue that *World on a Wire* should be considered part of the science fiction canon, but that the "immersion paranoia" explored within it is an early depiction of digital capitalism. My analysis of the prescriptive spaces and the movements and performances by the characters within them speak to the social stratification and systemic oppressions that remain relevant today. Because the rest of my thesis considers texts from the later twentieth century to today, I conclude this chapter by attending briefly to the notable contribution Galouye's and Fassbinder's works made toward contemporary iterations of virtual imprisonment by (and within) cybertechnology.

Where the texts discussed in Chapter 1 involve characters whose perceived autonomy is just a part of the machine's programming, Chapter 2 takes up a more specific kind of cyber environment in which characters plug-in or power-on to go to work within a video game environment. The gameworlds, as I call them, serve to segregate the workers from realizing anything outside the systems of control that are their reality. The films discussed in this chapter foreground different kinds of systemic control that obscure, for the worker, any potential for true escape from the confining rules of the game.

Part Two: "Technodigital Bodies and the Question of Hegemonic Desperation and Control," returns to the older machine/human iteration that existed in sf before the conception of virtual reality — one where the body and the machine are more physically intertwined. The machines discussed in Chapter 3 are not inhabited by the human and humanoid subjectivities, but instead they are used to transform otherwise autonomous bodies into technologically controlled, colonized in some cases, machines of labour hybridized with the commodity itself. Linking labour and commodification under capitalism, the texts examined here, I argue, challenge the

notion of choice and explore the degree to which everyone is complicit within the system yet ultimately choiceless in that complicity.

Chapter 4 turns to bodies that are *entirely* technologized. It focuses on alternatives to the often hypersexualized fembot — a being whom (male) humans have license to objectify given her actual object-quality. These include refreshing new opportunities for the female object of desire to turn the tables on her patriarchal controller and use her unique subjectivity to betray his expectations and break from her programming. In this final chapter I observe that these revolutionary characters do not fail to escape the oppressive capitalist system as do those in the previous chapters because like any real-world Westerner they *are made by* the system. Utilizing the theories of notable feminist scholars Audre Lorde and Donna Haraway, I examine the ways in which they rewrite their respective stories — rather than observing the futility of escape — and, effectively, use the system against those that would possess and control them.

The techno-digital spaces and bodies analysed in these chapters invoke an immateriality that speaks to the impossibility of escape from both the literal diegetic system and the metaphorical one of the real world. It seems fitting that we start with immaterial labour in relation to the digital capitalism described by Betancourt. The section that follows depicts worlds of work within ambiguous, pixelated, and fragmentary digital spaces. The abstract nature of these worlds demonstrates the ways that seemingly limitless possibility can be deceptively (and paradoxically) limiting. When lost in the vast maze of the digital system, it can be difficult for an individual, of any socioeconomic background, to see the constricting boundaries that so-effectively distract her from disputing her precarious condition.

PART ONE:
Virtual Space Narratives and the Immaterial Labouring Body

This first section of the dissertation observes a confluence of social movements and technological moments between the late 1960s and the early 1970s that generated not only a new subgenre of science fiction but a new fictional setting for it as well. The funding and subsequent release of a brand-new digital communication system called ARPANET, which would inform the design of the World Wide Web, coincided with the integration of computers in more working environments. Only in fiction, and arguably in some intellectual circles, could it be imagined that one day this new web-based technology and these machines would so deeply affect the working world that many taking part in the uprisings worldwide in 1968 and 1969 were fighting to improve.

Where, as Marx saw it, the machine was outside of and *attached* to the (hu)man, it is now the human that has become a pixelated fragment of the digital machine. No longer is she held firmly by the arms and legs, an "organ" to generate energy for the machine; she is now swallowed whole, consumed by the machine — even while she consumes its products. Whereas the theoretical and fictional mechanized human was a sign of its time — part of the Futurist values of speed and acceleration (Berardi *ATF* 21) and a hope for the fulfilment of John Maynard Keynes's fifteen-hour work week[11] — the postmodern, post-60s, cyber-body has become completely immersed in the system; this is a reflection of the state of overwork in which we now live.

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[11] See Keynes's 1930 essay, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren."

The non-physical fictional bodies discussed in this section powerfully reflect contemporary anxieties surrounding forms of technological "advancements" that may be yet to come. When the body is fragmented — pixelated within the digital machine — it can no longer be understood in a traditional productive manner. Its existence is affective, and it demands allegiance to corporate and consumer capitalism — or, "the system" as I call it, echoing the machine metaphor — instead of the social self. While these bodies move easily enough through the nonlinear, digital, spaces, previously existing lines separating work time from leisure time disappear, paradoxically creating firmer invisible boundaries that are determined by categories of economic and social class. The immaterial nature of work that arose out of the 60s and 70s is intensified today and in fiction we see it expressed in intangible (and, effectively, immaterial) cyber and virtual space. Yet this invisibility is given substance through the media of film and television; making such an impalpable space tangible and material within fictional diegeses allows for an examination of the precarious nature of labour and the consumer society under capitalism.

CHAPTER 1
Lost in the Circuits: *Simulacron-3, World on a Wire,* and the Birth of a New SF Body

> The general intellect has a body. An erotic body, a social body. But when we are working in the network machine we forget about that body. This is sickening us. This is producing pathologies... Remember, you — general intellect, you have a body. This body is precaritized in the present condition.
>
> – Franco "Bifo" Berardi[12]

This chapter takes up narratives that visually depict the invisible boundaries that are components of the digital capitalist machine, and which prevent equal access to rights and personal freedom within Western society. These sociopolitical boundaries represent the invisible power hierarchies and the hegemonic structures endemic to the capitalist system that have caused an entire society to be blind to its state of overwork. According to Franco Berardi, the breakneck rate at which computer technologies have grown since the 1960s has much to do with this overwork. Other post-Marxists such as Maurizio Lazzarato have identified this time as generative of immaterial labour — a form of labour that arguably revolutionized both how we work and the link between work and the subjectivity of the worker.

My central object of analysis in this chapter is Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1973 film *World on a Wire* (*WOAW*) — a made-for-TV movie based on Daniel F. Galouye's 1964 novel *Simulacron-3*. I focus on the film due to the unique staging and often psychedelic *mise-en-scène* with which it captures the paranoia narrative that was a common trope during the Cold War and situating the diegesis within a deceptively enclosed space. This spatially influenced paranoia

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[12] From the video "Bifo: After the Future," produced by the Infoscape Centre for the Study of Social Media.

narrative located within a computerized virtual space became very popular in the 1990s in what Florian Leitner calls "immersion paranoia." After *WOAW*, other narratives often situated the protagonists as puppets, servants, or prisoners within cyber-worlds made of similar technologies to those their readers and audiences were purchasing as brand-new home appliances. Fassbinder's direction of the film adaptation demonstrates visually (where Galouye's novel could not) the invisible boundaries produced by the class hierarchies and hegemonic structures of capitalism set up in the narrative about a virtual world with invisible limitations of its own.

Though this chapter is primarily dedicated to discussing Fassbinder's film, I follow that discussion by pointing to several more recent texts that build on the foundations set by the earlier narrative and its predecessors. I briefly discuss the Wachowskis' *Matrix* series and its animated prequel (1999-2003) — a series that, unlike *WOAW*, *has* become part of the sf cannon, so it would be remiss to not include it. These films take up many of the tropes that first appeared in Fassbinder's film, yet the Wachowskis' most significant development of them is the concept of dressing up as a sign of hegemonic infiltration — something that I will call the "costume dichotomy" in my *WOAW* analysis. Finally, the British science fiction series *Black Mirror*, created by Charlie Brooker and Annabel Jones, which has also had surprisingly little academic attention, bears discussing as a contemporary adaptation of issues engaged in the formerly mentioned films. My analysis of the episode "White Christmas," from the series' second season, acts as a segue between Fassbinder's timely reflection of contemporary technological anxieties about the supercomputer in the 60s and 70s and an especially terrifying modern update involving being imprisoned by computer/digital technologies, which Chapter 2 will expand on in relation to the question of class and who is in charge. "White Christmas" marks a shift in what is signified by immersion paranoia, now that we live in a society that appears to have embraced digital and virtual technologies yet does not seem to have changed how it views labour and class.

The episode alludes to how recent technologies might be tweaked, allowing consumers to imprison a clone of themselves as an ideal personal assistant via similarly immersive tech to that in *WOAW*. This episode invokes questions about power over, and disengagement from, the Other, which are endemic to capitalist exchange — issues that are further discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

KARL MARX AND THE MACHINE OF CAPITALIST PRODUCTION

The machine is but one kind of technological tool to have shown up after several millennia of tools being used to facilitate work, and it is not within the scope of this dissertation to provide a thorough history of the machine. Yet the mechanized technology that was born during the industrial revolution was a game-changer for capitalist production and, arguably, its existence is chiefly responsible for its growth. Thus, it's important to consider the machine in one of its earliest iterations as a tool of capitalist labour. In a section of *Grundrisse* entitled "The Fragment on Machines," Marx anthropomorphises the machine, describing it as a living entity, a "mighty organism," with its own limbs and even a soul (693). The work performed by the worker is thus a mere extension or component of the machine, an organ of the complete system with its own particular function:

> The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism. (693)

Describing the machine as a biological organism complicates the binary between human and machine and implicates the human as a fueling component of the capitalist system.

Though aspects of Marx's notion of the capitalist machine and its control over the worker's bodily autonomy can still be applied to many forms of work today, the advent of digital media and the move away from, strictly physical, mechanized labour means a change in how thoroughly the metaphorical machine affects the subjectivity of the worker. The worker's body, for Marx, was subsumed by the governing machine, yet the "self-activating objectified labor" (Lemmens 289) remained apart from independent knowledge and subjectivity. I examine virtual space narratives that imagine this spatial organization in another way, positioning us *inside* the machine, yet my analysis builds on this existing understanding about the (capitalist) machine's sociopolitical control over workers and consumers.

LIFE IN THE MACHINE

"The Machine Stops"

After Marx, E.M. Forster's "The Machine Stops" is perhaps the first text to present cultural anxieties related to technological progress from within a machine environment. In 1908, shortly before writing "The Machine Stops," Forster heard of the first airplane to successfully fly over a kilometre[13] and wrote in his journal:

> [I]f I live to be old I shall see the sky as pestilential as the roads. It really is a new civilization. I have been born at the end of the age of peace and can't expect to feel anything but despair. Science, instead of freeing man … is enslaving him to machines. […] The little houses that I am used to will be swept away, the fields will

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[13] Pilot, Henry Farman, won the Deutsche-Archdeacon prize of 50 000 francs (Crouch).

stink of petrol, and the airships will shatter the stars … such a soul as mine will be crushed out. (Beauman)

The subterranean narrative Forster wrote the following year depicts a society that has devolved physically, unable to breathe the air above ground. Each individual has their own room, which they almost never leave, and everyone communicates via a system of buttons and messages entirely anticipating our current use of Internet and social media. Euthanasia is available by lottery to anyone that isn't totally satisfied with their existence, and it has become "demerit to be muscular. Each infant was examined at birth, and all who promised undue strength were destroyed. Humanitarians may protest, but it would have been no true kindness to let an athlete live" (Forster 33). By ultimately being trapped in a machine-space filled with anything they would ever need and acclimatizing to a lack of intimate or proximal contact, the population of the machine unsurprisingly becomes helpless, antiseptic, and completely unable to work together.

A reflection of the living machine of Marx's time, the inhabitants of Forster's story are impoverished of actual human society due to having been raised and regulated on all sides by the non-human entity. In their isolation they can no longer care for themselves or each other, anticipating the contemporary capitalist world whose people's reliance on and fetishization of technology arguably has created social alienation as well, compelling individuals to work more so that they can make more in order to buy more — all of this to make up for their ever-decreasing spare time. While Forster may have been the first to write about literal human imprisonment within a machine to express concerns about machine technology in 1909, the texts I examine in this chapter update such a concern to fit the computerized and immaterial nature of the machine technologies of their time. I base my analyses of these texts on works by thinkers

who either tangentially or intentionally take up the machine metaphor as a fitting tool for consideration of the subsumption of the body within (and by) the capitalist "machine."

EARLY VIRTUAL REALITY IN SCIENCE FICTION

Cold War anxieties surrounding technological progress in the 1960s inspired a number of science fictional texts that engaged with forms of AI and virtual systems "taking over." Even before the 60s, Ray Bradbury wrote in "The Veldt" (1950) of a virtual nursery that attacks and consumes the parents that get in the way of their children's obsession with it. Other supercomputer narratives of this time presented characters physically trapped within the virtual "walls" of a machine, as in Bradbury's story, or battling against the control of an external supercomputer, as in D.F. Jones's 1966 novel *Colossus* (adapted to film in 1970 by Joseph Sargent as *Colossus: The Forbin Project*). Yet Harlan Ellison's "I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream" (1967) approaches the phenomenon of the alienation of the subject by the virtual machine more closely.

"I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream"

Ellison's story reveals characters that have mysteriously had their brains plugged into a personified machine called "AM," who treats torturing them like it is a game. The horrifically powerful and sadistic machine inexplicably kills off all but five members of humanity and proceeds to torture and incapacitate them in various ways without allowing them to die. The individuals whose actions are controlled by AM know that death is the only way out. But since death is not allowed, the group must form a secret death pact requiring one of them, Ted, to sacrifice himself for its successful execution. After the rest are gone, it is he that utters the titular concluding line, "I have no mouth. And I must scream" (250). AM, whose punishments are

never fatal, always fits them to the nature of the subject's subversion. Accordingly, Ted loses his bodily capacity to speak after having chosen to keep silent about the pact. Ellison's narrative laid out a lot of the foundational tropes for immersive machine narratives to come, particularly the need for innovative collective action to escape the system, and the use of death as the only form of escape once the machine and the human are already fused together. Though Ellison was not the first to trap bodies within a fictional virtual system, his Cold War-infused politics of social control invoking the fear (and fetishization) of technology would inform other VR narratives, including many of those discussed throughout this dissertation.

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES AND IMMATERIAL LABOUR: A NEW WAY TO WORK

The 1960s brought about a new fictional technologized body at the same time as a new way to work in the real world was facilitated by the technology that inspired the fiction. The specific forms of technological advances during this time can be tied to concerns beyond the anxieties stemming from a war being waged between two international superpowers. With advancements in digital media, particularly the advent of the ARPANET in 1966, the 1960s and 1970s were a transformative time for the nature of labour. These changes coincided with worldwide student and labour uprisings in and around the year 1968. This period marks the beginning of the Digital Revolution — a time when digital information communication technology (ICT) began to make advances that would soon facilitate globalization. Initially funded by the US Department of Defense, ARPANET's technical foundation and design would eventually transition into today's Internet. At its base, this non-linear form of media allowed work to take place more efficiently due to the expedited rate of communication, and from any location (ultimately facilitating global trade and international business communications of the

future); with this technological growth came the possibility for labourers to work more efficiently, consequently creating a hegemonic drive for them to work more.

Immaterial Labour

In his essay "Immaterial Labor," Lazzarato identifies a transformation in the "composition, management, and regulation of the workforce — the organization of production …[and] the role and function of intellectuals and their activities within society" (134) that began in and around the 1970s. A form of work hitherto exclusive to the bourgeois classes was coming to the masses, in sync with and facilitated by digital computer. To describe this new form of work, Lazzarato coined the term "immaterial labour," which he defines as "the labor that produces the informational and cultural content of the commodity" (133). Of these two aspects of labour, the former "refers directly to the changes taking place in workers' labor processes in big companies in the industrial and tertiary sectors, where the skills involved in direct labor are increasingly skills involving cybernetics and computer control (and horizontal and vertical communication)." The latter involves "the kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion" (133). Thus, this second aspect of immaterial labour involves the shaping of subjectivities, which Lazzarato notes had not been "recognized as 'work'" (133). Lazzarato also observes the effect of these new labour modes since the 70s on how work is performed and organized. He notes a blurring of the lines between physical and intellectual labour that relates to an increasing emphasis on the immaterial:

> The "great transformation" that began at the start of the 1970s has changed the very
> terms in which the question is posed. Manual labor is increasingly coming to involve
> procedures that could be defined as "intellectual," and the new communications

technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge. It is not

simply that intellectual labor has become subjected to the norms of capitalist

production. What has happened is that a new "mass intellectuality" has come into

being, created out of a combination of the demands of capitalist production and the

forms of "self-valorization" that the struggle against work has produced. (134)

Though, elsewhere in his generative essay, Lazzarato suggests that there might be revolutionary

potential in such a communicative mode of collective learning, his definition and descriptions of

immaterial labour also acknowledge the assimilatory nature of this kind of labour. Employers

require a new subjective mode of participation, an "investment of subjectivity [that] affects

workers in varying ways according to their positions within the factory hierarchy" (134). This

internalized embodiment of labour may not always be physically rigorous but it can be equally

draining at the mental and emotional levels and has created for many a state of being always

already at work, one of the qualities of digital capitalism. This is the case for the workers in

World on a Wire, who, despite always working, are shown to appear at leisure most of the time.

WORLD ON A WIRE
Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1973)

Rainer Werner Fassbinder was an instrumental contributor to the New German Cinema

movement of the 60s, 70s, and 80s. The movement started as a response to Germany's declining

production of and interest in theatrical film. The movement's works tended toward the

experimental yet varied greatly in style.[14] *World on a Wire* was produced for television because

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[14] Julia Knight describes the movement thusly: "Although grouped together, these films resist clear generic delineation and are in fact marked by their stylistic and thematic diversity. Nevertheless, critics have identified three common elements that unite them. Firstly, all the directors were born around the time of the Second World War, grew up in a divided Germany, and can therefore be characterised as a generation. Secondly, due to funding criteria and opportunities, the 'new cinema' was based on an artisanal mode of production which facilitated close collaborations and a high degree of experimentation. And thirdly, the films shared a concern with contemporary West German reality on the one hand and a search for audiences and markets on the other" (1).

Fassbinder was uncompromising about its length (Lorenz), and, in the early 1970s, German television stations provided better funding than film companies (Knight 8). At a runtime of 205 minutes, the film was too long for standard film release but an acceptable length for broadcast as a two-part television presentation (Lorenz). He also knew that television would allow him to reach a larger audience, and indeed he did: the film aired during prime-time with "a guaranteed audience of millions" (Gemünden). Though the prolific filmmaker made forty-four movies before he died at the age of thirty-seven, *WOAW* is Fassbinder's only film that can be categorized as science fiction.

According to film critic Ed Halter, *WOAW* is a meta-narrative[15] of sorts. Rather than using non-existent futuristic technology that is expected in a science fiction film, Fassbinder repurposed analogue technology such as television sets to reflect the digital world of Simulacron. In so doing, suggests Halter, the film itself is positioned as a "virtual" space of its own: "Fassbinder uses computer simulation as a metaphor to think about his own métier, film and television, as a form of virtual reality. The characters become little 'identity units,' trapped within the artificial world created by the filmmaker-as-programmer, unknowingly playing out his directives." Yet the film's computer simulation is not limited to representing the filmmaker's métier; it speaks more broadly to the situation of labour of its time as well as the constricting nature of capitalist society, which remains in some ways applicable today. Moreover, the representation of future digital technologies by existing analogue ones within the diegesis is significant because *WOAW* (and its literary source) arose out of a new technological revolution that was deeply engaged in issues related to the changes in the form and nature of labour. Technologies such as the video phones used in Stiller's office reflect accelerated communications technologies that were yet to come but that are presented, believably, as an

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[15] My word, not his.

intercom-system with a video camera attached to it. The manner in which an operator returns from the simulation world requires a telephone, as well, once again presenting a digital process by way of what was then only an analogue invention. Though Fassbinder did not usually produce science fiction, he uses the genre to speak to his current political and social moment.

An Immaterial Labourer *par Excellence*

Fassbinder's protagonist, Fred Stiller,[16] operates very well within such a system. He is the definition of immaterial labourer *par excellence*. As a computer programmer, he has helped design a data-collection system called Simulacron, filled with subjective "identity-units," unaware that they are not tangible, material, living humans. Stiller not only performs his daily work on computers and with information, but his job is to interact with and manipulate a reality within a digital computer program. Thus, his work engages both aspects of immaterial labour as per Lazzarato's definition. Indeed, though it does not seem so at first, *WOAW* is entirely about work; everyone is always working even when they seem to be at leisure, and the fact that each character serves a function[17]— like a cog in a wheel or a contributing organ to the machine's anatomy — is made manifest within the film's diegesis.

Stiller eventually discovers that he, too, is trapped within a system like Simulacron, thus making him not only an immaterial labourer but an immaterial subject — a product himself. In what follows, I trace the multiple ways in which being lost in the system is reflected in this narrative by examining not only the hegemonic drive for upward mobility and Stiller's inability to escape the program that has become his reality, but also how certain characters are pushed to the margins and represented as mere objects of desire (in the case of women) and of control (in

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[16] In *Simulacron-3,* the protagonist is called Douglas Hall. Fassbinder changed most of the characters' names, making them sound more plausibly German.
[17] I use this word deliberately due to its relationship to mechanical operation.

the case of visible minorities) with even less hope of escaping the system due to their limited

capacity to move within its circuits. Not only is this a foundational narrative in its taking up of

the matter of a lived (expressly capitalist) reality within what we now call cyberspace,[18] but my

thorough analysis of the film unveils an accurate depiction of a capitalist world of work from

which apparently no one is exempt. Very little scholarly attention has been paid to *World on a

Wire* (in English at least), and neither the film nor the book upon which it is based remotely

approach the familiarity that sf scholars have with William Gibson or Bruce Sterling as founders

of the cyber genre. Yet I demonstrate in what follows that the film should be seen as a canonical

science fiction text — or at least generative to sf narratives engaging alternate realities facilitated

by computer technology.

Stiller is an attractive, well-educated, white male in 1970s Germany, so his potential for

upward mobility is strong. He is not yet at "the top," however, as he is not present when the

leading men at his firm appear in the first scene, discussing with the Secretary of State (Heinz

Meier) their new invention, Simulacron. Professor Henri Vollmer (Adrian Hoven), the lead

researcher on the simulated reality project, behaves strangely at the meeting, telling the Secretary

"You are nothing more than the image others have made of you;"[19] and later, after telling

Günther Lause (Ivan Desny) that he knows something no one else knows, he suddenly collapses

and dies. *WOAW* complexifies the simple anxieties about computer technology's effect on

society expressed in Galouye's novel by making visual (on the screen) the invisible class and

power hierarchies at play within the capitalist machine and drawing attention to the deceptive

reality in which all characters dwell.

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[18] See William Gibson, "Burning Chrome" (1982).
[19] All quotes from *World on a Wire* are from the Criterion DVD release's English subtitles.

A World of Work

Stiller is only introduced in the second scene, at a company party hosted at the home of the Institute's chief executive, Herbert Siskins (Karl Heinz Vosgerau). Introducing the protagonist in the second scene establishes where he sits in the power hierarchy of the story, which centres on the Institute for Cybernetics and Futurology[20] and its employees. The scene itself sets up all the issues taken up in Fassbinder's film that are related to work and capitalist hegemony.[21] It establishes the film's visual and performance aesthetics and demonstrates the role of each sort of character within the diegesis. The conceptually oxymoronic "work-party" takes place in the Siskins's "private" space, yet the space is presumably not the living space in which he usually spends time. Siskins is described in Galouye's novel as "an extraordinary host" (5) and that aspect of his character is well demonstrated in the film and this scene in particular. The party is held in a part of his home designed expressly for work-related socialising — and not living. The space therefore reflects the collective subjectivity that is central to Lazzarato's description of immaterial labour. Being the boss at a large software company at the cutting edge of technology, Siskins is unsurprisingly wealthy; this is reflected in how his party is set up. There is a large stage on which a cabaret-style singer performs, an indoor swimming pool, and, of course, an open bar with full service.

The manner in which Stiller and his co-workers travel through and engage with each other in these three spaces within the scene sets the stage for all the various character roles within the film that each speak to different ways in which different subjectivities are trapped

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[20] Institut für Kybernetik und Zukunftsforschung (Institute for Cybernetics and Future Research).

[21] Particularly in relation to the capitalism of its time, yet it also anticipates the contemporary movement that involves the growing trend in the West of working in "third places" like coffee shops such as Starbucks. A "Third Place" is a term used in community planning to indicate a community space in which people gather other than the primary spaces of home and work (Oldenburg). Recently such spaces have been lauded as idealized alternative workspaces, and even incorporated as gathering places within office buildings yet apart from the office(s) ("Real Work").

within the capitalist system. The ten-minute scene sets up Stiller's potential for growth within the company as well as his breakneck transition from a hegemonically privileged and careless white male who becomes briefly invested the system (though not fully immersed) into a much more serious individual that remains skeptical about that same system. The issue of keeping up appearances (and playing one's part) is central throughout the film, and Stiller's smug relationship with clothing speaks directly to his unique capacity to control (some of) his movements from scene to scene while all other characters fail to have as much control. Clothing, makeup, and the nature of mobility are performed differently by different kinds of characters — notably by women and people of colour. The varying levels of autonomy represented by these characterizations are developed within the 212-minute film, yet Siskins's party is where most of them are set up; it is also where we observe Stiller effectively move up in social standing and transition through several micro-subjectivities himself.

From "Small-fry" to "the Next Bracket"

Stiller's first interaction in this scene is with the barman, Rainer (Rainer Langhans).[22] Though clearly of inferior social ranking, Rainer refuses Stiller a drink from his serving tray, pointing him in the direction of the bar. Stiller has little success at the bar as well, which demonstrates his average standing amongst the guests. Less than a minute later, Siskins teases him about not being able to get a drink (and easily gets one for them both) and Stiller retorts that he must be "small fry." After suggesting to Stiller that "maybe you'll grow," Siskins leads him on a stroll around the pool[23] that begins by him asking Stiller to tell him his dream car:

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[22] Notably, Langhans was a prominent member of the 1968 student movement in West Germany.
[23] The swimming pool has a long history as a status symbol in the Western world. For a thorough discussion of the cultural significance of pools in Western popular culture, including a brief discussion of pool culture in Europe see Lucy Scholes's article "Beneath the Surface: The 'Hidden Depths' of Swimming Pools."

STILLER: Pardon me?

SISKINS: Your dream car. It's a simple question.

STILLER: Oh, God… A Corvette

SISKINS: I see, a Corvette… 275 HP.

STILLER: And about 40,000 marks.

SISKINS: Beyond your wage bracket?

STILLER: Somewhat, but you asked about my dream car, not my wage bracket.

SISKINS: What bracket do you want?

STILLER: The next one.[24]

Stiller's flippant attitude in this discussion with his superior, who seems to be (and ultimately is) offering him a promotion, reveals that he doesn't stand on ceremony or take most things seriously. Being systemically privileged as a straight, white, handsome man, though, he may not need to work as hard as others to succeed. He even admits, unapologetically, that he is not as "good" as Vollmer at his job. It is in this moment, as the two men walk around the pool and for the duration of the film, that Stiller becomes the subject of everyone's gaze.[25] He orders a drink for Siskins's secretary Gloria (Barbara Valentin), this time seamlessly. As he and Siskins complete their walk and unofficially seal the deal on his upcoming promotion, the rest of the cast exhibit minimal motion with their gaze fixed on Stiller, affirming his role as the protagonist in tandem with his transition from "small-fry" to Corvette owner.

Though Stiller doesn't seem concerned with how others see him and initially makes light of what men will do to be taken seriously, the question about his "dream car," followed by a casual discussion about his career goals, appears to stir up latent hegemonic career values within

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[24] Both ellipses are from Criterion's English subtitles. They do not indicate an omission.
[25] Background actors, as well as some in the foreground, are often staring off dramatically or directly at Stiller. This significant direction of the cast lends to the psychedelic *mise en scène*, but I will return to its much more significant importance in several pages.

him. Automobiles have been especially strong signifiers of both social status and capitalist productivity in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. According to Berardi, "the mass production of the automobile became possible [when] … the mobilization of social energies was submitted to the goal of the acceleration of labor's productivity" (Berardi, *ATF* 21). The short (social) walk at Siskins' party entails not only the discussion about dreams and goals but also Siskins' effective interview of Stiller — inquiring into the former's capacity to do the job properly and expediently, or, in other words, his capacity for productivity. Siskins also seems to be considering Stiller's character, asking him, in reference to Vollmer, "He was pigheaded, don't you agree?" Their stroll, which lasts only one-minute, culminates in Siskins ensuring that Stiller understands that the offer isn't formalized just yet, then leaving him with a parting reference to the Corvette. Such an interaction would understandably invoke some amount of ambition in an employee; even one as nonchalant as Stiller.

Before the walk — where Stiller physically exercises his inherent right to (upward) mobility with an affluent superior — he tells a woman coming on to him at the party that, if she is interested, she may look him up in the phone book. This off-handed statement as he walks away from her demonstrates his general lack of interest in making an effort, yet at the end of his talk with Siskins, he tells his future boss that he is "tough," thus exhibiting some level of initiative to the man who will soon get him that dream car. Later, however, Stiller is taken into a back room with Lause who begins to reveal that they themselves live in a virtual reality not unlike Simulacron, but not before disappearing abruptly and sending Stiller on a fruitless search for his colleague for the duration of the film.

I argue that Stiller's unique position as a fully immersed member of the capitalist labour machine (remember that even he does not yet realise that this immersion is actual, let alone metaphorical), but one who clearly doesn't respect it, is what allows him to realize its artificiality

and ultimately survive to escape it. The system in which he lives and works (always at the same time) is not an analogue one — by design, this machine and its inhabitants cannot abide colouring outside of lines that are not there. The non-linear design of digital technology therefore requires its parts, including its identity units (we might call these *subjectivity units*), to function according to plan. There is no space for ambiguity — no room for error in a system of zeros and ones. If a unit in Similacron does not function as it was meant to, it is simply terminated. This complete control of the system over its subjects (who must always be working even when they think they are at leisure) is an apt depiction of the state of labour within consumer capitalism after the digital revolution and at the dawn of an immaterial labour force. Stiller's escape from the system, as I will discuss later, may indeed be due to his anomalous programming by one of the system designers. Before he is shown to be particularly rebellious, however, his walk around the pool with the boss affects how he is perceived by others and that in turn affects his position both socially and within the company.

In the background of the party scene, and foregrounded substantially for the first few minutes, a female cabaret singer played by Solange Pradel sings Marlene Dietrich's "Boys in the Backroom." The song, its lyrics,[26] and Pradel's performance provide an apt backdrop to the rest of the party, one that contributes to our understanding of the society exhibited within the diegesis. Ultimately, the song is about ensuring that the speaker is estimated as worthy in society — that that they fit in:

> See what the boys in the backroom will have
>
> And tell them I'm having the same

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[26] Fassbinder opted to have the French singer perform the English version of the song, which Dietrich had recorded in German as well. This was surely a deliberate choice on the director's part, as the German lyrics ostensibly tell the story of a woman's sexual attraction to and weakness for men — very different from the gender-ambiguous English version that I argue situates the speaker as a near equal to the "boys" of the song's subject. My thanks to Birgit Esser for the translation assistance that helped me confirm the functional difference between the English and the German lyrics.

Go see what the boys in the backroom will have

And give them the poison they name

And when I die don't spend my money

On flowers and my picture in a frame

Just see what the boys in the backroom will have

And tell them I sighed and tell them I cried

And tell them I died of the same

[…]

And when I die don't pay the preacher

For speaking of my glory and my fame

Just see what the boys in the backroom will have

And tell them I sighed and tell them I cried

And tell them I died of the same

Figure 1 Solange Pradel as the Cabaret Singer in Fassbinder's *WOAW*

Pradel (Figure 1) paces the stage with a look of smarmy confidence that is artificial and "cute" at best; the song *is*, after all, performed at a festive event, so the audience would perceive it as a pleasant musical act. But in fact, the performance is ironic, since the overly confident looking singer knows that as a woman performer she is there for the passive enjoyment of all and any kind of agency is merely a spectacle. The subject of the song is a follower, one whose needs are secondary to those "boys" who are presumed to be more powerful. She wants them to believe that she, too, drinks what they drink — even though it is not clear if she does: the colloquial term "poison" used to describe alcohol suggests that she does not even care for drinking. In her original performance of the song on the soundtrack of a western film called *Destry Rides Again* (George Marshall 1939), Dietrich sings in a low register, presents a gender-bending performance, and behaves aggressively towards a waitress who gets in her way. In subsequent recorded-live performances, she complicates the earlier portrayal of male-coded power by frequently slurring her speech, making the words difficult to comprehend. The slurred performance, which is duplicated by Pradel in Fassbinder's film, reveals perhaps a certain pleasure in not being in control or doing what is expected and accepted by one's peers.

The lyrics, combined with this performance, tell a complex story that complicates the notions of power, control, desire, and identity. Preserving her memory, when she dies, seems unimportant unless it has to do with whatever is going on in the backroom. She doesn't have time to do things that would make her memorable, certainly not as a unique individual. Instead, she desires that the boys in the backroom, individuals whose company she doesn't yet keep, think that she is (or was) one of them. There is an emptiness to the desire for acceptance reflected in the song, yet the woman giving the performance is captivating, walking confidently along the stage. She looks at everyone and no one simultaneously while those in the audience

gaze upon her. As a singing and dancing entertainer, her job is to provide an experiential service to Siskins's employees — to give them a good time. Though much of this performance is off-camera, it sets the stage[27] for the rest of the film and its characters. The singer appears to know that she is not the only one giving a performance in the room, but she, at least, perhaps due to this knowledge, has some level of agency in her performance unlike many of the others in the room — especially the other women whom I discuss later.

Stiller, too, has knowledge; it begins with his own inherent privilege, and by the end of the scene he starts to realize that his world — a world of work — is in fact artificial, just as he is an immaterial subject within it. In this awareness, he moves as freely as the singer does, yet both remain within the confines of the invisible digital boundaries. The clear differences between the two, however, are the intention with which they move and the circumstances under which they have been permitted to do so. It bears recalling now that none of the characters at this point (except for Vollmer, who is now dead and Lause who soon disappears and is forgotten by all but Stiller) nor the viewer knows that they are really living in a simulated reality and are simulations themselves. Their society, though just a digitized illusion, organizes its citizen workers as hegemonically as does a Western capitalist society, and within this hegemonic system, the female artist, who performs physical-emotional labour, and the male computer-specialist, who does immaterial labour, have different roles to play.

The singer's pompous movements imply a humorous attitude toward the lyrics to Dietrich's song, *knowing* that as a female the desire to be "one of the boys" is a futile one yet she must still perform with arrogance. Stiller also knows, though he doesn't need to think about it, that his vague interest in moving up in his society is a natural part of his existence. He is nonchalant as he moves through the room, several times being splashed from the pool and never

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[27] The pun is intentional.

seeming overly concerned. He does not take keeping up with appearances as seriously as others; he is frequently self-deprecating and balks at convention. Asked if he will attend Vollmer's funeral, he notes that he will but that "the dead don't really care, do they?" His glibness indicates his carefree position of privilege, yet it also recalls that he is uniquely positioned to be more aware of his fabricated and imprisoned state than most others. This unique position is due to the combination of his inherent entitlement to privilege and his ability to move more freely than others who share his status. The position is precarized, however, because, we discover later, he has been designed by a programmer in his likeness, and the programmer has been playing with him all along. I will return to this unique position after discussing the various other positions demonstrated in the film. All of these positions relate to how the characters appear (to the audience and other characters as well as to themselves in the mirror) and how they look — where and on whom their gaze is focused.

THE COSTUME DICHOTOMY IN *WOAW*

Stiller's consciousness of privilege is reflected in how he treats dressing up as an arbitrary act. The nonchalance with which Stiller both dresses himself and discusses wardrobe in general is notable. Though Stiller cares little about clothing, the topic comes up quite often. The first time he discusses clothing is at the party, with the woman that makes a pass at him:

> WOMAN: "Ooh! La la!"
>
> STILLER: "It's padding, not muscles."
>
> WOMAN: "Ah!"
>
> STILLER: "To look manlier."
>
> WOMAN: "It's not all padding, is it?"

But it *is* — metaphorically, at least. And while he may not respect or even need it, he still puts the padded armour on. Furthermore, this conversation anticipates that which Stiller is not yet aware of — that it *is all padding*.[28] When he later gets the Corvette, he achieves another kind of faux-muscle[29] to make him "look manlier," and not only does this "costume" facilitate his movements throughout the film, it fuels Stiller's scenes with testosterone-filled machinery. The success of his intellectual labour is rewarded by his achieving his dream car — the only kind of muscle he needs to compliment his success. This metaphorical "muscle" replaces the physical muscle one could not acquire through immaterial labour.

Despite his privilege, Stiller is different from others like him, such as Siskins. He needs to be in order to become enlightened about the true state of things and somehow survive. He's uniquely capable of understanding what it means to be programmer and programmed.[30] The capitalist costumes he dons (business suits, tuxedo, sports car, etc.) contrast with frequent moments in which we see him disrobing, changing clothes, or simply lounging around shirtless. He is the only white man in the film to be seen with his shirt off; racially othered characters are — with small exception[31] — always shown without their shirts on, and when anyone (Stiller included) is shown in this way, it's usually pragmatically unnecessary or inappropriate, creating an effect of satire or uncomfortable orientalism. When Stiller encounters these othered bodies and when he wears little himself, it is always at imperative moments of realization about the true state of his world.

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[28] As Florian Leitner notes, it is ironic that Stiller "starts the film by unintentionally speaking the truth, that his body is all artificial" (272).

[29] The high-priced Corvette coupe was especially influential to the evolution of the "muscle-car" (Walker 38).

[30] Notably, the Wakowskis' *The Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), which was clearly influenced by central movements of this film, and which I briefly discuss later, involves a similar narrative arc: a computer programmer becomes enlightened about the artificial nature of his world. The majority of the other individuals who have the same knowledge are people of colour.

[31] Fassbinder's lover, El Hedi ben Salem (Hodgkiss), who plays a bodyguard, is the only black male actor cast in a speaking role and to be fully clothed in the film. There is also a fully-clothed black female extra near the pool at Siskin's party.

Though he is suspicious throughout the film's Part One about the mysterious disappearances of his colleagues, the revelation that his is an artificial world just like the one he'd designed comes from an escaped identity unit from Simulacron (one singularly designed to be self-aware and thus aware of his own immaterial subjectivity within a virtual system). Part Two is about Stiller's coming to terms with this revelation and negotiating his precarious place in the system. It is not merely a disorienting tale about what is real and not real that fuels Stiller's resulting paranoia and subsequent illness. As the only one who seems to care that Vollmer is gone and know that Lauser is missing, his confrontational interrogations of others paired with erratic behaviour due to his intense headaches and frequent drunkenness make him the prime suspect in Vollmer's murder.

As he becomes a wanted man, Stiller loses his inherent privilege to move at his own leisure and becomes a second-class member of his society, resulting in the inherent right to mobility transforming into a need to constantly move for survival. He nearly becomes what Zygmunt Bauman calls a "vagabond," a "low down," where he used to be a "tourist," a "high up." Bauman invokes these terms to denote those who can afford to consume and to travel at will and those who cannot and who are relegated to certain spaces or forced into perpetual motion due to inhospitable living conditions: "Those 'high up' … travel through life by their heart's desire and pick and choose their destinations according to the joys they offer. Those 'low down' happen time and again to be thrown out from the site they would rather stay in" (Bauman 86). Though Stiller never fully achieves the "vagabond" status, his antihegemonic behaviour causes him to be suspended from work, after which his movements become increasingly erratic. He eventually abandons the Corvette — the signifier of success for him since the start of the film — and travels by foot in an effort to avoid being captured by the police and, ultimately, to find a way out of the system.

At the apex of his awareness of his immateriality, prior to his suspension yet after accepting his existence as identity unit, Stiller accompanies Gloria to a dance lounge populated primarily by topless, black, male and female dancers. Their slow, seductive dancing in close proximity to one another suggests at least a sexual freedom and collective solidarity that resists control by the system, but they are also passive and exhibit no sense of agency. Their lack of costume and free bodily movement might be construed as a form of separation from the machine, but it's clearly because of race that they are in this place. Though they may not subscribe to the same hegemonic desires and rules as those at Siskins's party, and though Marx's machine does not appear to control their arms and legs, they remain within the system — bound to it or not. As the "vagabonds" described by Bauman, they may be in a space that "they would gladly leave behind — but they have nowhere else to go, since nowhere else they are likely to be welcomed and allowed to put up a tent" (87). They can only be this way, in this place, and in this objectified manner.

Where Gloria moves slowly through the dancers, staring intently at their bodies (she is usually the one objectified in this way), Stiller is drunk, moving through the room quickly, and ferociously expressing his touristic entitlement to movement while refusing to do so in a socially appropriate way. This is a freeing moment for him — he accepts the knowledge that he is a mere identity unity but also deems himself "crazy." He does not expect to be believed but he also returns to the careless and flippant attitude that he had at the beginning of the film, before being briefly subsumed by the comforts and commodities offered by capitalism. Still drunk, he returns to work and changes into a tuxedo with an especially large bowtie that emphasizes the inappropriateness of this particular costume to the occasion, linking him, once again, to the performer at the party and other artists shown later in the film whose exaggerated appearances are kept up not by costume clothing but costume makeup.

Makeup and the Costume Dichotomy

Those who wear a significant amount of makeup, similarly to those scantily clothed, are partially detached from the system due to their exaggerated portrayal of those more ingrained in the hegemonic work-world. The prominent appearance of mirrors in each scene suggests that they are frequently in use because, as I have already noted, image matters in a capitalist work environment. Thus, everyone habitually keeps track of their appearance as a culturally hegemonic expectation and most do not realize that doing so is a part of their work. By contrast, the individuals at the extreme ends of what I will call the costume dichotomy are partially detached from this hegemony: these ends involve the highly made-up and the insufficiently clothed. On each of these ends, individuals are more in touch with their bodies than the rest who suffer from lack of autonomy and, it seems, lack of consciousness.

In his essay on *WOAW*, "The Perfect Panopticon,"[32] Florian Leitner does not distinguish between those who are made up and those who are not, yet his description of those that are is notable: "Due to their pale faces, their bodies look highly artificial: the make-up lends them an aura of the ephemeral, the transient, as if the faces and bodies are vanishing behind thick paint, thus creating an impression of immateriality" (272). Leitner further states that this heavy makeup creates an "aesthetic of disappearance" (270), but he neglects to note that only a specific class of individuals is found with such makeup — they are those occupied and employed by the arts: dancers, performers, and the maître d' at a cabaret — none of whom have speaking roles in the film. Due to the performative, embodied, nature of their vocations, and their comparative ability to control some of their movements, those who are heavily made up seem conscious of the imperative to work and the rituals surrounding it, while they assert a limited amount of creative

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[32] This essay, published in *Science Fiction Film and Television* in 2009, is the only academic essay focussed only on *World on a Wire* to be published in an English-language academic journal.

independence. Though they are a part of the machine (represented by the Simulacron system) and their arms and legs are attached to it like the others, their eyes look where they want to, and their makeup alerts the viewer to their awareness that they are part of a system. One such artist is, of course, the singer who appears at the party and again later at the cabaret restaurant, but another notable character who dons a lot of makeup is the cabaret maître d' who looks knowingly at Stiller when the latter seeks a hiding place in his venue. Though he holds a stiff posture, befitting of his position, he lies to the police and leads Stiller out through the back way.

Where these individuals seem to aid Stiller in his effort to survive — perhaps due to an inherent consciousness of what it is to *perform* — the majority of the background cast does just the opposite. *WOAW* presents a world that is filled with work. This is observable through the purposeful lack of movement of the background actors while the primary action takes place. Everyone is *always* at work even when they appear to be socializing, and this is especially relevant to the employees of the Institute who comprise the majority of Stiller's society. These characters rest in the middle of the costume dichotomy, always perfectly dressed for the occasion and well-mannered, though their presence is every bit as obscure as those on either end of the dichotomy. These are the immaterial labourers who cannot see that they are under constant control, that they are nothing but data units that are only as significant as their programmers made them to be. These characters are perfectly comfortable in what they do — and, from what the camera reveals, that isn't much. Yet, they are always already at work in the same way as people living under capitalism are always already working, trying to work, or indirectly working as consumers and passive agents of the capitalist drive for constant growth. More than identity units, perhaps, they might be called "utility units."

The multi-levelled diegesis of *WOAW* exists in a surveillance society, which is clear already from the visual technologies present in the *mise-en-scène.* And yet, as Leitner notes, the

sometimes-limited view of camera angles is reminiscent of the scope of a hidden camera. Indeed, it is confirmed "that the technicians working on the program that created Stiller handle his virtual world in the same way that Stiller and his colleagues handle Simulacron. Consequently, his world is not only one of artificial bodies but of ubiquitous surveillance" (274-5). Programmers are also able to see through the eyes of individual identity units, which we see the first time Stiller enters Simulacron through the eyes of a truckdriver with a companion in the driver's seat.

In Stiller's world, outside of Simulacron, characters with nothing specific to contribute to the protagonist's plot seem to switch off and become nearly motionless, evoking no sense of agency or any personality at all. Yet, their eyes remain open, fixed on Stiller. Not only do they stand in for the audience who watches Stiller passively, but they also serve, at these times, as surveillance devices, presumably allowing the analysts in the world above to keep an eye on this character to whom they have allowed more combined mobility and agency than anyone else in the system. As simple programs, they maintain subjectivities that are revealed at times, but they are, in effect, the ocular organs of the machine (Figure 2). Like the identity unit that escaped Simulacron and enlightened him, Stiller is a wild-card, especially worthy of surveillance.

Figure 2 Stiller is always under surveillance by his friends and colleagues who are, like him, merely identity units — ocular organs of the machine.

Those who do the most staring off and consequently watching are the female characters who say very little that is unrelated to their own bodies or their relationship with other male characters.[33] The female characters with speaking roles are all either sexual or romantic conquests of Stiller's. Maya (Margit Carstensen), Stiller's secretary, is generally insignificant to the plot, yet her performance is noteworthy because how she is positioned and made up reflects her character's change in function. Gloria takes Maya's place, we later find out, because she has been asked to keep an eye on Stiller. For this to happen, Maya, with whom Stiller had clearly been sexually involved, must get sick[34]— being unable to work takes her out of the equation (Figure 3). She is reduced to a figure lying on a sofa bed continuously applying lipstick. Lying helpless and heavily desexualized (she even holds a doll as a pre-pubescent child might) and therefore useless to Stiller, her concern is all the more pressing that she still appears attractive to him — even if she isn't well enough to work. For this period of time, she, like the singer at the party, intuitively understands her diminished contribution as a woman in her society. Her makeup, which is just as heavy as the artists formerly mentioned, does not make her a radical like them, but it does indicate a sudden (if brief)[35] understanding of what it takes to fit in in an artificial society.

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[33] Indeed, though I will argue that it's certainly class-conscious, the film can in no way be deemed feminist. It doesn't even pass the Bechdel test (established in 1986 by Alison Bechdel in her comic "Dykes to Watch out For") which requires a film to have two female characters that speak to each other about something other than a man. In *WOAW* all female characters only interact with men and talk about their relationship or service to those men.

[34] Of course, she doesn't really "get sick." Her illness, or more aptly, her virus, is programmed into her code as an identity unit.

[35] After this period of being unwell, Maya disappears completely and then shows up healthy again as though nothing had happened. This time, however, she is in a sexual relationship with Stiller's friend Fritz Walfang (Günter Lamprecht).

Figure 3 Stiller's secretary, Maya (Margit Carstensen) is reduced to a childlike status as she lie on the sofa at home. She holds her doll while repeatedly applying lipstick — a subtle indication and awareness that they are in an artificial society where performance is everything.

Artificial Worlds: Artificial Escape?

When Stiller escapes the virtual world in which he was trapped, there is very little indication that he's somehow become free. Eva Vollmer (Mascha Rabben), a woman from the world above who had been inhabiting a data unit in her image and the wife of the designer of Stiller's world, helps him escape by somehow swapping his consciousness with that of her husband's. He awakens with Eva in a room with heavy mechanical blinds and almost no furniture. There are no mirrors, which is a notable difference from the rest of the film. Though he seems initially anxious, he becomes overjoyed when the automatic blinds rise. Eva approaches him and says "hair, eyes, mouth, neck, shoulders," affirming his new material existence. Leitner suggests that, "In its references to Stiller's material body, the final scene constitutes the antithesis to the scene in which he first appears" (272). Leitner refers here to the dialogue about the padding in Stiller's suit, which I discussed above, but I argue that in fact the moment is

reminiscent of Stiller's discussion with Gloria after his walk around the pool when he asks her about her measurements, and she says "you get fat, just sitting around." If we read Stiller's escape from his artificial world as an escape from a hegemonic world of work or, simply, an act of autonomy from the machine, it is not at all clear that he has truly escaped. Listing one's body parts merely objectifies that body rather than giving it a subjectivity, which is no different from discussing someone's bust, waist, and hip measurements. The door to the room is also locked, apparently from the outside. Thus, there is no evidence that Stiller's situation has improved; in fact, his new reality may be similar to that of the topless dancers in the lounge: he is free, but only in that pre-determined space.

The ambiguous ending of the film speaks to the complexity of how capitalist hegemony functions, and how agency is limited within a system whose parts are designed to function in specific ways. Stiller does not do anything revolutionary with his awareness that he and his friends are merely data units except try to escape and save himself. As we see with the death of Vollmer, the disappearance of Lause, and the death of Stiller's friend Franz (Wolfgang Schenck) once Stiller confides in him, the punishment for knowing the truth of being programmed is usually death. It is impossible for him to form any kind of collectivity to fight (and escape) the system because not only does the system assign individuals limited autonomy and predetermined access to mobility and opportunity — leaving the least-threatening groups as the most privileged and simultaneously least aware — it also simply extinguishes any program that shows signs of autonomous thought.

Berardi identifies a nearly identical interruption of the potential for developing collectives in contemporary Western society's dependence on technology — which I would add is most available to the economically privileged. Discussing the throngs of workers every

morning on the subway commuting to their respective (precarious) jobs, Berardi describes the effect of technological dependence on human community:

> Everyone wears headphones, everybody looks at their cellular device, everybody sits alone and silent, never looking at the people who sit close, never speaking or smiling or exchanging any kind of signal. They are traveling alone in their lonely relationship with the universal electronic flow. Their cognitive and affective formation has made of them the perfect object of a process of desingularization. They have been pre-emptied and transformed into carriers of abstract fractal ability to connect, devoid of sensitive empathy so as to become smooth, compatible parts of a system of interoperability… [T]hey seem incapable of human communication and solidarity; in short, they seem unable to start any process of conscious collective subjectivation. (*ATF* 132)

The machine in *WOAW* has so infiltrated the existence of its worker-inhabitants that they cannot know where it ends and they begin. Everyone, Stiller included, is literally trapped, lost in the system, no matter where they fall in the class hierarchy and no matter what level of effort they give or to what extent they mask themselves with the right accoutrement to be accepted by capitalist hegemony.

THE MATRIX AND IMMERSION PARANOIA AFTER *WOAW*

One cannot speak today of canonical virtual reality texts without invoking the Wachowskis' *Matrix* trilogy (1999-2003), which is itself indebted to *WOAW* in its worldbuilding. The films, in addition to the animated short film collection *The Animatrix* (Mahiro Maeda et al. 2003), present technophobia by invoking what Leitner calls the "immersion paranoia" (261) that was especially present in films released in 1999, by which time computers

were becoming regular consumer products. Leitner defines this narrative trope as one in which "characters are not always capable of distinguishing between the real and the artificial. They believe themselves to be in the true world while they are in fact immersed in a virtual reality created by computers" (269). Because more recent science fiction has expanded the level of consciousness of the subject in these kinds of narratives, I would amend this definition by emphasizing the *not always* and including narratives with characters who *can* distinguish that they exist within, or are antagonized by, a computer. *The Matrix* offers its protagonist a community of people that are also aware of, and choose to escape, the simulated reality.

The Contentious Costume Dichotomy in *The Matrix*

In both Fassbinder's and the Wachowskis' films, individuals who would be marginalized due to race and gender with fewer opportunities to work in well-paying jobs are presented in varying levels of dishabille. I have already discussed how this plays out for people of colour in *World on a Wire*, freeing them somewhat from the trapping costumes of the system yet relegating them to a segregated space, suggesting that though they do not agree with the system they cannot leave it. The first *Matrix* film takes place after a technological singularity due to the uprising of a machine race against humans. Captured humans were plugged into the machine, pacified by the illusory world of the Matrix — which looks nothing like the actual eradicated earth — and fed upon while the machines use the energy produced by their bodies. Not unlike Stiller's world, there remain different classes of people — workers and bourgeois alike — but most inhabitants of the Matrix do not know their world is created by a computer. The majority of survivors of the Singularity are African Americans — a clear casting decision by the Wachowskis that, I argue, situates previously disenfranchised individuals in the diegesis as singularly suited to surviving a war in which machines are taking over. The inhabitants of Zion

are enlightened about the apocalyptic state of the world after humans lost the war with the machines, thus presenting them optimistically as revolutionaries left to fight for humanity.

The uprising of the human-made machines is highlighted in "The Second Renaissance Part I" and "The Second Renaissance Part II" of *The Animatrix,* a series of animated short films that serve as prequels to the live action film series. The AI machines were created to serve humans ("Renaissance Part 1") and thus to replace the kind of low-wage work that has historically been reserved for people of colour and immigrants. The first android to attack a human is named Bi66er ("Renaissance Part 1"), after Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas in *Native Son*, a young African American man who accidentally kills his wealthy white employer's daughter to avoid being falsely accused of having raped her. This parallel to the controversial novel from 1940 parallels the ill-treatment of the machines by the more entitled humans to that of people of colour by privileged and empowered whites. Both Bi66er and Bigger commit murder out of fear for their own safety. Though the connection between the machines and non-white humans does not exempt them from the wrath of the machines, it draws the viewer's attention to the power politics inherent in *The Matrix*'s diegetic history, which is no different from the real world of the 20th century. Thus, their presumable distance from the technology, as well as their disconnection from an increasingly mechanistic society, might have protected people of colour somewhat when the machines attack through the technologies which humans had come to depend on ("Renaissance Part I").

As he presents a small battery to Neo (Keanu Reeves), Morpheus (Laurence Fishburn) explains: "The Matrix is a computer-generated dreamworld, built to keep us under control, in order to change a human being into this." Humans literally plugged into and fed on by the machines believe that everything is "normal" by contemporaneous standards, though the Earth was actually decimated when the humans "scorched the sky," thinking that the machines would

die without its energy. As in many post-apocalyptic narratives, most aspects of capitalism have been effectively eradicated in the real world, yet all of its aesthetic trappings, its fashion, its gourmet food, *and* its jobs remain within the Matrix. The illusory comforts the consumption-labour cycle provides are essential for keeping the masses of human fuel working passively for the machines.

A similar costume dichotomy separating groups of people with differing levels of agency to that in Fassbinder's film appears between the "woke" members of Zion and those who inhabit or enter the Matrix. Clothing worn by the protagonists as they travel in the Matrix is often made with artificial materials like latex and is beautiful and expensive.[36] This aesthetic matches the commodity fetishism designed by, and apparent within, the Matrix. The fashion is part of what Morpheus calls "residual self-image: it is the mental projection of your digital self" (*The Matrix*). By contrast, people in Zion are meanly dressed. Their clothes, threadbare and made of natural materials, reflect the fragile mortality linked with being out of the system. Their garments are not always unattractive, but they are human-made, in earthy colour tones, and many of them have large holes in them. The film's costume designer offered the extra-diegetic knowledge that "Everything [in Zion] is grown hydroponically… They grow flax and hemp and things you can weave" (quoted in Orecklin np). Their frugal, minimalist clothing is especially observed in the famous and oft-criticized "rave scene," which takes place in *Matrix Reloaded* before the humans leave for war with the machines.[37] In this scene, the inhabitants of Zion dance orgiastically —

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[36] Notably, although the costume designer, Kym Barrett, wanted to create costumes "that weren't connected to a certain time or place," the fashion industry was evidently inspired by the series, particularly by the costumes sported by the protagonists when they enter the Matrix (Orecklin).

[37] Readings of how this scene, and the *Matrix* films in general, treat race and power vary in perspective. See Lisa Nakamura's "The Multiplication of Difference in Post-Millennial Cyberpunk Film: The Visual Culture of Race in the *Matrix* Trilogy for further analysis of the people of Zion as a counter-culture to the machine and as black identity in the film as one that is retained "in the face of technological change, white power and privilege, and racism" (129). In contrast, Mark Bould suggests there is much racism apparent in the film in his introduction to *Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction.* Bould gives a considered view of the cultural and racial appropriation that plays out in the film and is critical of certain casting choices, suggestive "of the racist structures of the western imaginary" (14) and well as an especially problematic portrayal of the (white) protagonist couple's "private" and "romantic"

reminiscent of the lounge dancers in *World on a Wire* — yet their collective moves with purpose, *toward* a purpose. After a rousing speech from Morpheus, ahead of an epic battle with the machines, the inhabitants dance to the powerful sound of makeshift drums fused with electronic (mechanistically-produced) beats representing the humans' reappropriation of machine power and reclamation of their autonomy.

As Lisa Nakamura observes, the manner black and white characters in the film engage with technology and their proximity to it bears significant difference. Nakamura's description of a shot of Link (Harold Perrineau), the *Nebuchadnezzar*'s pilot, intercut with one of a white female gate operator provides what I argue might be some explanation for the population of Zion being primarily populated by people of colour: "While [Link] types commands on an antiquated keyboard, she is jacked in differently. Her body is linked to the computer through a more direct means: gesture" (128). In other words, the gate operator may be liberated from the Matrix, but her body works in consort with, and deeply connected to, another form of machine whereas Link simply utilises one. Though the various *Matrix* backstories never spell out why so few whites survived the war with the machines, this comparison implies that a more intimate proximity with the machines (presumably because of financial access to the AI described in *The Animatrix*) is what made whites so easy to assimilate and occupy as fuel. The minimal clothing and the sexual overtones of the scene ritualistically affirms the group's humanity in the face of potential assimilation by the machine society.

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lovemaking intercut in juxtaposition with the public displays of "passion" non-white characters Link and Zee (Nona Gaye) (14). Yet, despite his warranted criticism of these racist aspects of the scene he does not dispute the revolutionary quality of the dance party itself (13).

A SHIFT IN IMMERSION PARANOIA IN RECENT SF

More recent iterations of fictional cyberworlds[38] function similarly to today's Internet, allowing characters knowledge about the conditions of their technological use and existence: these texts tend to return somewhat to the optimism of early technotopias. The potential reflected in many of these texts may be due to a decrease in general cultural anxieties regarding digital technologies as a generation having never known life without computers has started to enter the workforce. Additionally, the concept of virtual reality is no longer a mystery. Just as the computer became a familiar household appliance at the end of the last millennium, with the Internet following very soon after, the growth of virtual reality products, design, and marketing is skyrocketing. Yet science fiction's speculative potential is surely not tapped because the (now digital) machine's continued improvement is bringing the working and upper classes closer to living in the Machine imagined by Forster over a century ago. The greatness of virtual and smart technologies paired with our reliance on and addiction to their various systems has allowed writers to imagine a state of being even further trapped, and in this case the one who is trapped is fully cognizant of the situation.

From the Fear of Not Knowing to the Fear of Conscious Alienation

The fear of *not knowing* that a society is trapped inside a computer, exhibited in *WOAW* and *The Matrix*, has recently morphed into something much more terrifying. Nearly twenty years after *The Matrix*, immersion paranoia is still invoked in narratives about digital technology, along with its entangled role in capitalist-based social control. The fear has shifted somewhat, though, from earlier texts that revealed inhabitants within oppressive computer worlds living

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[38] "Metaverse" (as Neal Stephenson calls it in *Snow Crash*) or the "OASIS" (as Ernest Cline does in *Ready Player One*) and other names have been given to virtual or cyberworlds.

contently despite their tragic ignorance to what only the viewer could see. According to thinkers like Berardi, it seems that we now live in a society that has adapted to the detachment from others produced by an attachment to Internet and smart technology; it seems that not unlike Forster's protagonist Vashti's experience in "The Machine Stops," something that's truly fearful in such a society would be to remove the social gratification acquired by that technology — to be imprisoned by a digital or virtual system and separated indefinitely from all forms of society.

Black Mirror and the (Literal) Prison of the Machine

This anxiety is deeply evident in *Black Mirror*, an ongoing television series featuring standalone episodes, most of which would be well-described as science fiction-technohorror,[39] all set in the near future. Like *World on a Wire* and *The Matrix*, the show expresses sociopolitical anxieties related to technologies of its time. Co-creator of the show, Charlie Brooker, does not endeavour to change the actual technologies much, just what is done with them. He cites as his motivation for the series an interest in what has changed in "everyday life" of the last ten years or so: "[From people just] walking around and experiencing the world to staring at a rectangle." Stating "[t]he villain is never technology," Brooker implies that it is the obsession with technology that is the concern; the villain is how the technology is used. One of these technologies is, of course, virtual reality. One *Black Mirror* episode impactfully translates for the current technological moment the central issue of immaterial labour and its link to imprisonment by the capitalist system as located in Fassbinder and Galouye's texts. "White Christmas" is effectively a framed narrative that begins with Matt (Jon Hamm) and Joe (Rafe Spall) in what appears to be a remote cabin at a work site. Though the nature of their work is

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[39] Some episodes are more horrific than others and a small number of them feature positive outcomes despite taking place in dystopian environments.

unknown, a complete absence of digital technologies in the cottage paired with their rugged-looking clothing suggests it's physically rigorous in nature. Referring to their near-silent five years together, Matt presses Joe to tell him about himself. He starts by inquiring into why Joe chose this particular employment: "Why are you here? No one ends up here without things going to total shit for them out there." Joe retorts, "It's a job, not a jail," but Matt quickly responds "Often, they're one and the same thing." Matt's constant referral to "out there" hints that he knows they are in fact "in" somewhere and an audible "clink" sound midway through their discussion suggests that Matt's claim that work and jail can be the same is more than a flippant remark. Indeed, the end reveals that they are in an actual jail where time-manipulating technologies are being used to expedite Joe's confession to a murder.

To get Joe talking, Matt divulges some of his own past, notably that he has done some unethical things for money and suffered the personal consequence of being caught. He was involved in a side project in which he talked single men through picking up women in real time while seeing though their eyes. Though the privacy concerns and dishonest sexual coercion implications are troublesome enough, one such engagement gone wrong ends up in an emotionally unstable woman killing herself and Matt's client, eventually resulting in Matt's arrest. His legitimate employment had involved a technology that becomes increasingly relevant to the story's denouement. He worked for a company that makes miniature electronic clones of its clients to use as the ideal self-servants. These clones, called cookies, can be depicted to users as themselves in miniature. They are like Einstein in *WOAW,* the one contact unit who *knows* that his world is merely a false representation of something else yet who cannot escape. This scenario is not dwelled upon in Fassbinder's film, except for the discussion about an identity unit who tries to commit suicide but is disappeared from Simulacron because the units are not allowed such freedom of choice. The clear implication is that only the system can decide if

identity units live or die (and, ultimately, what they do in general). I take up the connection of life and death to the state of labour again in Chapter 3 as it relates to living body surrogates. Here, however, I underscore that in "White Christmas" this connection involves a subjectivity that lies somewhere between that of the made-up data units and the real, living human surrogates. It involves a subject that feels completely human but that is taken outside of its organic shell, thus making it not subject to human-related ethics while still being capable of producing similar labour. Matt's job involves training the clone or "cookie."

The production of and engagement with the technology is painless for the customer yet traumatic to the cookie. The "cookie" is surgically implanted in the mind of a client to create a "simulated brainful of code" ("White Christmas"). Thinking that she's the customer, and not properly sedated, the cookie managed by Matt overhears much of the surgical procedure and is promptly extracted from the brain of the customer, Greta (Oona Chaplin), and placed in an egg-like container, where she is left isolated until Matt speaks to her. "Put me back in my body!" she insists, but Matt tells her no. When she screams in protest, he mutes her at the touch of a button, exercising his privileged right to *not know* her suffering (not unlike the willful ignorance of many in the West of the underprivileged and exploited who facilitate mass production elsewhere in the world). Matt manipulates her perception of time so that about one minute for him feels like three weeks for her — three weeks in solitary confinement with no contact and nothing at all to do. When she again refuses to comply, he repeats the process, this time for what feels to her like six months: "The trick lay," Matt tells Joe, "in breaking them without letting them snap completely." This time, she is willing to accept that she is stuck in the system without hope for any pleasure other than making the original Greta's home work smoothly.

The cookie works (literally) tirelessly at such things as making toast perfectly to Greta's taste, waking her up just the right way with just the right music, and reading her the day's

schedule — ultimately, she is a home assistant like Alexa or Google Home, without any limitations or glitches. The cookie's sole edification lies in her "job," which consists of administering Greta's life seamlessly. Notably, the cookie program who necessarily "lives to work" was created to facilitate her workaholic owner's ability to do the same thing. Yet Greta, whose unspecified job has made her very well-off, gets to enjoy some simple pleasures she would otherwise have no time for while the cookie only produces these pleasures for her. "It wasn't really real, so it wasn't really barbaric," says Matt to Joe. His ill-considered rationale reflects the West's hegemonic refusal to acknowledge the work of underpaid workers, especially in sweatshops in other countries as barbaric and unacceptable — what one would not accept for herself is accepted easily enough when it's an Other going through it. One reason for this, of course, is the perpetual feeling of always being busy.

As a worker, Greta's cookie bears a peculiar sort of otherness. The company Matt works for literalizes the clichéd saying "I wish there were two of me," yet what one would do with such a double is rarely considered — it is fair to imagine that the other "me" would be given the lion's share of unpleasant duties because, though I know she feels exactly like me, my own consciousness need not bother with her suffering. Greta does not outsource any pleasurable duties to the cookie. Instead she gets to enjoy the finer points of her already busy life by offloading the stressful and mundane work to the perfect domestic care worker. Greta engages this personalized slave so that she can better focus on her own work. The link here is hardly metaphorical as many people at higher economic brackets have personal assistants for the same reason. She, and they, engage these workers — from personal trainers to nannies and housekeepers, whom are paid significantly less than they — to take care of their personal lives, their children, their personal health and wellbeing, etc. just to facilitate their productivity in a job that in turn pays for these services. Just like Matt, who munches passively on toast while Greta's

cookie suffers six months of isolation torture, Greta thinks (and in effect *knows*) nothing of her cookie's necessary suffering for Greta's convenience. This relationship reflects the attitude of consumers in the West toward sweatshop labour and other consumerist-fueled exploitation of people in the Global South, which I will examine more thoroughly in Chapter 3.

In contrast to his unethical pastime helping men hook up with women, his "legitimate" occupation — a service for wealthy clients — involves torture and forced labour. The traumatic process undergone by the cookie warrants Joe's pronouncement that it's "barbaric." Yet Matt is not unlike middle management in a company providing consumer goods at a high price while exploiting the labour of precarious workers. The system starts by isolating the worker, "breaking them" to stop them from being able to fight back, and then teaching them that there is no choice but to work. Greta's cookie transitions from thinking she is independent and autonomous, to complaining, and then, after the torture of sitting without any form of distraction or company, acquiescing to work. She shows resignation at the same time as a kind of numb fulfilment.

What feels like five years to Joe's cookie is only seventy minutes with Matt in real time. Matt extracts Joe's confession to fulfill his own prison sentence for being an accessory to murder. His statement that a job could be one and the same with a jail is not only pithy and a factual speech act, but it has multiple implications for the two men. While Joe is literally in jail when he thinks he's at work, Matt performs a similar kind of manipulation to that which his previous employment entailed — getting the cookie to accept its unfortunate position — as part of his own incarcerated labour. At the end of the episode, Joe's cookie (who notably didn't commit the crime!) is kept on accelerated time to "a thousand years a minute" while, in the outside world, the jail employees go home for the holidays.

CONCLUSION TO "LOST IN THE CIRCUITS"

Being trapped within a machine is a narrative trope that can be traced back to well before the industrial revolution, and the fictional expression of bio-technology and science getting out of hand might go back to 1818 with Frankenstein's monster. Yet the twentieth century and the advent of digital media invoked new concerns related to the working and othered body exploited by capitalism. While several more well-known sf writers took up the computer and the idea of being usurped by virtual technology in the early half of the century, Galouye's novel appears to be the first to show an expressly capitalist and work-oriented system at work without its inhabitants' knowledge. This kind of environment was popularized by immersion films like *The Matrix* at the end of the 1990s and, twenty years later, similar narratives continue to be adapted in texts like *Black Mirror* to complement (or worry over) current technologies while increasing the paranoia of being isolated through devices that were supposed to bring us together.

World on a Wire and the novel from which its story came deserve much more critical attention due to their early interventions in the paranoia thematic that was common during the Cold War and their introduction of it to the science fiction genre. Despite a well-advertised theatrical release in 2010 of a high-definition digital restoration of the film by Criterion, and a subsequent DVD release in 2012, there exists just one published academic essay focused on it and only brief mentions in a few books on Fassbinder's work. Each and every scene in the film contains characters and ideas that, though sometimes revealing socio-cultural hegemonies that are slightly dated, remain pressing concerns related to how we approach our role in the machine and how the metaphorical machine structures and limits Western society.

CHAPTER 2
Gameworlds at Work: Digital Capitalism and Negated Revolutionary Spaces

> I got no strings, so I have fun
> > I'm not tied up to anyone.
> They got strings, but you can see
> > There are no strings on me!
> > > – *Pinocchio* (1940)

> These days, many movies use the game as a subject matter, but they have nothing to do with the movie I imagine. I don't think it's a question of bringing the virtual in reality, or the other way around, it's the boundaries between them that must be the theme of the movie. Otherwise, I have absolutely no interest in games.
> > – Mamoru Oshii[40]

In Chapter 1, I examined texts in which characters are unknowingly trapped within a digital system. Like the classic techno-dystopias of the early twentieth century,[41] *World on a Wire* and *The Matrix* present oppressed diegetic populations, most of the inhabitants of which are unaware of their lack of autonomy within machine-based systems. Only the protagonists and their minimal entourages can see their imprisonment within the systems and the fact that their worlds are merely illusions. I concluded the chapter with a brief analysis of an episode of *Black Mirror* in which AI subjects trapped within virtual technology *are* aware, and I suggested that this might be a more terrifying situation for a present-day audience to consider. In "White Christmas," Matt's job is to convince the personal assistant cookies that they have no other

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[40] Quoted in Ingram and Reisenleitner's "Polarizing *Avalon*: The European Virtuosity and Global Virtuality of Mamoru Oshii's Filmic Imaginary" (129).
[41] Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1924) and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) are among the most popular.

option but to exist in servitude. After having lost their sense of entitlement to connection with others or any kind of autonomy, they acquiesce — resulting in them becoming the perfect kind of worker/machine fusion. The end-product is an automaton with machine precision, an intuitive understanding of human subjectivity, and no emotional expectations or biological needs for food or any other kind of maintenance. Thus, a lack of awareness is demonstrated as unnecessary for total control over subjects if they believe that it's normal that they be imprisoned, or if the subjects have suffered systemic oppression that led them to their imprisonment. In *World on a Wire* the data units within Stiller's "reality" are fully acclimated to their prescribed roles within the system; this acclimation exists in tandem with there being no alternative for escape. They have no control and no choice, but in their ignorance this lack does not affect them. Anyone inclined to care about this lack of autonomy is relegated to certain spaces or terminated entirely.

This chapter extends this consideration and expands on it by interrogating the concept and parameters of "choice" in a moment when the distinction between work and leisure has become increasingly superficial. The texts I examine imagine what it might look like if the lack of division between work and leisure was absolute — what it might look like if certain individuals must "choose" to lose their autonomy entirely for the sake of their survival. Specifically, I examine the contemporary representation of the very real concern regarding the illusion of choice and its relationship with conflated notions of work and leisure. In doing so, I look primarily at two films that take up the questions of control and resistance by situating their protagonists as labourers and prisoners within diegetic video game spaces.

Mamoru Oshii's *Avalon* (2001) and Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor's *Gamer* (2009) are both films about systemic power and control, that reveal the ways in which systems that run on ideology can be inescapable for the players dwelling (virtually, and literally) within them. Just

as I indicated in my introduction and the previous chapter, the words "system" and "machine" (and several others) bear a dual meaning, I will now add "game" to my lexicon of nuanced technological terms. The virtual reality game environments presented within these films' diegeses call to mind the phrase "playing the game," providing yet another view of how the real world can be dictated by capitalism, facilitated by it, and lived in the name of it. Both narratives are about gaming avatars that are living, breathing, and conscious human beings that have elected to move through — or be moved through — an exploitative or dangerous game space in exchange for money or survival, or ultimately both.

In *Avalon*, the titular game is conducted entirely in cyberspace, though there is some question about the boundaries of the game that are expressed through the film's visual aesthetic and narrative gaps in the game's rules. By contrast, the games in *Gamer* are *staged* — acted out — in meatspace though controlled by individuals using a digital gaming system. The rules of those games are clearly defined by power hierarchies that are unfairly, and almost exclusively, determined by economic class. In each of these films, how and why the games are played are manifested differently to present the futility of efforts to "game the system" from several angles. In *Avalon*, Ash simply ignores the rules of the game, choosing her own individualistic way of doing things and ironically embracing an existence within its limited boundaries; in *Gamer*, Tillman uses the rules to his advantage to fight against the clearly defined villain. The characters in both Oshii's and Neveldine and Taylor's films are trapped under the illusion that their games might be won, and though they appear to succeed — getting to the top level in Ash's case and escaping the "puppet-master's" strings for Tillman and his family — the films end in ambiguity, with the suggestion that these systems cannot be gamed.

GAMEWORLDS

In my analysis, I approach the video games[42] within these films as narrative devices —

symbolic tropes that engage the precarity of labour and the blurring boundaries between work

and leisure. Because these games are also jobs, they directly as well as metaphorically represent

those blurred lines. As a shorthand, I refer to the diegetic game spaces in these films as

gameworlds to describe these two otherwise very different kinds of spaces. The gameworlds

explored in this chapter are also worlds of work, as are Fassbinder's diegetic layers discussed in

Chapter 1. These worlds are organized around the concept of *the game*, yet unlike most real-

world video games, these games cannot be won or completed to the player's satisfaction.

I acknowledge that academic game studies favours a distinction between two

methodological approaches to studying games: narratology and ludology. The former approach

focuses on diegetic storytelling and the latter the gaming experience. Though my reading of the

gameworlds within film diegeses delves occasionally into medial technique and the experience

of the characters/gamers, my focus does tend to prioritize narrative. This distinction between

narratology and ludology is not what is at stake in this chapter, however. Committing to

narratology over ludology (or vice versa for that matter) is not necessary to my argument;

likewise, neither is too strict a definition of "game." It is for this reason that I do not draw

significantly from game studies in my analysis. A somewhat looser theoretical underpinning of

the term *game* allows my occasional application of theories from that discipline in a way that

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[42] Ultimately, these games are more than just video games as will soon become clear in my discussion — they are speculative and virtually real extensions of digital games that take up much of the films' diegeses. But, as they are not simple board games or any other form of game without the need for electronic technology, "video game," will suit my purposes here, before I give them the name of "gameworlds."

supports, rather than unnecessarily complicates, my analysis, which is rooted more broadly in the digital and the virtual nature of the machine and its symbolic capabilities within fiction.

For my purposes here, "game" can be understood as a term with polarizing capabilities: I define a game as something one does in one's spare time to derive pleasure, or at least to pass one's leisure time. Yet one may play a game for less innocent purposes; colloquially, we also understand "playing games" to denote the use of tactics of manipulation between individuals in an otherwise trusting relationship. Thus, while playing a game can be something one does while at leisure, it may also relate to a restrictive power relationship — not unlike the relationships that many people have with their jobs. My close reading analyses take up gaming, playing the game, and attempts at gaming the system within gameworlds where the protagonists and other characters dwell for extended periods of time and (to different extents) are obliged to play these games rather than simply doing so of their own volition. The ironically-forced gameplay demonstrates the lack of contrast between capitalist spaces of work and leisure and the result is minimized access to a subjective experience outside of work.

In both *Gamer* and *Avalon*, characters acquiesce to their unpleasant lot as bodies that are not in control of their environments. These bodies manipulated by technology are shown to perform specific functions within these game systems against their (albeit passive) will. This is especially the case in *Gamer* where bodies are controlled by a paying customer — something like an employer; by contrast, in *Avalon* the body is in a constant state of distraction — something like a consumer. In both cases, the game spaces occupy their subjects in such a way that they cannot escape its rules and oppressive boundaries (no matter how well they appear to do so).

PUPPETS AT PLAY

As the titular character in Disney's 1942 film *Pinocchio* learns upon losing his puppet-strings, the freedom to play may not be true freedom after all. When he reaches his dream of becoming a real boy, Pinocchio sings jovially about having no strings like the other puppets, but he soon finds himself imprisoned in a cage nevertheless — being without strings, it seems, does not exactly equate to being free. It is therefore apt that the same song, "I've Got No Strings," appears in *Gamer*, a story in which freedom based on class hierarchy figures prominently and that suggests a universal lack of autonomy, for those with and without "strings." The film takes place in a near future not entirely unlike the present in how voraciously it consumes spectacle-based media: a billionaire tech-mogul named Ken Castle (Michael C. Hall) has invented and capitalized on a "Nanex" technology that allows a video game player to fully control the body of a living human being as an avatar. Playing the game is costly, so the gamers who are given the power over the avatar are also rich. The acting avatars are members of oppressed and marginalized groups, and they accept this role as a game pawn out of various states of desperation. While I will return to the special relevance of "I've Got No Strings" in relation to the problematic portrayal of one individual from such a group, the song's lyrics speak broadly to the situation of all the characters, with or without the metaphorical strings.

PLAYING THE GAME

Society **and** *Slayers*

Gamer features two role-playing video games that involve controlling living human avatars: *Society* and *Slayers*. *Society* literally employs[43] human "actors" as avatars who are kept

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[43] I say "literally" here to emphasize the fact that the actors are *used* and *paid*; they are made use of and employees. They are the labourer *and* the product.

alert while being physically controlled by external game players, or "controllers." These gamers navigate the actors through a highly sexualized environment that is aesthetically similar to the online virtual world of *Second Life*. However, while the players of *Second Life* have control of their own avatar's image and actions, *Society*'s actors trade in that privilege for a paycheck. Lack of bodily agency is even more prevalent in *Slayers*, a war-game that utilizes death-row inmates as avatars in a first-person shooter game. The gaming experience for the actors[44] in both games is traumatic; their bodies are located in a real-world gaming arena and they are fully conscious yet physically incapacitated. Therefore, at the end of the workday, *Society* actors remember every (often demeaning and/or exploitative) act that their controller commands of them (Figure 4). *Slayers* inmates also give up physical control to an unknown video game player, but theirs are higher stakes. As a talk show host (Kyra Sedgwick) explains, "*Slayers* gives the gamer full control of a flesh and blood human being in full scale 'kill or be killed' combat." Inmates elect to play the game — to be controlled by a player — with the promise that whoever wins will be allowed to "go free." This form of motivation, which does not rely at all on the determination of the inmates but on outside controlling interests — wealthy controllers who stand to benefit (socially and economically) from their winnings of a game that jeopardises the lives of others — is entirely reminiscent of the empty promise of the American Dream and its connection to exploited labour.

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[44] Though the living avatars in *Society* are officially employed as paid "actors" and those in *Slayers* are not compensated financially (usually a benefit of being employed) I will call both kinds of game characters "actors," for lack of a better word to relate the two. Yet, *Society* and *Slayers* actors both sacrifice their bodily agency in exchange for some kind of reward. In the case of the prisoners involved in *Slayers*, the reward is their life.

Figure 4 *Society* "actors" give up full bodily control to their controllers while remaining conscious of every exploitative act they commit.

The gamer's investment in keeping these flesh and blood human beings alive is almost entirely a financial one — and one purely at the entertainment level. Protagonist and inmate/avatar John Tillman AKA Kable (Gerard Butler) is horrified, yet not surprised, that his player Simon (Logan Lerman) is only seventeen-years old. Simon's father is wealthy, his virtual gaming room is exquisite and top-of-the-line, and he clearly suffers from the benumbed boredom and carelessness that only a rich white hetero-male teenager could possess. The potential for freedom is clearly not in the prisoner's power but under the control of the player who paid to play him or her. As the games' billionaire designer Ken Castle puts it, "You can pay to control, or you can get paid to be controlled." While Tillman's life is in the hands of a complete stranger in *Slayers*, his wife Angie (Amber Valletta) sacrifices her free will in *Society* so that she might earn money and prove herself worthy of regaining custody of their estranged young daughter.

The foundation of the game is rooted in a class-based power hierarchy and the gameworld is allowed to continue because of a cycle of exploitation that can only end in death.

Playing the Game: *Avalon*

Narratively, *Avalon* is less complex than *Gamer* due to its minimal dialogue and its focus, primarily, on the single player protagonist but its aesthetic complicates the issue of labour precarity within an all-encompassing sociopolitical system. The film follows Ash, a professional virtual reality gamer whose avatar is a mage in the game called *Avalon*. She makes her living working out of a dingy, dimly-lit game room where she plugs into a haptic machine that allows her to move through *Avalon*, as though as if its space is made of physical matter, while her actual body remains in the room. This emphasis of visuals over dialogue within a virtual diegesis approximate to those discussed in the previous chapter make Ash's state of existence (her sense of subjective control) and the rules of existence within the game more precarious than for Tillman/Kable. Like Kable, Ash is a high-ranking competitor whose performance is watched as a sport by others outside of the game, yet she has some level of control in how she navigates the game. Though it appears that she enjoys her obsession with the game it is also apparently her only source of income.

The visual aesthetic of Oshii's film creates an ambiguity between the spaces where Ash works and where she lives. Both the gamespace and the spaces outside of her game room are presented in a monochromatic sepia tone with very little difference between the two other than the game appearing to have a touch more yellow and the outside a touch more green (Figure 5). The aesthetic of both Ash's society and the game in which she spends most, if not all, of her

time[45] has been described as invoking "the global cultural memory of the Cold War" (Ingram and Reisenleitner 131). The Eastern-European city and countryside landscapes, filtered by the sepia hue, sets an oppressive tone suited to the film's setting: a rationed society devoid of any culture besides work and sustenance. Indeed, the only place that Ash encounters others is on the streetcar going home and in the communal dining area where slop-like rations are served.

Figure 5 The game of *Avalon*'s visual aesthetic (left), particularly the sepia colour filter, is very similar to the "real" world that is supposedly outside of the game (right).

In *Gamer* and *Avalon*, the fictionalized gameworlds each serve as a segregational space, negating revolutionary potential by isolating the work environment from the "real" (futuristic) world even while maintaining an interdependence with it. "Playing the game" in real world capitalism isn't something one does for fun but out of necessity. In these films the same goes for the protagonists, but for them playing the game is *literally* a means to exist. In a system like capitalism, as in a video game without mods[46] or "cheats," there are rules that must be followed that have been dictated by those who have designed the "game," just like playing Super Mario

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[45] There is a reoccurring current throughout my analysis that wonders whether or not Ash ever leaves the game. I unpack the significance of this ambiguity later in the chapter.

[46] A mod is the product of user-driven alterations made to a video game by "non-market game developers (modders)" (Nieborg and van der Graaf 177). The nature of these changes can vary, and they "range from changes in the physics of the virtual world to total conversions in game play that can lead to changes in story line and game type" (Postigo 131).

requires a Nintendo console, a controller, and a monitor of some kind. Notably, some games

provide a better experience if one has money to *pay to play*[47] and, likewise, some game avatars

are set up with better skills than others while some are in the game just to be killed, ogled, or

assaulted.[48]

The gameworld environments within both films' diegeses function as representative

microcosms of the class-based exploitation experienced in everyday late capitalism. While these

films take different aesthetic and narrative approaches, they each address labour and class

exploitation by offering up diegetic worlds in which playing a video game is not a matter of

leisure but one of labour instead. For the gamers being controlled, these games are *not*

pleasurable, nor do they provide any kind of escape. The characters who enter these spaces all do

so to go to work within virtual gaming environments and their corporeal experience with the

aesthetic of these environments provide some insight into how the abstract nature of hegemonic

control in everyday late capitalism interrupts the possibility of revolutionary change. These

science fictional depictions of digital spaces and digitized bodies reveal how easily the

boundaries between work and leisure can be blurred beyond distinction with the help of

immaterial labour's non-linear distribution of time. The agnatological result is that individuals

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[47] One highly publicized controversy regarding pay to play (or pay to win, as some call it) accompanied the 2017 release of the *Star Wars Battlefront II* video game and the "loot boxes" and "buff cards" that positively affected game play for those that could afford to purchase them. The loot crates unlocked characters that would take hundreds of hours of gameplay to otherwise access. These crates contained random characters, so to access all potential characters, one could spend thousands of dollars. The buff cards ranked up weapons to make them more powerful, making it easier to play the game if the player can afford to pay more (Jackson). One must either have the money to pay more than the game was listed for or have the time to play it out and "earn" the characters. The later "option," however, also implies that a player be of a certain social class, or perhaps, a child. At any rate, it stands to reason that many adult players who do not wish to spend more money also cannot afford so much time away from work and other responsibilities to dedicate to success in the game. If one has more money, or more free time, one is rewarded with better access than others and they can enjoy the game in its totality. My thanks to Matt Novak for pointing me in the right direction for navigating this issue and particular controversy.
[48] This is especially true for female game characters. For a thorough critical analysis of the portrayal of women in video games, see Anita Sarkeesian's series "Tropes vs. Women in Video Games" as part of the Feministfrequency *YouTube* channel.

are held prisoner — puppets via a hegemonic obsession with being busy to the point of inescapability. The gaming avatars in these films are living icons of capitalist consumption; the spaces through which they travel are indicative of the digital network that embodies capitalist labour precarity and hegemonic commodification of neoliberal life.

EARLIER GAMEWORLDS IN FILM

The history of gameworlds in science fiction goes back to shortly before the immersion paranoia films of the 90s. Since the 1980s and the rise of video game culture, struggle in virtual space has been a recurring theme in film and literature. In Steven Lisberger's *Tron* (1982), a video game designer hacks into the mainframe of a gaming company at which he was formerly employed and finds himself sucked into the game itself. There, he finds that video game characters appear in the image of their makers, known within the mainframe as "users" and are forced to fight and kill other game characters to stay alive themselves. Probably unbeknownst to Lisberger, who wrote, directed, and arranged some of the special effects for the film, *Tron* would become a pioneer for texts in which people become stuck in gameworlds. Various films since *Tron*[49] engage this thematic: virtual worlds in which some are cognisant of their entrapment and others are not. The video game texts that are central to this chapter, however, offer something different. In the 90s, around the time of the development of the World Wide Web, many narratives — literary and televisual — started to show more and more people getting lost in virtual worlds. Drawing on tropes from *World on a Wire* and popularized with *The Matrix*, the situation of being trapped within the game grew increasingly ambiguous for the characters — being lost, in these diegetic narratives, becomes *part* of the game.

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[49] These include *The Lawnmower Man* (1992), *Wargames* (1983), *Brainscan* (1994) and *eXistenz* (1999) among others.

In most of these earlier narratives the protagonists and other characters are conscious that they are inside the system.[50] But with *Avalon,* Oshii invokes an uncertainty and ambiguity related to the fear of losing control of bodily perception that hearkens back to Galouye's 1964 novel *Simulacron 3*, and *World on a Wire*, Fassbinder's 1973 film adaptation that was discussed in Chapter 1. As in those earlier texts, which exhibit multi-tiered and inescapable digital systems extracting use value out of identity units, the gameworld spaces presented in *Avalon* emphasize the omnipresence of an ideologically-structured system akin to capitalism — one that cannot be easily escaped, if it can be escaped at all. While in *Avalon* there initially appears to be a separation between Ash's gameworld and her time unplugged and away from it at home, the viewer observes that she never seems to escape the game. And while Tillman seems to defeat the villain in *Gamer* it appears that he — and everybody else in that film — will never permanently escape the system that supports the power hierarchies that accommodate the proliferation of games like *Society* and *Slayers*.

ESCAPING THE GAME – Part I

The gamespaces in these films not only reflect the prevailing model of social and political life in their diegeses, but are also staged in such a way that demonstrates the inescapability of this model — the futility of any revolutionary impulse when confronted with the marriage between spectacle and system. This futility is also found in David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ* (1999), another film staged within a convoluted gameworld system. When Ted Pikul (Jude Law) puts the game system *eXistenZ* on pause he exclaims, in horror, "I'm not sure here — where we are — is real at all. This feels like a game to me." Indeed, Pikul has finally realized that they have been in

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[50]   See, for example, Lisberger's *TRON*, Kosinski's *TRON: Legacy*, Gibson's *Neuromancer,* and, more recently, Cline's *Ready Player One*, Doctorow's *For the Win*, and Stross's *Halting State* among others.

the game all along and when Allegra Geller (Jennifer Jason Leigh), the game designer herself, wins the game she asks, "Have I won, have I won? Have I won the game?" This repetitive delivery implies Allegra's own uncertainty about where the boundary between real life and the game are drawn. She tells Pikul, "you have to play the game to find out why you're playing the game." In other words, there is no clear objective except to navigate the system the best one can.

As with the game of *eXistenZ*, those in *Avalon* and *Gamer* do not provide a happy escape from the outside world, but a paranoia-filled mystery-ride filled with the thrill of the possibility of uncertain and unlikely reward — emblematic, again, of the American Dream. In a direct address opening Oshii's film, Ash describes this precarious drive to ambiguous achievement within the game of *Avalon*: "I've been playing *Avalon* for a long time. I know this game as well as anyone, but I couldn't tell you how it was started or who controls it, or how it is supposed to end. Some people think it has no ending; you could play forever and never see the last level. It seems pointless: a game without a goal. But there *is* a goal — to go beyond the game, to something more." While a film like *eXistenZ* commodifies the game playing body, demonstrating a classic difficulty of finding a way out of the maze that conflates leisure and responsibility, *Gamer* and *Avalon* involve characters that go to work (for money) within virtual gaming spaces. But while everyone is at work, dreaming of being at work, or being worked for, there is a hegemonic force holding those within and those supposedly outside the game captive and, it seems, only the most expert gamers can defeat it. But this is not the case; these gameworlds are structured in such a way to reveal that even when one is fortunate enough to "beat" the game, the likelihood is that the game isn't truly over. Though some may seem in control of their own situation, like Ash, or in control of others, like Simon in *Gamer*, while others are destined to be controlled, *everyone* must play their part.

POWER AND CONTROL

In *Gamer,* actors know they are physically controlled by paying consumers and the game designer is a celebrity in his own right, so identifying the "bad guys" in the film is a simple task. The tendency in many popular films, including *Gamer*, to portray violence through the direct actions of a single villain (or unified villainous group) is deceptively unrealistic. Slavoj Žižek describes this concern in an analysis of the final moments of *The Fugitive* (Andrew Davis 1993) in which the protagonist-doctor (played by Harrison Ford) interrupts a talk given by his colleague (played by Jeroen Krabbe) at a conference to accuse him of falsifying "data on behalf of a large pharmaceutical company":

> At this precise point, when one would expect that the shift would focus on the company — the corporate capital — as the true culprit, Kraabe interrupts his talk, invites Ford to step aside, and then, outside the convention hall, they engage in a passionate violent fight, beating each other till their faces are red from blood. The scene is telltale in its openly ridiculous character, as if, in order to get out of the ideological mess of playing with anti-capitalism, one should do a move which renders directly palpable the cracks in the narrative. (Žižek, "The Act")

Žižek further asserts the displaced ideological focus by identifying the demonization of the antagonist which, because he is a physical entity with various embodied negative characteristics, can be defeated through this violence:

> Another aspect here is the transformation of the bad guy (Kraabe) into a vicious, sneering, pathological character, as if psychological depravity (which accompanies the dazzling spectacle of the fight) should replace the anonymous non-psychological drive of the capital: the much more appropriate gesture would have been to present

the corrupted colleague as a psychologically sincere and privately honest doctor who,

because of the financial difficulties of the hospital in which he works, was lured into

swallowing the bait of the pharmaceutical company. (Žižek, "The Act")

This is to say that, as in *The Fugitive*, the true villain in *Gamer* — the bodiless capitalist system

that empowers and encourages this exploitation — remains invisible while Tillman (the "good

guy") accomplishes a morally-centred triumph against Castle (the "bad guy").

In *Avalon*, labour precarity is demonstrated by aesthetically obscuring the real (leisure)

from the not real (labour). The extradiegetic viewer is subject to this precarity, too, because she

is asked to accept that the sepia colour filter used in all but the last 18 minutes of the film is seen

as "real" for characters like Ash. It is difficult to identify the discrete function of each space, and

each character within it, because the deeper within the system players get, the less systemic it

seems, and yet the deepest level of the game is clearly a place of privilege, comfort, and

exclusion. Players plug into and operate within a game system that is completely virtual and run

by an unidentified and ambiguous power hierarchy. The system's lack of clear purpose

accompanies the visual illusions keeping the player from knowing if or when she is in the game

and when she is not.

Avalon's presentation of imprecise boundaries between work and leisure spaces reflects

systemic issues within capitalism that are not a result of any one person, company or

government. Oshii's precarious gameworlds offer a sort of nuanced ambiguity that appears

missing from *Gamer*. No character seems overtly violent yet many behave suspiciously, and

Ash treats them as such especially when the digital Game Master discourages her from asking

questions and reminds her about the "rules" of the game. As the protagonist, Ash is not squeaky

clean herself and what drives her to continue playing the game is never entirely clear. Oshii's

narrative thus disallows any easy and objective identification of evil by revealing that the system is everywhere, and good and evil are arbitrary concepts within an inescapable game.

PRECARIOUS SPACE BETWEEN NARRATIVE/LEISURE AND GAMEPLAY/WORK

Filmic gameworlds exhibit an alternative temporality from real games: this is to say that time (game time especially) necessarily slows down in film, emphasizing narrative over battle or competitive gameplay. Many films about games like *Avalon* are primarily comprised of battle-light narratives of the kind that are ordinarily presented to gamers as "cut scenes" or in "movie mode" as a reward for a successfully completed battle or level.[51] In these plot-driven films, an emphasis is placed on social interaction, where in an interactive (real) video game an avatar would likely be killed for such a distraction. Gameworlds in film thus exhibit a temporality that ignores usual gameplay rules (King 58) but in film this fact is overlooked for the sake of narrative delivery and plot development.

The tension between narrative entertainment and the need for less of it in interactive battle-style gameplay is taken up in *Gamer* in a poignant scene that demonstrates the problematic precarity of one's leisure time — the vanishing distinction between time spent as an organ of the machine and being an autonomous subject. Tillman/Kable's controller, Simon, is given a mod, allowing him to interact with his avatar. Though mods are usually seen as a chance to break from conventional gameplay, or subvert the predetermined function of the game, Simon wastes his unique chance. He does not try to get to know Tillman at all; instead he obnoxiously displays his puppet-master skills by making Kable dance — in the middle of a warzone (Figure 6).

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[51] See, for example, *eXistenZ, Lara Croft: Tomb Raider, Mortal Kombat* (1995)*, Resident Evil* (2002), and *Prince of Persia: Sands of Time*.

Figure 6 In *Gamer*, Simon (Logan Lerman, pictured right) plays a dangerous game of "Simon says" with his living avatar Kable (Gerard Butler, pictured left).

Soon after, Simon reveals to Kable/Tillman just how little he cares for the fate of the other avatars in the game: "Death row, psycho, so what? They had it comin' anyway." When Tillman asks him, "I guess that goes for me too?" Simon responds, "Yeah but you're different... because you're my psycho." In naming Tillman *his* "psycho*"* Simon asserts his financially-granted ownership over Tillman's body, thus sealing his privileged upper-class status and asserting his view of Kable as an object — an expendable entertainment commodity. At one point during the game, he has Kable push a woman out of the way of a moving vehicle; it is a mere flourish, for which he seems to receive no game credit, intended probably to entertain the viewers of the game's live television broadcast, which have made Kable and him superstars. The woman, however, is a "genericon," a different rank of avatar without a controller to protect her. Without a player, and programmed nevertheless to have no agency, she gets up to cross the street again, only to be hit by a truck. Simon shrugs the incident off, saying, "Can't say I didn't try." His

flippant remark further reflects the hegemonic acceptance that within the game space other people's bodies are simply expendable objects of enjoyment for those with the money to play them. Due to his own privilege, Simon simply cannot see *Slayers* actors as actual people.

It is difficult at times to differentiate between the real world and the gameworld in *Avalon* as well, but this is mostly because there is little aesthetic difference between the *Avalon* game space and the world in which Ash lives. As I have already mentioned, all but the final eighteen minutes of the film are produced with a sepia filter whether Ash is playing, commuting, or sitting at home. The majority of the film presents any apparent difference between diegetic spaces almost solely via plot development, rather than visual cues separating the digital world from the analog. While there appears to be a separation between Ash's gaming experience and her time away from it (she comes and goes from the haptic room in such a way that one would an office), I contend that she never actually leaves the game. For the majority of the film, we are to understand, as Ash does, that she spends her days playing *Avalon*, effectively winning money so as to support herself (evidently well) and then returning at the end of the day to her comfortable apartment with her loyal, and possibly nonexistent, basset hound.[52] Ash's apartment is a site where the viewer at first assumes she is no longer playing the game and there is no sense that the war game of *Avalon* permeates the walls of her reality (and her apartment).

The world of *Avalon* and Ash's "reality" both appear poor and devoid of culture — everything is about function — getting to where one is going, purchasing food, and travelling to and from work. The "game world" often looks identical to Ash's normal world with an occasionally adventurous camera angle or the use of night vision or lag effects. The astute viewer

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[52]   The dog serves as a further indication that Ash is always in the game. Among a number of other appearances, he, or his image, makes inside the gameworld, his dog bowl appears empty on the floor when Ash awakens in her gaming room in Class Real — a level which I will discuss later. Like the real world, the dog's existence may be an illusion.

will notice that the passengers on the streetcar Ash takes her trip home on each day are always the same, doing the same things as though they were stock characters or NPCs[53] — an early indication that Ash is still in the game even when she seems to be free of it. A further indication that these worlds are at times indistinguishable is when Ash cashes out after playing and we see that the game receptionist keeps a gun behind the counter. Ash notices that another player has previously shot the head off a statue cherub, presumably because s/he believed s/he was still playing. The cashier keeps a gun in the drawer because, it is implied, such a thing has happened more than once. This ambiguity between spaces, and characters' attachment to the game, is reflective of Ash's perpetual existence within the game and her inability to leave it even when she thinks she does. Unsurprisingly, *Avalon* is an addiction for many players, and Ash is no exception. When she is not playing, she sits at her home computer obsessing over ways to move to higher levels in the game much as any worker might plan towards getting a promotion.

Ideology in *Gamer*

The owner and designer of *Slayers* and *Society* is a blatant mouthpiece for the ideologies that surround neoliberal discourses of meritocracy and "me first" politics. His public persona as an "ordinary Joe," while he speaks matter-of-factly of the class-determined rules of control within his games (in that they have something for everyone) suggests that, should the film have been made today, he might don a "Make America Great Again" hat (Figure 7).

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[53] A non-player character, controlled by a program rather than an actual human.

Figure 7 *Gamer*'s billionaire antagonist, Ken Castle (Michael C. Hall) looks like an "ordinary Joe" and talks plainly about how "You can pay to control, or you can get paid to be controlled."

In step with Žižek's critique of contemporary popular film, Castle's eerily canny right-wing villainy invokes the impression that he alone must be defeated. Yet the problem is a systemic one even though Tillman thinks, and the film's seemingly happy ending suggests, that the solution is Castle's death. At the end of *Gamer*, Tillman confronts Castle in Castle's home after being treated to a song and dance act from him — and not just figuratively. It is one of two scenes in the film that is treated like a musical and its performative musicality implies an artificiality to *any* sense of agency in such a game system, including for those who appear to have the most (financial) power. While they are no longer in the gaming arena, the meeting occurs on an indoor basketball court and thus invokes another kind of stage: a playing field for yet another sort of game. The men participate in a physical fight that appears to be weighted in favour of Castle, who says "I think it, you do it," vaunting his own designer grade "Nanex" control-technology, until Tillman defeats him by tricking him into "thinking" about being

stabbed in the chest. Castle's failure to protect himself with his expensive technology depicts how hegemonic systems of power prevent the success of the poor by effectively telling certain marginalised communities, and convincing them, that they have no option but failure.[54]

When Tillman kills Castle, and Castle is revealed on live television to be a self-centred bigot, it seems that the film can have a happy ending: Tillman can be free, and the other game "actors" can be liberated as well. As Steven Shaviro describes him in *Post Cinematic Affect*, Castle is "the living personification of 'the new spirit of capitalism,' with its emphasis upon flexibility, innovation, and entrepreneurial initiative, and upon networking rather than vertical command" (106). Castle's business politics reflect what "ultimately remains a form of authoritarian management, in which networked manipulation works more effectively than a hierarchical chain of command ever did. ... Castle is the 'human face' of software-based capital, or of affective capital, in the society of control" (107). Yet, of course, his destruction does not actually eradicate the system enslaving the living avatars and encouraging the upper classes to enjoy exploiting them. *Society* actors still need jobs, and the *Slayers* survivors inevitably return to their subjugated roles within the American prison industrial complex. At first glance, a heroic finale like this one seems to imply that the complex problems addressed in the text could actually be eradicated so quickly by one or two "good guys," and that the system that facilitated Castle's rise to power could not simply cultivate another individual to do the same thing. But the game isn't over. The evil mind-controlling technology is destroyed, but humanity's capacity to create that technology has not. *Gamer*'s concluding graphic reads "Game Over Insert Coin." Shaviro argues, "The film itself has gamed us; we are still trapped in the world it depicts" (*Post*

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[54] An excellent example of this is the systemic racism ingrained in Canadian and American judicial systems. Eva Duvernay's excellent documentary, *13th* (2016), encapsulates this issue within the American system as it has affected African Americans since the abolition of slavery.

Cinematic 130). Castle "precisely embodies and condenses the 'system itself'" (*Post Cinematic* 108) and, with his death, the film is framed in such a way that reveals the power of that system — that the game is *not* confined to the game software; capitalism's "coin" remains to facilitate the repetition of similar atrocities.

Ideology in *Avalon*

Power and ideological oppression are presented more abstractly in *Avalon*, yet Ash's society is nevertheless ideologically organized, even if not especially political, and it does reveal particular rules to be abided. In the place that Ash perceives to be "real," there are posters everywhere that read, "Stop playing *Avalon*." It is unclear if these posters have been erected by protestors or conversely by some kind of government. This lack of clarity extends throughout the narrative regarding how the diegetic society of *Avalon* sees the game. As Eva Mazierska argues,

> It is difficult to establish the attitude of the political authorities toward 'Avalon.' We are informed at the beginning that it is illegal to play it, so ostensibly the authorities are against games of this kind. The most obvious explanation is the danger it poses to the human brain, which can be taken as an index of contemporary governments' uneasy relation toward biotechnology and a metaphor of the harm caused by any addiction, be it to alcohol, drugs, or gambling... Yet we do not see any attempts by the police to actually prevent anybody from entering the 'Avalon' universe. (186)

Mazierska does not unpack how she sees this tension unfolding in the narrative, only saying that it's a sign of neoliberalism's tendency to value the "freedom to decide" over safety (186). Her analysis does not consider the function of authorities making gameplay illegal and simultaneously not preventing it. I argue that though there is no answer to how the authorities figure into the game, the ambiguity is an important narrative device that may have a destabilizing

effect on the viewer. What is *not* ambiguous is that Ash's society is poor and heavily rationed and, in contrast to *Gamer,* her world does not indicate that anyone lives in a state of surplus.

While she tends to play the game her own way, Ash's resistance to hegemonic norms is especially reflected in her relationship with consumption — both the commodity and alimentary kind. While no one in the film appears wealthy, Ash is relatively well-off by contrast to other characters. Her comfortable state is afforded by her gaming skills and celebrity status within *Avalon*. That is to say, her ability to "play the game" and, therefore, play by the rules (or in her case a knowledge about how to bend the rules and get away with it) provides her with a comparatively comfortable position in her society. While Ash is not being sold as a product like Tillman and Angie, her gameplay is consumed by spectators of the game. Moreover, she is involved in consumption in a more literal way. Though the majority of characters seem to dine communally on price-controlled gruel-like rations, the meat Ash buys at the butcher shop for her dog is clearly priced based on demand. We see the butcher asking when she goes in a second time for additional cash, causing Ash to look annoyed — clearly prices have gone up and he knows she will pay. Yet while she seems to participate in a certain kind of consumer culture, she does so only to buy food for her dog. As for feeding herself, Ash does not consume anything that could provide nourishment to her physical body. Her gaming skills, after all, are located in an entirely different space (or so it seems to her) that doesn't require food. When not playing, she smokes cigarettes and drinks vodka, and she snacks on food from a box generically branded "Chrupki" (*snacks* in Polish) with a picture of a dog on it indicating that she may very well be eating dog treats while she feeds her dog a healthful stew each night. Ash's corporeal health does not seem to matter to her. Her unhealthy and non-conformist form of consumption indicates a refusal to participate in non-virtual existence and the lack of choices it supplies.

Lack of choice, of course, is clearly linked to loss of control in both films. The theme of puppet strings and/as ideological bonds, with which my examination began, is prevalent in *Gamer*, and significant to the plot's development surrounding issues of power and control. Castle earns $650 million USD per broadcast of *Slayers*, and the program has no end in sight. Like Simon, who does not flinch when he is offered, and refuses, €100 million to sell the rights to playing Kable, it seems that Castle, who has more than centupled the earnings required to comfortably pursue "the American Dream," would be bored if he were not playing the puppeteer. An apt example of how the film depicts ideological bonds is when Castle brings Hackman (Terry Crews) into the game — he intends him to be the "new face" of *Slayers* as well as Tillman's assassin: "They'll be seduced by the power, the violence, the dominance, that's human nature," he says of Hackman, remarking that this new fighter is not controlled by anyone; he is naturally violent and destructive, mean and tough. He is also a raging, erratic, embodiment of numerous racist black male stereotypes — hyper-masculine, violent, and completely irrational. The "new face" of *Slayers* is, in fact, ready to play the part Castle wants him to.

When Hackman first meets Tillman he sings him the song "I Have No Strings" from *Pinocchio* (1940). Yet, as Castle implies, Hackman is still a puppet (sans strings) fully oppressed by and engrained in the system so as not to need them. If this man is not "controlled" by anyone, then how might the audience understand his significance? I argue that this problematically-depicted figure reflects the marginalized members of Western society who have internalized the beliefs and values by which they are oppressed, ending up incarcerated, for example, because they grew up in a system where they did not believe they had a choice other than to pursue crime. The racist portrayal of Hackman is suggestive of the systemic exploitation and oppression of marginal groups that produces the hierarchy between the upper and the lower classes that is

essential for the capitalist system to thrive in the West, especially since the abolition of slavery (DuVernay). The stereotypical image, just like the false happy ending, is problematic, but the tension created by these portrayals is suggestive of the inescapability of the capitalist system. Neveldine and Taylor effectively present this impossibility by way of mechanistic systems and relationships alongside over-simplified understandings of hegemonic power.

Rather than representing explicit oppression, *Avalon* depicts a subtler form of authority that exerts its control by way of invisible strings. The game of *Avalon* gives those in power clerical titles whether they are real (people playing the game) or virtual (NPCs). The Game Master (GM) with whom Ash has an agreeable yet terse relationship reveals the system's panoptic power over its players when she asks him if he is real, and he responds, "Does it matter?" He wears a clerical collar denoting ideological authority; for the most part, she cedes to this authority and respects it. His "rules," however, are never presented as law, further complicating the ambiguous state of the *Avalon* gameworld; he even goes so far as to say he cannot give advice to help individual players. The GM's passive form of control relates to Castle's claim in *Gamer* that many people wouldn't mind a bit of control, that they just want to be told what to do, indirectly or otherwise. In *Avalon*, there is no need for repercussions if players do not do as advised, because most will. When one enters a gaming arena it is typically understood that they will follow the rules — in other words, they cede decision making to those who have been given that power. Ash, of course, is an exception; the GM cautions her against her pursuit to "win the game," but she does not heed this warning because she is obsessed with succeeding and proving herself to her opponents.

In the subtext of *Gamer* lies the implication that because they have been brought up in a system that encourages complacency, the masses on both sides of the class divide are incapable

of looking out for themselves and exercising social responsibility. This is reflected in the lack of control the living avatars seem to have over their own bodies while their wealthy players treat them with disregard and disrespect. Sherryl Vint rightly argues that only certain privileged individuals can afford to take control over how the body can be adapted in order to benefit themselves:

> The ability to construct the body... is a position available only to those privileged to think of their (white, male, straight, non-working class) bodies as the norm. This option does not exist for those who still need to rely on the work of their bodies to produce the means of survival, for those who lack access to technologies that can erase the effects of illness, and for those whose lives continue to be structured by racist, sexist, homophobic, and other body-based discourses of discrimination. (*Bodies of Tomorrow* 8-9)[55]

Though Vint's emphasis is on the wealthy who may choose to alter their own bodies for the sake of improved health rather than the marginalized who are forced to do so in *Gamer* and *Avalon,* I argue that her point is applicable to the processes created *by* the rich in order to mechanize and commodify the bodies of the poor in *Gamer* and through immaterial labour in the real world.

The exaggeratedly pacified state in which *Gamer* actors find themselves when their "Nanex" technology is activated is comparable to the complacency that citizens in a democratic society demonstrate when they cede to the directives of politicians with whom they may not always agree, or perhaps, feel they have no right to disagree. This is particularly the case in *Slayers*, where prisoners are represented and controlled by someone whose access to capital

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[55] This is the only reference to Vint's book, *Bodies of Tomorrow.* All other references to "Vint" relate to her chapter, "The Biopolitics of Globalization in Damir Lukacevic's *Transfer*," in *Red Alert: Marxist Approaches to Science Fiction Cinema.*

allows them to care more about the fun and competition of staying in the game than the actual wellbeing of the living avatars. This disengagement from responsibility is referenced by Castle who addresses the human inclination to outsourcing responsibility: "Don't you suspect a good many folks wouldn't mind or need a bit of control?" he asks the talk show host: "Someone else makin' all the decisions for you? No tough choices, no responsibilities."

On the other side of the reigns of control, however, we see that the players, as the ones granted the power of control, don't actually bear the responsibility Castle suggests could be uploaded to them. In fact, the players of both games are actually given license to be *irresponsible* and as amoral as they want without bearing the guilt of having committed the actions themselves. Mazierska, speaking of *Slayers*, notes:

> The fact that the players control the "pawns" from a distance and are not personally involved with their actions brings them many advantages — they can kill and torment with impunity, while implicating the "pawns." Equally, it diminishes the danger that the "pawns" will rebel against their masters as they need to know who are their masters (sic) and be able to approach them to organize rebellion. (194-5)

The upshot of this is that the distance and anonymity facilitated by the technology provides a geographical segregation between the classes. Though the physically precarious placement of the "pawns" makes revolution difficult, so too does everyone's hegemonic acceptance of their lot. This is to say that rebellion would not be possible in the face of these so-called masters because the actors are in no position to fight either corporeally — stripped of control over their own bodies, or in thought — lacking any time to think about an alternative. This state of impotence and distraction speaks to real world class control and the conditions of labour for all classes. The

reason that capitalist values linked to wealth and the accumulation of goods are ever present in the Western world is that everyone is too busy working to see an alternative.

This is why the issue crosses classes — individuals both at work and at play are too distracted to see the myriad negative implications of the capitalist system and its effect on many.[56] Actors in *Society* and *Slayers* are conscious of the actions they have volunteered or have been employed to do, despite the fact that they accept their situation. Castle neglects to acknowledge that while they may effectively give up responsibility, there is a traumatic price to be paid; they cannot consent or deny consent to the actions their bodies are made to enact. Castle's manipulative logic clearly betrays that he wants to be the one controlling, not the other way around. Whether the avatars for these games *prefer* to give up control or not, it is notable how little the players care for them as human beings. The game arena for *Society* is carnivalesque by design — with high colour saturation reflective of consumer excess and the empty spectacle of it all (Figure 9). Meanwhile, *Slayers* exhibits a low colour saturation (Figure 8) in order to highlight the colour of blood whenever someone is shot and killed. But the blood is essential to the fun. Without the blood there would be no game.

ESCAPING THE GAME – Part II

Thus far, I have outlined the various ideological frameworks that are presented through digital spaces and technologically induced agnatology in these films. I conclude now by examining the closing moments of *Gamer* and *Avalon* to consider how the inability to escape from these game spaces reflects the link between immaterial labour and the pervasiveness of

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[56] This applies to many of the wealthy classes as well as the poor. In *Gamer* the rich who "pay to control" choose to do so because they live in a culture where power is a capitalist aspiration. The lower classes are merely tools for getting what they want which is ultimately a little piece of what Castle has — power.

consumer capitalism. In both films, the game systems and the ideological ones they represent can't be escaped, yet that does not stop individuals from trying. The results of these efforts, however, are similar to Stiller's in *World on a Wire* because the success of their "escapes" is unclear. While there is room to read the films' respective endings in a utopian manner, to do so would mean ignoring the significance of ambiguity as outlined here.

Figure 8 *Slayers* is portrayed in washed out grey tones.

Figure 9 The Game arena for *Society* is presented in high colour saturation to reflect consumer excess.

I have already mentioned that Ash refuses to follow *Avalon*'s hegemonic rules by disregarding the Game Master's advice. In *Gamer*, there is a group of individuals that appears to be socially conscious: they are a group of hactivists called the Humanz — a group whose members are cast as women and visible minorities. Though the Humanz are killed before the ambivalently hopeful ending, they do offer evidence of a group that successfully re-appropriates the systems of control to defeat the oppressor. Mazierska observes that *Gamer,* as well as *Avalon*, demonstrates "that, although digitalization and computerization allow everybody to be connected with everybody else, these connections are not based on the principle of reciprocity. Rather, they are the instruments of surveillance and control of the powerless by the powerful and the means of the powerful to avoid democratic control by making them invisible" (199). In *Gamer* at least, the mechanisms of control are *not* invisible, however. Yet the film does reveal digitalization's capacity to obscure the hegemonic connection between the working body and the labour machine.

The Humanz make use of Castle's tools of control — the Nanex technology coupled with their counter-hegemonic capacity within cyberspace — to attack the apparent source of their making. These individuals actively fight against Castle and his ploy to take over individual agency. Following the puppet analogy, the Humanz are at least *aware* of their strings within the system. As hackers, they are uniquely capable of identifying the system's exploits. Their concern is primarily with the vast number of individuals, rich and poor (but beginning with marginalized people), who subscribe to the lure of Castle's technology, thus creating mass groups that he will eventually control:

> HUMANZ BROTHER: Everyday there's more people stepping forward. Want to be part of Castle's world. Throwing away everything it means to be human.
>
> TRACE: Right now it's the desperate ones: Convicts, addicts, the sick, the poor, the ones that fell through the cracks.

They address the problems that evidently arise from the privatization of social systems that cause individuals, effectively, to end up in prison, or with no choice but to 'act' in a game like *Society*:

> HUMANZ BROTHER: Federal prison system's growing out of control, set to bankrupt the whole damn U.S.A. Then Castle rides in on a white horse: says he has a plan that will bail us all out and we just fall in line?
>
> TRACE: The health care system is collapsing...
>
> HUMANZ BROTHER: ...and this time he's pushing for total control over genetic disease. Birth defects no longer an issue. All we got to do is exchange ourselves for the ones he wants to give us.
>
> TRACE: Promises us a longer life and a fatter wallet, I mean do you think people will refuse?
>
> HUMANZ DUDE: Fuck no.
>
> HUMANZ BROTHER: And the next thing you know: we're all slaves.

This final line, delivered by a black man (Ludacris) to Tillman who is white, emphasizes that society is not only in danger of reverting to racist economic and labour policies but that "this time" everyone will be involved, and that perhaps that process has already begun. Their success is not complete, but it does reveal that this subversion is possible and is reminiscent of Anonymous, the real-world group upon whom they are clearly modelled.

As hackers, the Humanz's work lacks aesthetic gusto. Shaviro notes that "In contrast to Castle's slick, state-of-the-art presentations, the Humanz's own media transmissions are low-fidelity and full of static and other interference; it is as if an over-the-air television signal were being received by a poorly tuned and inadequately sensitive antenna" (*Post Cinematic* 116). Shaviro further suggests that this inadequacy is indicative of the Humanz's inability to invoke a powerful technological resistance to Castle's fancy bells and whistles — that there is "no possibility of reverting to an earlier more honest state of affairs" (116). I argue, however, that the Humanz prove themselves to be an elite group of hackers, not unlike the techs in *The Matrix*'s Zion. They have the skill to mimic Castle's high-end tech, but they opt not to because the spectacle itself may just be part of the problem they are trying to combat. Instead, they hack and jam Castle-approved signals — providing diegetic television viewers with glimpses of the truth about Castle and his megalomaniacal control-plot. Making these revelations in such a way interrupts the seamless spectacle, jarring the audience to attention. Their refusal to participate in the spectacle responsible for turning a massive and still growing amount of people into Castle's evil hands is a kind of revolution from within the system. This can be read as a kind of civil disobedience in the name of revolution and in the form of technological refusal.

As in Western capitalism, *Avalon*'s multi-tiered diegesis exhibits a kind of post-historical hegemonic disavowal of the system(s) in place that has(have) gotten them to the dispassionate and poor state in which they live.[57] It is only when she goes against the Game Master's wishes and finds her way to the elite level "Special A" that it seems Ash has finally escaped the oppressive system. Yet, as a rogue player/worker who refuses to remain properly within the

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[57] Identifying precise issues and explicit demands when calling for revolution is inordinately difficult and counter-productive when up against an entirely corrupt system. During the heyday of Occupy Wall Street, it became evident that such a system could not properly tackle anything on a list of issues it requires *to remain issues* in order for the system to continue functioning. Slavoj Žižek engages this issue in his article "Occupy First: Demands Come Later."

system and accept its limitations, Ash's resolve to remain in the expert level indicates the futility of breaking from the system and effectively leaving the game. The aesthetic of the level itself, and Ash's interaction with it, reflects the pleasant comforts of the consumer society that makes capitalism run; it also portrays the deceptive perception of "freedom" inherently linked to capitalist ideologies related to work and commodification.

Because a description of the structures of power in *Avalon* is left out of the film (though it is clearly indicated as ambiguous, consumption-based, and ideological), the question of revolution is understated in comparison to *Gamer* if not entirely absent. The ambiguity presented in Oshii's film, however, demonstrates the futility of imagining an escape from a world of work, while suggesting that the further ensconced one gets within a system that conflates leisure with the need for commodified labour, the more difficult it is to see the system's faults. Like a video game, one is driven to just keep playing. Once achieving Special A access, Ash awakens in a familiar-looking game room and reads on a computer screen "Welcome to Class Real." Leaving the dark room, the sepia-tone gives way to a colour-saturated modern-day Warsaw. Jenna Ng calls this moment in the film "a literal dawning upon both character and viewer" (80), highlighting the climactic moment of the film when Oshii's aesthetic choice emphasizes how easily one can become accustomed to limitation. Class Real seems almost transcendental in contrast to Ash's perceived reality and the basic game of *Avalon* and its real-world aesthetic is utilized, in contrast to what the viewer has been accustomed to, as though it were a special effect (Ng 81).

The slowed-down pacing typically required in narrative films about video games is interrupted, perhaps to suggest that Ash has left the game. Prior to this moment, even fight scenes appear in slow motion (Ingram and Reisenleitner 135). But the busy city street, filled with

streetcars and other vehicles, bright-coloured advertisements, consumers and people in business suits, are accompanied by a much quicker pace: "Gone are the weapons, the armour, the shootouts and the elegiac slow motion…and not only the streetcar, but also people move fast, faster than Ash, who moves hesitantly in this new environment." This contrast is a reversal from earlier when Ash is the one seen bypassing immobile others (Ingram and Reisenleitner 136).

Ash quickly finds that there is no need for a gun to defend herself. It's effectively a virtual gated community. The environment appears lively, clean, and rich with nature while also full of brightly coloured advertisements — there are no oppressive signs insisting that people should stop playing the game. Warsaw looks like any number of well-off Western cities on a sunny day (Figure 10). Ash arrives at the Warsaw Philharmonic and is surrounded, for the first time, by individuals who don't appear to survive on rations and who live lives of actual leisure rather than lives primarily focused on work. In this final scene where the colours are more vibrant, the picture quality is of higher-resolution, also, and it seems that people move through this space in a much freer and lighter manner than in the sepia-toned worlds exhibited in the rest of the film. Freedom to move does not mean freedom from the system, as discussed in Chapter 1, but for many within the system of capitalism freedom does not mean escape — it means having the opportunity to access the (usually commodified) comforts the system can offer.

Figure 10 By comparison to the rest of the game, and the rest of the film, "Class Real" looks realistic to a contemporary Western viewer.

This new aesthetic seems so different from Ash's oppressed rationed world before gaining access to Special A and it implies that perhaps Ash has located a utopian "real" outside of the game (having not realized with the viewer that she was always in it even when at home). While this comfortable and colourful space calls to mind consumer capitalism and the relative daily comfort as experienced in the West, Ash discovers that it is in fact still part of the game. Class Real presents itself as safe, a gated community, and cultured (both social benefits reserved for the well-off) and though Ash does not need the handgun in her possession to protect herself, she has been told that she has one task *that will require it* if she wants to get to the top. She must eliminate "the unreturned," a friend and former teammate named Murphy (Jerzy Gudejko). Class Real is not a utopian gameworld. It is the American Dream for those who can achieve it, and like the American Dream, its violences are not readily visible:

> [G]lobal capitalism's game world defines most people's everyday reality, a reality born out of violence yet commercialized, just like the cyberspace universe that is its enabling condition — in other words, a real-world fantasy come true, without an obvious way out or 'reset' button. What Oshii seems to indicate in the final scenes is that although the rules might have changed (no heavy weapons, but also no time limit), this world is different, more colourful, but certainly no less violent than the levels 'below' it — the levels on which Class Real is built. (Ingram and Reisenleitner 137).

Earlier in the film, a flashback reveals that Ash had called "reset" when on a mission with her team, which affected their score and celebrity reputation. Whether because of guilt or shame, it is clear that Ash no longer wishes to be responsible for others. Though she is clearly close to Murphy, she does not hesitate to shoot him when it looks like he may be reaching for his gun.

Murphy's death confirms that Class Real is indeed just another level of *Avalon* yet the way it is staged compared to deaths in the game earlier in the film speaks to how completely absorbed by the system Ash has become. Earlier deaths are bloodless, rendering avatars as two-dimensional before dissolving them into pixel fragments. Keeping with Class Real's theme, his death initially looks confoundingly realistic. Unlike dying avatars elsewhere in the game, his body starts to bleed, which appears to shock Ash. As an "unreturned," Murphy has become lost in the system, the result of which is that his body on the apparent outside of the game has been rendered comatose. The result of his death within the game will likely result in actual death and Ash is given a moment to register the implications of her competitive action. Eventually, though, his body digitally shatters into pixelated fragments like the others, but the pixels now appear different, swirling in a circular motion rather than the traditional square shape. The alternate rendering of the same old effect affirms that though the level may appear different it is still part of the same system, composed by digital code even if that digitality is less evident than before. Ash proceeds into the now empty opera house that had provided the soundtrack for their encounter. In another direct-address, apparently in response to her ambiguous introduction to the game she now asserts, "As for who controls the game, I choose to believe it's me," and points her gun at the cherub statue mentioned earlier and established in the film's narrative as a red herring. Whatever she *believes*, Ash, too, remains limited in her choices regarding how she navigates the game. As in *Gamer*, the final frames of the film comprise a graphic that reads, "Welcome to *Avalon*," thus resetting the game to which, evidently, there is no end.

CONCLUSION TO "GAMEWORLDS AT WORK"

In *Avalon* and *Gamer*, game spaces are constructed and maintained by deeply rooted and variously enforced ideologies that are revealed in the hegemonic structures upheld to support the games. These films present gameworlds as work environments in which the potential for revolution is brought up, challenged, and ultimately negated. That these are digital gaming spaces within real-world diegeses is handled multiple ways in these films, yet the fragmented and non-linear aesthetics are representative of the precarious state of labour in late capitalism. Getting out of the system is presented as metaphorically, literally, and virtually futile. Ambiguity plays an important role in complicating these environments, effectively representing the complexities of labour and class relations in late capitalism. Where power hierarchies are clear in *Gamer,* what is not clear is how, if at all, individuals like Tillman and groups like the Humanz might stand up to power. The living human avatars are veritable, yet conscious, meat puppets who are fully alienated by their bodies' immersion in the game and the necessity of offering their work for sale to and for the pleasure of a more elite class. *Avalon* presents an ambiguous power hierarchy in which it is the game itself that cannot be escaped. The drive to "work" (or to play the game) is a matter of survival at times and a hegemonic race towards uncertain ends at others. Despite their narrative differences, these films are both vital cultural indicators of contemporary attitudes toward embodiment, labour, and exploitation that simultaneously engage with the matter of digital capitalism today while making use of its technologies to do so.

PART TWO:
Technodigital Bodies and the Question of Hegemonic Desperation and Control

As I have shown in Part One, the virtual space narratives of the 60s, and equally those of today, reflect(ed) the ways in which people get caught up in the capitalist system and stuck within its metaphorical machine. Due to this system's digitality (fragmented and omnipresent in form) workers and consumers may easily become lost and alienated from the social aspects of humanity. This section of the dissertation turns its attention to fictional technologized bodies that are not lost in the system without a view to something outside of it. There is no question of an "outside" in these narratives yet that does not preclude a hope for revolution. This hope, which comes up near the end of Chapter 3 and is prevalent throughout Chapter 4, has a lot to do instead with an escape from one's programming.

By no means do these bodies cease to be alienated and trapped within the digital system, but the processes by which they are alienated serves to emphasise the point that immaterial labour's revolutionary appeal ironically favours the rich and not those who need it most. Though Section One delved into how the poor might be exploited through control technologies, this section explores texts that demonstrate how the power and control inherent in the capitalist system — related to work as well as consumerism — are distributed amongst social classes and informed by economics, race, and gender.

These bodies are different from the digital bodiless ones presented in narratives like *WOAW* and those that stemmed from it because, to varying extents, the subjects in possession of them are conscious of their systemic roles. Where *WOAW* expressed the anxieties surrounding the onset of immaterial labour due to the techno-digital developments of the 60s and 70s, and the

advent of what would soon be known as the Internet, biotechnological advancements had increased exponentially by the 2000s, prompting increased reasons for concern. Enter the era of our increasing attachment to smart technology. Enter, also, the era of capitalism's exploitation of this attachment.

There are two main differences between chapters 3 and 4. The first difference relates to the type — that is, based on its technological composition — of fictional body being analysed; the second difference relates to the potential for these bodies to (effectively) reprogram the system and take charge of their own subjectivities. As I have suggested, the texts in Chapter 3 are in line with chapters 1 and 2 in that they offer readings that are substantially more pessimistic about our condition in the capitalist machine; yet the chapter concludes in a discussion of one character who manages to break from her service to capitalism while using the same technology that had exploited her to embrace a revolutionary community of female subjectivities. Chapter 4, however — the only chapter involving narratives about characters that are entirely mechanised and entirely programmed by patriarchal capitalism — features fembots that rewrite their prescriptive coding and reclaim their *power*[58] and independence from the system, thus creating a new kind of Singularity.

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[58] Intentional pun. As robots, they require some form of external power source — be it electrical, solar, or otherwise.

CHAPTER 3
Commodified Bodies: The Body Surrogate Other and the New Corpse-economy

> Most of these people are not ready to be unplugged. And many of them are so inert, so hopelessly dependent on the system that they will fight to protect it.
>
> — Morpheus, *The Matrix*

This chapter engages four contemporary (post-millennium) texts — three films and one television series — in which the bodies of marginalized, poor, or otherwise disenfranchised people are made into technological products for consumption — actual objects for the wealthy to use at their leisure and for their own benefit. I analyze the various ways that Tarsem Singh's *Self/less* (2015), Damir Lukasevic's *Transfer* (2010), Jordan Peele's *Get Out* (2017), and Joss Whedon's *Dollhouse* (2009-10) take up capitalism's commodification of the labouring or marginalized body. The characters in these narratives are diegetically rooted in the real world; they can see that they are stuck but they have no options for escape if they want themselves or their families to survive. The texts reveal a form of imprisonment, supported by the capitalist system, which is effected at the pleasure of the rich, yet they also demonstrate a sort of symbiotic relationship between the two socioeconomic classes.

In Singh's, Lukasevic's, and Peele's films, variously othered bodies become life-support systems for the wealthy, and in Whedon's series they are given made-to-order subjectivities that are hired out to rich, emotionally unavailable or damaged clients. A fundamental consideration in this chapter is that of "choice" in decisions that each side of the class divide makes to participate

in this system of exploitation, along with the degree to which their choices are free from and autonomous in relation to the capitalist machine. Rather than focusing on a megalomaniac villain, as demonstrated in last chapter's *Gamer* discussion, most of the texts examined in this chapter reveal a relationship of give and take that leads to a more nuanced experience for all involved. Immaterial labour consists of the manufacturing of subjectivities rather than the producing of objects, and these fictions involve characters that are embodied products of such labour. The exploitation of the immaterial worker's time and their experience of that exploitation are made more obvious through the use of fictional biotechnologies that allow the consumer to *completely* usurp control over the worker/product's body. In so doing, we can consider the ways in which these two classes are caught up in an exploitative exchange with each other, and how it may be difficult for either of them to choose not to participate.

Marx described human labour as a living organ of the hungry machine; the visual created in his description is that of a human-shaped organ, "regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery" (693), which imaginatively situates the machine physically outside of the body. With this in mind, I posited in Chapter 1 that we might imagine the same scenario as though it is us inside the machine. I associated this spatial organization with the immersion paranoia derived from Cold War anxieties about digital technology between the late 60s and early 90s. Today, according to Franco Berardi, this spatial separation of the subject and her labour is indistinguishable, as the machine (read capitalist labour, consumerism, etc.) has worked its way into the social fabric and the worker's body itself:

> In the mechanical era, the machine stood before the body, and changed human
>
> behaviour, enhancing our potency without changing our physical structure. The
>
> assembly line, for instance, although improving and increasing the productive power

of laborers did not modify their physical organism nor introduce mutations inside

their cognitive ability. The machine is no longer in front of the body but inside it.

Bodies and minds therefore cannot express and relate anymore without the technical

support of the biomachine. (*ATF* 23)

The machine is no longer an entity that feeds on human labour and controls our actions from the

outside like a puppeteer while we work. It has fused entirely with the worker's soul and is part of

her subjectivity — "not as external machinery opposing living labor as fixed capital but as fixed

capital inside living labor, i.e., as an attribute of living labor" (Lemmens 289). Berardi's claim

that the machine's position has changed along with our dependence on it does not stand in

opposition to Marx's description, but it does speak to how totalizing the machine's influence has

become.

    There is a clear connection between the current state of the commodified (always

labouring) body and a tradition of class oppression and control related to technology that can be

traced at least as far back as the Enlightenment. The "corpse-economy" related to the culture of

public dissection and body snatching since the sixteenth century will serve as a point of

departure for my analysis of what I will call the "new kind of corpse-economy" of today, in

which the bodies are exploited in a similar manner while still living. Though there may well be a

new kind of corpse-economy in a metaphorical sense, the fictional texts engaged here literalize

the real-world indignities of capitalism by showing the mechanisms of control (which are usually

invisible) and the relationship between them and those who stand to benefit from their operation.

    The texts I look at present the living body as a product to be sold to the rich, who either

inhabit it as a sort of living skin or receive satisfaction from its programmed subjectivity. I begin

with *Self/less* and *Transfer* as contemporary body-surrogate narratives reminiscent of bourgeois

public dissections around the eighteenth century and reflective of the hegemonic factors of "choice" on both sides of the economic spectrum. Both films provide the point of view of the "consumer" rich and the "commodified" poor. The wealthy characters are presented as relatively "likeable" and simply desperate to beat their terminal illnesses, whereas the poor sell their bodies in order to make a better life for their families. They all take part in this commodity exchange out of desperation, but the existence of the expensive technological processes to facilitate that exchange reflect a hegemonic class-based entitlement to life on the part of the rich.

Next, I discuss *Get Out*, a horror film with sf elements, to look at commodity fetishism in racialized terms. Peele's film also involves body surrogacy, though it challenges the matter of choice, as the host bodies are procured from African American men who are either abducted or tricked into going to the location of the procedure. The protagonist is one of these men, and the narrative perspective remains with him. The rich, white individuals are presented as monstrous and completely inhumane. Comparing them to the less malicious whites in the former two films allows us to see the true implications of the act of taking over someone else's body, which are nearly the same in all three films, even if they seem excusable in the first two.

Anticipating my last chapter on fembots, I conclude with a discussion of the television series *Dollhouse*, which engages commodified bodies not as body surrogates but as unconscious bodies of marketable affect for hire to reveal the objectification of affective labour in posthuman form and further consider the relationship between capitalist wealth and exploitative labour. Unlike the inescapability of the cycle of exploitation portrayed in Singh's, Lukasevic's, and Peele's films, in Whedon's series the protagonist appropriates the many technologically programmed subjectivities within her. She establishes a hybrid identity of many personalities and abilities that allows her to fight the organization that originally created them for the sake of

profit. In effect, the machines and the spaces in which they do the work that enslaves the marginalized bodies reflect the position of the capitalist commodifier and the sometimes-ignorant perspectives of the rich who benefit from the exploitation. Though both the marginalized and the rich come to it and engage it in varying ways, these texts demonstrate that their participation is predetermined within the system.

THE QUESTION OF "CHOICE" IN A CONSUMER SOCIETY

Societies preceding modern Western capitalism were not without their share of consumption. Yet, as Zygmunt Bauman argues, normative societal roles related to consumption have shifted. Whereas the industrial phase of modern society placed emphasis on "mass industrial labour and conscript armies," argues Bauman, "[t]he way present-day society shapes its members is dictated first and foremost by the duty to play the role of the consumer" (80). For Bauman, consumption is an unavoidable "internalized pressure" that is revealed "in the disguise of a free exercise of will," yet the freedom to choose is limited only by the fact that a choice *must* be made (84). Thus, if the poor are forced to "choose" to be exploited in order to participate in the consumer society enough to survive, the rich are forced to consume at any affordable cost, including the lives of the poor.

These kinds of choices, made for survival within consumer capitalism, are explored here as the consumption of the poor body for the sake of the rich is literalized within the fiction, in terms of body ownership. Treating the human body as a commoditized good in these texts can suggest that the "choice" of the rich to do so is every bit as limited as that of the poor. Their position in the system is certainly more comfortable and necessarily supportive of their quality of life within the closed system that is the capitalist consumption machine, yet that does not mean

they are free and autonomous. I begin with some discussion of the earliest form of economically

determined hierarchies regarding bodily rights — body snatching. An economy of privilege and

power over the dead bodies originated centuries ago when the dead bodies of the poor were

snatched from their graves for use — sometimes legitimate and sometimes not — at the abusive

hands of the rich. David McNally calls this exploitative trade the *corpse-economy.*

HISTORICIZING THE CORPSE-ECONOMY

Sixteenth-century Europe was a formative time for the development of scientific

knowledge of human anatomy. This was when Andreas Vesalius introduced dissection into

common use for medical research. His new hands-on approach revealed grave inaccuracies in the

antiquated theories of the body set forth by Galen circa CE157-210, which had still been in

common use (Ede and Cormack 37-41, 124).[59] In Science Studies, Vesalius is celebrated for his

important contributions to anatomical study, and his decision to always perform his dissections

publicly appears to have been generative of what we now know as the peer-review process (Ede

and Cormack 125). The making public of these anatomies and where the corpses were procured,

however, had broader and less socially progressive implications.

Public anatomies in the seventeenth century were commonly conducted on bodies that

had belonged to the poor — bodies that had been sentenced to death and executed or simply

found dead in the streets. Having already suffered in life and experienced degrading deaths, they

were cut open and picked apart, with no respect or compunction, by men of high social standing

(McNally 25). According to McNally, by the eighteenth century, "Attendance at public

anatomies [had become] a mark of enlightenment… Interest in anatomy became an index of

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[59] For a comprehensive history of dissection for the sake of anatomical study prior to Vesalius, see Charles Donald O'Malley's *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels 1514-1564.*

intelligence, wit, and education; indeed, it was not uncommon in eighteenth-century France for a wealthy man to have his own private dissecting room" (25). Thus, it was a mark of status to have access to the objective and financial means to perform a public anatomy. With the expansion of medical research over time, the rising demand for experience with hands-on dissection created a shortage of corpses, resulting in steep price increases. The bodies were also illicitly acquired by way of "grave-robbing, murder and the purchase (from relatives and friends) of the bodies of the condemned on hanging days" (McNally 52). McNally refers to this process of procurement as the "*corpse-economy*" (52). The corpses for sale, and for trade, belonged principally to the poor; the wealthy had the means to protect themselves — even after death. They paid grave guards or arranged to have their bodies buried in double or triple coffins made of lead and wood and sometimes in multiple graves (apparently preferring dissection on their own terms). The capacity to pay for expensive funerals and burials therefore directly correlated to a body's assured safety and integrity (McNally 57; Richardson 80).

There are some rather macabre parallels between the corpse-economy of the past and the capitalist exploitation of today's worker/citizen, which I'm calling the new corpse-economy. A terrific visual representation of the use of scientific technology for this purpose is Rembrandt's 1632 painting *The Anatomy of Dr. Tulp* (Figure 11). The centuries-old work of art speaks directly to exploited working bodies of today as well as those of its time. Produced near the end of the commercial revolution and thus on the heels of a proliferation of capitalist ideals in European society, the painting reflects the assertion of power by the wealthy over the poor; McNally argues that it presents bourgeois control "as a heroic, even godlike power that ennobles all involved. In a characteristic antinomy of class-society, intelligence is attributed to those with social power, while the labouring classes are reduced to brute bodies awaiting superintending

will" (34). The painting depicts Dr. Nicolaas Tulp, then chief anatomist of the Surgeon-

Anatomists of Amsterdam, conducting an anatomy on the body of a petty thief (McNally 29). [60]

McNally notes how Tulp applies the forceps to the subject: "he manipulates the *flexorum*

digitorum muscles of [the corpse's] left hand" and pulls "on these muscles, causing the corpse's

fingers to curl in imitation of his own" (33-4). In so doing, Tulp demonstrates his socially

determined power over poor bodies, even in death. McNally argues that this is

> a portrayal of the paradigmatic relationship between capital and wage labour. The
>
> superintending will … employs a tool with which it directs the movements of the
>
> labouring body — or, rather, of a body that ought to have devoted itself to labour….
>
> [T]he movement of the pauper-body is being directed by a will external to it, a will
>
> whose control over the tools of production … is the key to its command over the
>
> bodies of the poor. (34)

Figure 11 *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp* (Rembrandt, 1632)

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[60] The man, one Adriaen Adriaenszoon, had been charged for the theft of a coat (McNally 29).

The symbolic act of the forceps, technological "tools of production" that are used by a member of high society to force the bodily movement of a pauper's corpse, is repeated in the contemporary texts discussed this chapter. Hundreds of years before Marx wrote about the alienating function of the factory machine, proletarian bodies were being connected, against their will, to mechanical devices designed to treat them with indignity. Yet, in many ways, the rich still unfairly employ the bodies of the poor to improve their own quality of life. McNally's analysis of the painting applies to the state of the worker under capitalism today and can be applied in different respects to the fictional texts discussed this chapter, made nearly a half-millennium later.

THE NEW CORPSE-ECONOMY

The key difference between the sixteenth-century painting of a real-life anatomy and my twenty first-century-based case studies is that the later bodies — which reflect a new kind of corpse-economy — belong to the still-living. Yet the control over their bodies is given up to the wealthy, thus affecting their continuation of a subjective living experience. The implication, in all of these texts, is that though the poor, desperate, or marginalized working body is to remain alive, she loses any capacity to control what her body does. I argue that this new corpse-economy is, in effect, less about bourgeois bodies posturing for more power and more to do with elite classes now comfortable in said power willing to become body snatchers themselves in order to maintain their established place in society. In addition to how these inescapable roles are played out, it is also notable how and where the imagined technologies are used to facilitate power and control in these narratives. Like the painting, the aesthetic of the rooms and technologies where

the programming of the controlled body takes place offers insight into how power is allowed to circulate amongst the wealthy classes.

As in Vesalius's and Rembrandt's time, we are now in a period of immense technological development. The digital age vaunts technologies that facilitate the employer's access to the employee outside of company time. Labourers and consumers are almost always "on the clock," and one cannot overlook the passive labour undertaken through the advertising we encounter on the Internet, at the movies, and even just passing though the hallways of our learning institutions. This is to say nothing of the physical and emotional surplus labour performed by most while at home and supposedly "off the clock."[61] Control over what the labourer does in her "free" time often does not lie in her hands. Today, poor, working, and marginalized bodies are taken into an economy similar to that described by McNally due to desperation for power and for survival on each side of the economic spectrum; now, though, the dissection happens in life rather than in death.

TARSEM SINGH'S *SELF/LESS* AND DAMIR LUCASEVIC'S *TRANSFER*

Body Snatching in the New Corpse-economy

Self/less and *Transfer* present differing kinds of marginalized characters exploited by capitalism. The former reveals the desperation of a former soldier with a sick child facing uninsured treatment within the American healthcare system while the latter invokes unethical labour practices that stem from globalization impacting the global South.[62] Yet both films reveal

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[61] This issue has been well documented by Marxist feminists affiliated with the Wages for Housework movement that began in the early 1970s. See: Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James's *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community*, Silvia Federici's "Wages Against Housework" and "The Reproduction of Labor-power in the Global Economy," and Leopoldina Fortunati's *The Arcane of Reproduction.*

[62] Global South is a term from postcolonial studies and intersectional sociology that refers, broadly, to areas whose economies that have suffered due to the politics of "the West." As Nour Dados and Raewyn Connell explain in their

the traumatic process of capital's utilization of othered bodies to accommodate the privileged hegemonic entitlement to comfort. Comfort, in these films, is presented as a right to life and the access to immortality by way of full and permanent body surrogacy. Though the poor body used for the transplant remains alive, the body and control over it is given to a high-paying consumer with little to no control over his or her own body. The films engage these problems in different ways. One thing they have in common, however, is that they reveal capital's traumatic claim over certain bodies and its accommodation of a privileged, hegemonic entitlement on the part of (usually white) subjects to comfort and even immortality by way of full and permanent body surrogacy. Though the poor body is kept alive, it is given over to a high paying consumer, resulting in the creation of a kind of living dead posthuman subject.

In *Self/less*, there is an antiseptic quality to how Singh presents his protagonist's daily environment as well as the technological process his body eventually undergoes. Damian (Ben Kingsley) is a billionaire architectural icon who has been dubbed "the man who built New York." He is also in the final stages of terminal cancer. Given his profession, and the fact that his identity is bound to it along with the money it has brought him, it makes sense that structural design should be highlighted in the film's aesthetic. The opening shot traverses the landscapes of an empty golf course, a public park, and finally the bustling skyscrapers of New York City. The scene cuts to looking out a window from inside one of the buildings — Damian's home — emphasizing the sonic contrast between public and private space. The searing traffic noise of the city cuts out abruptly; its window is designed to keep the audible rabble out, and the silence

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description of the global South's origin and meaning, the term comprises "the regions of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Oceania. It is one of a family of terms, including 'Third World' and 'Periphery,' that denote regions outside Europe and North America, mostly (though not all) low-income and often politically or culturally marginalized. The [phrase] marks a shift from a central focus on development or cultural difference toward an emphasis on geopolitical relations of power" (12).

produces a peaceful effect as Damian's face comes into focus. The peace and quiet are quickly interrupted, however, by a crashing sound within the suite; a member of his house staff has disrupted Damian's idyllic quiet, and he winces. He stands in his dining room, a large room decorated in white upholsteries and trimmed in gold with a glass table top. The opulence of the room clearly indicates wealth. The offending "help" isn't a housekeeper or butler however — it's a medical doctor who has dropped a tray of tools. Due to his high social status, Damian has been sheltered from the chaos of everyday life, but he now finds himself in the inconvenient, undignified, and noisy position of having a serious health condition. It seems, to his apparent dismay, that he is mortal after all. Understandably afraid of death, and with the means to do something about it, Damian agrees to have a procedure done, called "shedding," through which he is given a new, young, strong, and attractive genetically engineered body. He later discovers that the body belongs to Mark (Ryan Reynolds), a soldier who sold his living body to fund an expensive medical procedure needed to save his dying daughter.

The "shedding" procedure's name relates the sort of person who can afford it to the most well-known creature to shed its skin, cold-blooded and survival-driven as it is. By contrast to the negative snake connotation, the company's name, "Phoenix," rhetorically cleanses the process, promising a brand-new start and effective immortality to the rich and exceptional. The mythical bird invokes the notion of a clean slate as it abolishes its old body in favour of a new and improved one. Yet, there is an aspect of the phoenix's story that is less clean and simple than the rebirth that it initially implies. The process endured by the mythological creature involves complete immolation before its reappearance from the ashes. If the company were truly providing synthetic bodies, the name would fit, as the rich give up their old bodies for new, revitalized ones. But since the company is acquiring bodies from the economically desperate, it

is symbolically inappropriate. Though Damian's body is indeed eradicated, a more apt company name might be parasitically inspired, as once he "sheds" the old body, he fully inhabits someone else's.

The shedding procedure also *looks* clean and is free from intrusive surgery — there is no dissection, just side-by-side MRI-like machines (Figure 12). It does not look comfortable for Damian during the several seconds it takes, but the film suggests that it's more startling than painful as he does not shout out while the flashing lights are all that he can see through the mesh fabric across his face. Once the process is complete, Damian need no longer deal with the poking and prodding associated with common medical procedures, and, thanks to scientific progress, the new body's acquisition is devoid of the ugliness of the corpse-economy centuries earlier. Yet, he eventually finds out that his acquisition of a new body actually involved a similar financial interaction to those between body snatchers and those engaged in public dissection. Therein, he is exposed to the ugliness in which he has taken part, not only by receiving the procedure but in his years profiting from a system that would encourage such a thing.

For several weeks after the procedure, Damian enjoys the simple pleasures of being young again, but when he fails to take his anti-rejection medication on time, Mark's memories start to bleed through. Damian discovers the truth about the body he had been told was just "a bundle of organic tissue" and instinctively locates Mark's wife Madeline (Natalie Martinez), and daughter Anna (Jaynee-Lynne Kinchen). He does not immediately reveal the truth to Madeline (who thinks Mark had drowned) that he is not in fact her husband. Though it appears to cross his mind, it isn't an option for Damian to give up his new body and seems easier for him to pretend to be Mark. He only tells her that he (Mark) had to fake his own death and do some unsavoury

things to get the money to save Anna. He does not tell her the truth until much later, when they are on the run from Phoenix, because they have learned about the company's violent practices.

The way in which Madeline receives the information speaks to the state of many who struggle to perform what Arlie Russell Hochschild dubbed "emotional labour" in 1979.[63] She coined the term to identify the responsibility of (particularly) women — at home and in the paid workforce — to ensure the happiness and comfort of their children, husbands, bosses, and customers through a process of emotion management. This responsibility requires emotional energy to be spent whether the revealed emotion is genuine or not. Hochschild identifies two modes of emotion management: emotional labour and emotion work. The difference between these two modes is primarily at the economic level: "By 'emotion work' [Hochschild refers] to the emotion management we do in private life; by 'emotional labor' [she refers] to the emotion management we do for a wage" (118). Yet the difference seems small, as, paid or not, the working or labouring individual produces an affect, whether it be for their boss, a customer, or their small child:

> Each time we manage feeling we engage, as flight attendants do, in a series of momentary acts. Like the tiny dots of a Seurat painting, the micro-acts of emotion management can compose, through repetition and change over time, a movement of the entire form of a feeling. A feeling has changed. We have done emotion work. (Hochschild 121-22)

Madeline performs the emotion work of a mother caring for her child, yet class and gender hierarchies between her and Damian are highlighted in this scene, representing, perhaps, the

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[63] In her book, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling.* This is the only reference to that book. All future citations referencing Hochschild indicate the 1990 article, "Ideology and Emotion Management: A Perspective and Path for Future Research."

position of many whose job responsibilities and the demands of the employer must always come before themselves. Madeline's (initially) begrudging cooperation with the wealthy man who continues to exploit her husband's body by living in it, reflects the experience of many working parents who must juggle their emotional energies: smiling at work for the clients and the boss, and smiling for their children, too, no matter their actual subjective experience at a given moment. Madeline is understandably shocked to find out the man in her husband's body is not her actual husband, and quickly becomes furious, yet she manages her anger out of necessity. After calling him a "manipulative asshole," she endures Damian's patronizing explanation about "the bottom line" and follows his instruction to "grab [her] daughter and get in the car." By the end of the car ride, Madeline seems less angry than concerned. Like any parent, she wants to protect her child, so she takes on the emotion work of managing her daughter's experience of the situation while cooperating entirely with Damian. She develops a legitimate affection for Damian in time, but her immediate adaptation to the painful situation in order to save what is left of her family is an act of desperation.

Later, Damian "does the right thing" and releases his control over Mark's body by ceasing to take his anti-rejection medication. He does this, however, after utilizing the body one last time to deliver a letter to his estranged daughter (Michelle Dockery) — a social activist who is uninterested in his money. His experience in the body of a less fortunate man allows him to better relate to her interest in social justice, and his letter — though its contents are not shown — seems to reflect a better appreciation for what she does. The delivery of this letter offers Damian peace of mind and allows him to die with a clear conscience. This emotional transformation is indeed the closest Damian gets to rising from his own ashes, though his release of Mark's body to the rightful owner is no thanks to Phoenix Corporation. Mark's happy family reuniting on the

beach symbolically brings about a return to nature and, apparently, what is just. The picture-perfect ending is disturbing, though, as we remember the grotesque fact that Mark has actually been absent from his rightful body for several months so that Damian might bring acceptable closure to his own entitled life. Damian dies heroic and guilt-free, and Mark's family seems better-off for having accepted the gruesome interference in Mark's biological existence. Though initially shot from the sky, like the film's opening, the scene is conspicuously devoid of skyscrapers. The utopian lack of contrasting societies suggests a note of impossibility as it points to the removal of class disparity from the equation. The death of the wealthy (and therefore powerful) man, and his willful decision not to choose from his socially entitled options for survival, was required for it to be so.

Damian's temporary possession of Mark's body which is enabled by his access to capital and facilitated by capitalist technological production personalizes the issue of the global exploitation of the lower classes. Bauman's tourist and vagabond analogy — he describes the former as choosing to travel to "destinations according to the joys they offer" and the latter as being jettisoned from places in which they would rather remain (86) — is applicable to their situation. The space that Mark must vacate is not a village, city, or country, but his body; Damian gets the joy of living in a better place — that is, he gets to inhabit the body of a young, attractive, and healthy man again. As I have already noted, though, Damian does not initially realize that someone else must lose out if he is to thrive, so while his economic privilege bears responsibility for Mark's loss, his personal culpability is questionable.

Transfer presents a very similar narrative to *Self/less*, though the former's diegesis takes place in Germany, and the body donors, Apolain and Sarah, hail from developing countries in Africa. Here, then, Bauman's analogy is especially relevant, as he further explains, "The tourists

travel because *they want to*; the vagabonds because *they have no other bearable choice*"
(Bauman 93, emphasis in original). Apolain and Sarah are migrant "workers," which is to say
that as "vagabonds" they actually travel, but just like Mark, a more immediate limitation to their
right to movement is located at the site of their bodies. The "tourists" in *Transfer* differ from
Damian in two ways that highlight how the global elite may not be able to see their privileged
access to certain rights and freedoms. First, unlike Damian, the elderly body transplant recipients
Herman and Anna know very well what they are doing. They hesitate at first to have the
procedure but they are desperate and, ultimately, when she collapses and nearly dies from what
they know is terminal cancer, they conclude that they have no other alternative. Second, they
engage the services of Mendoza Corporation in order to acquire *two* bodies — one for each of
them — even though only Anna is sick. So while they feel they have no other choice, the loving
couple effectively embarks on an adventure together, emphasizing their inherent feeling that they
both *need* the new bodies when in fact they just *want* to do it together. Their conflation of
needing and *wanting* here betrays their apparently privileged lives before Anna became ill. For
them, there is only one decision to make, and that is if they (both) want to undergo the
procedure.[64]

Hermann and Anna know very well the implications of what they are doing — Anna
especially feels somewhat guilty and appears to understand that there is a reason that she cannot
be given personal information about her hosts — yet their ultimate decision that they have no
choice reflects a willful ignorance that fuels the social exploitation of the capitalist machine. In
his updated reading of Marx's formula for false consciousness, Žižek adapts the idea that people

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[64] They discuss the alternative briefly, and it involves Hermann's committing suicide after she dies of cancer.

2

are ignorant of their exploitative actions and suggests that it's not so much that they don't know but that they misunderstand their knowledge:

> [I]deological illusion lies in the "knowing". It is a matter of a discordance between what people are effectively doing and what they think they are doing - ideology consists in the very fact that the people "do not know what they are *really* doing", that they have a false representation of the social reality to which they belong (the distortion produced, of course, by the same reality). (*Sublime Object* 27, my emphasis)

They are not deceived in what they are doing, but their perception of reality causes them to misperceive. Hermann and Anna know that their continued life — or, rather, Anna's continued life and Hermann's gratuitous life-improvement — requires two others (or, rather, two *Others*) to give their lives up. Yet they understand that Apolain's and Sarah's families have been "well-compensated," which appears to quiet their guilt about extending the natural course of their existence at the expense of someone else.

As with *Self/less*, the cleanliness of the transfer procedure as well as the bodies involved in it represents the protection of the upper class from literal and figurative contamination by the lower. Certainly, the high-paying customer wants to ensure their health is protected from illnesses that may originate from the poorer countries. The customer also does not want any residual knowledge about the poor treatment — of the poor bodies — on their conscience. Hermann and Anna are not given any personal information about their host bodies, presumably for this reason. Apolain and Sarah wear only underwear and seem to be kept in a sterile state such as medical instruments might be. In Sherryl Vint's analysis of the film in "The Biopolitics of Globalization in Damir Lukacevic's *Transfer*," she notes that they are shot in such a manner

as to "invite us visually to consume their bodies, but not in an eroticized way" (103). This lack of sexualization speaks to the desperate nature of desire within the diegesis; the company endeavors to fully dehumanize Apolain and Sarah in an effort to keep the process uncomplicated and unemotional — affectless — despite the truly affective nature of the exchange.
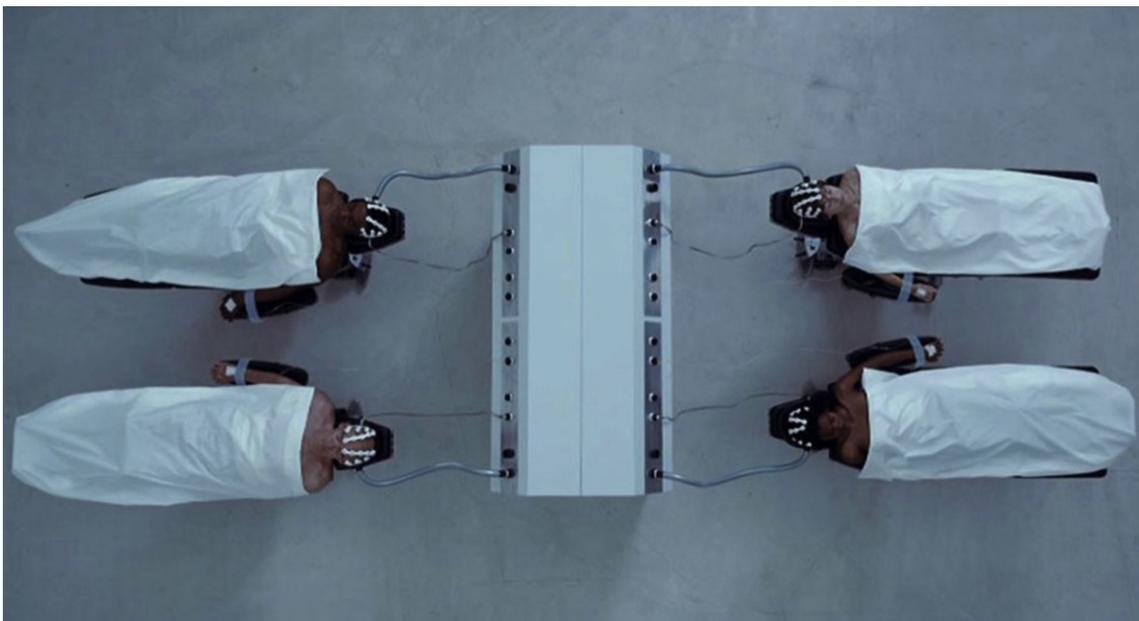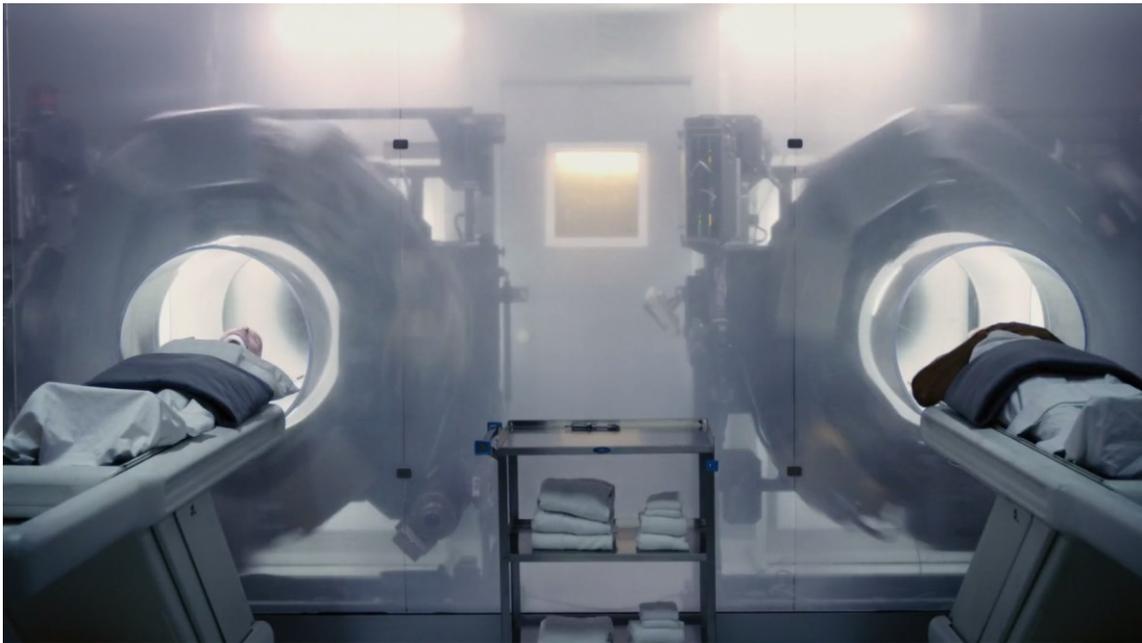
Figure 12 (top) The shedding procedure in Tarsem Singh's *Self/less*
Figure 13 (bottom) The transfer process in Damir Lukacevic's *Transfer*

The first steps in this transaction, the selection of the bodies and the transfer process itself, are clean, bloodless, and lacking in intimacy. Though they result in a (near) complete colonization of the healthy poor bodies by the ailing rich subjects, the body-swapping procedures in both *Transfer*, and *Self/less*, involve no physical contact between the two (Figure 13). The operation space is brightly lit, minimalistic, and virtually free of staff after the four of them are brought in on gurneys. Apart from one technician who remains on hand to ensure the integrity of their respective connections to the machine, just the four involved in the transfer appear in the scene — and they lie side by side and head to head in a gleaming white room. The rich even enter the process with clear consciences due to the false mediations provided by Mendoza and Phoenix respectively. Whereas Damian is told the body is synthetic, Hermann and Anna are told that the families of their new bodies have been well-compensated — but these claims are untrue. I argue that the clean and detached nature of the initial transaction emphasizes the otherness of the new bodies and encourages xenophobic anxieties. Hermann worries that he might be given the body of a cannibal, that this new body will want to literally eat other humans. His fear is ironic, however, since, as Vint notes, "it is Apolain who is being consumed" (107). It is *Apolain* who has a consumer-parasite within *him*. In order to support their families, Apolain and Sarah effectively play hosts to capitalist viruses that feed off their bodies twenty hours a day.

Despite Mendoza's efforts, their shared bodies create an emotional attachment between the characters by the end of the film. Vint suggests that "The embodied nature of their commodity transaction … is so intimate that it threatens the necessary division upon which capitalist social relations depend" (110). The mutual knot in which the two pairs find themselves tied up signifies the inescapable nature of consumer capitalism as it relates to the poor, marginalized body and that body's commodification for the sake of rendering the privileged

classes comfortable — or, immortal in these films. Hermann and Anna are as much tied up in the system as Apolain and Sarah: they've just been dealt the more advantageous hand and they seek desperately to remain in their state of comfort. Once they agree to participate in the Mendoza program, just like Apolain and Sarah, there is in effect nothing that they can do to get out. Hermann asks if he can give more money to Apolain's family, but this is an offer that would allow him to continue benefiting from the body, leaving "the system of exploitation intact" (Vint 112). Like Damian, they simply cannot imagine an intelligent way out of their predicament that wouldn't kill them, and thus the knot tightens.

As in *Self/less,* the intimate connection between the owners of the bodies and those that purchased them allows the wealthy customers to see the exploitative nature of their exchange. When the German couple ultimately decides to return to their original bodies, Hermann's ailing wife wakes up to be informed that her husband was "too weak" to survive the transition. But his body wasn't too weak; to Mendoza, he was potentially too powerful because he had threatened to expose Mendoza for its crimes against humanity and thus refused to participate in the system of exploitation. By refusing to continue to benefit from the system of exploitation that he'd previously not seen the error of, Hermann effectively (and permanently) signs away his own privileges as a member of the affluent class. And since this power isn't in line with the company's politics, he is terminated lest he expose them for doing the same to so many others. Meanwhile, Apolain and Sarah are prepared to be surrogates for new wealthy clients. The bodies of the poor simply *cannot* escape the cycle of perpetual work and incessant infection by the capitalist class. The rich *must* remain comfortable, and those who refuse that comfort, that privilege, have no place in the system. In these films about immortality, therefore, they must die

in order to symbolize their lack of place — as a failed organ that was intended to feed the capitalist machine but refuses to function properly.

JORDAN PEELE'S *GET OUT*

In *Get Out*, there is much less emphasis on the inescapable relationship between wealthy consumer comfort and the exploitation of othered bodies than in *Self/less* and *Transfer*. The issue of choice is complicated in the latter films, which engage the perspectives of both the wealthy and the poor subjects taking part in a capitalist-mediated exchange, an interaction that is mediated by a larger technologically sophisticated corporation. The recipients do not think they have an alternative, and the viewer is encouraged to be sympathetic to their situation. This creates a moral ambiguity that is not present in *Get Out*. Though Peele's film does engage the body-transfer as the driving *need* in the narrative, the circumstances under which the surrogate bodies — always belonging to African Americans — are obtained and the people whose bodies are occupied are different because the horrified and traumatized perspective of the original owner of the body is foregrounded in the film. This positions the wealthy consumers of the bodies as unequivocally evil — their despicable character, however, when compared to the surrogate recipients in the other two films, makes evident the invisible hegemonic value of the rich (usually white) body, and its rights, over the marginalized Other.

The film begins with Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), an African American and successful professional photographer, and Rose (Allison Williams), his white girlfriend, preparing to visit her family (the Armitages) together for the first time. She assures him that though she has not told them he is black, it won't be an issue. On the drive there, they hit and kill a deer — an incident which seems at first to be used to provide a "jump-scare," setting the tone for a typical

horror film. Yet the scene also leads to an awkward interaction between them and the police officer called to the scene. When he demands to see Chris's license, though Rose had been driving, she implies that the officer is a racist; this seems to establish Rose as a white woman in an interracial relationship, aware of social injustice and systemic racism. Neither the deer accident nor Rose's refusal to let the officer take Chris's license are what they seem to be, however. It is later revealed that, since she is in on a ploy to have Chris's body possessed by a high-bidding rich person, Rose has reason not to want Chris's whereabouts and direction of travel to be on record.

Upon arrival at the Armitage home, Chris is welcomed by a family that seems to be unnaturally kind, and it is soon evident that race is indeed an issue due to how quickly and often it is brought up, even in friendly conversation. As they tell her parents about the deer incident, Rose's father (Bradley Whitford) launches into a bizarre diatribe about deer: "Well you know what I say? I say one down, a couple hundred thousand to go. … I don't mean to get on my high horse but I'm tellin' ya I do not like the deer, I'm sick of it, they're taking over, they're like rats. … I see a dead deer on the side of the road I think to myself 'that's a start.'" Given the friendly circumstances of the family gathering, which contrasts sharply with the vitriol with which the speech is delivered, it does not seem that he is talking about the deer anymore. Instead, considering the otherness of their new company, it sounds as though his frustration about *someone* "taking over" is racially charged.

Yet what is about to happen to Chris is less about eradication of his race than an appropriation of it. Chris ultimately discovers that Rose's parents (her father is a medical doctor while her mother is a psychiatrist adept at hypnotism) intend to conduct a procedure that will allow a paying customer to inhabit his body permanently. The wealthy individuals in this film,

who appear to be friends with the Armitages, come to their home annually for a "party" and a silent auction of whatever body the Armitage children have procured — always someone black. While Rose's father had exhibited antipathy towards "deer," the party guests betray a fetishized view of black people. This view is demonstrated at the level of aesthetics, as one of the guests says "black is in fashion," and another ogles Chris's body, gropes his arm, and asks Rose "Is it true? … Is it better?"

Whereas the other two films reveal that the roles of oppressor and oppressed are often dictated by capitalism, *Get Out* does not support any kind of sympathetic reading of Rose's family. On the contrary, they seem to take the place of the large corporations in the former films — they are not tricked, deceived, or lulled by the mechanisms of capitalism. They are not compelled by the machine but rather take its place.

Characters in *Transfer* and *Self/less* whose bodies are taken over accept having this procedure done to them — or, perhaps more accurately, they acquiesce to it. It's not that they want to do it but that they choose to do it out of desperation — to save their family or a family member. Death seems to be the only alternative to such a choice. They *do* have that alternative, though, whereas in *Get Out* they are kidnapped, tied up, and forcibly *taken*. Not only does the process of obtaining and claiming the othered bodies in this film commence (and end) with physical violence, the procedure of taking over the body is much more tactile, and though the surgery seems sterile, the environment looks less clean than those depicted in *Transfer* and *Self/less.* In those films, the cleanliness of the operation that transforms the marginalized bodies suggests a certain societal blindness. It reflects the ingrained notion in Western culture that some bodies (coincidentally the bodies whose labour/work is easier) have more of a right to comfort than others (those whose work happens to be more physical and laborious). It is also an indicator

of the whitewashing performed by Mendoza and Phoenix to create the illusion that the process is morally acceptable. This illusion is not required by Rose's parents because of the despicable and transparently selfish nature of those lining up to receive a surrogate body.

The operating space in *Get Out* cannot be described as dirty, but the partially candle-lit room has much more of a glum, gothic, presence than the bright, white, gleaming rooms in which Damian, Hermann, and Anna receive their new bodies. The makeshift operating room in the Armitage home evokes the famous laboratory in which the eponymous scientist in *Frankenstein* creates new life out of the bodies of the poor. Besides the lighting, various other aesthetic differences between this film and Lukacevic's and Singh's highlight the abysmal nature of not only the process, but of those willing to pay for it, too. Where the other operating rooms minimized the presence of technicians, Peele composes a shot that foregrounds Dr. Armitage in his scrubs with his head bowed reverently towards his yet unsullied hands (Figure 14). This shot, which emphasizes the presence of the person about to perform the procedure, cuts to another in which his son enters with a tray of antiquated looking tools to be used for the surgery. These are not an advanced technology that will facilitate the surrogacy process as we see in the former two films. This technology is contrastingly manual, like the forceps used in Rembrandt's seventeenth century painting — the human hands here are not forced or facilitated through digital technologies. This invocation of the old corpse-economy sheds a macabre light on the inhumanity of the new, where the lightness used in the formerly discussed films merely reveals that the characters (if not the audience) are being deceived.
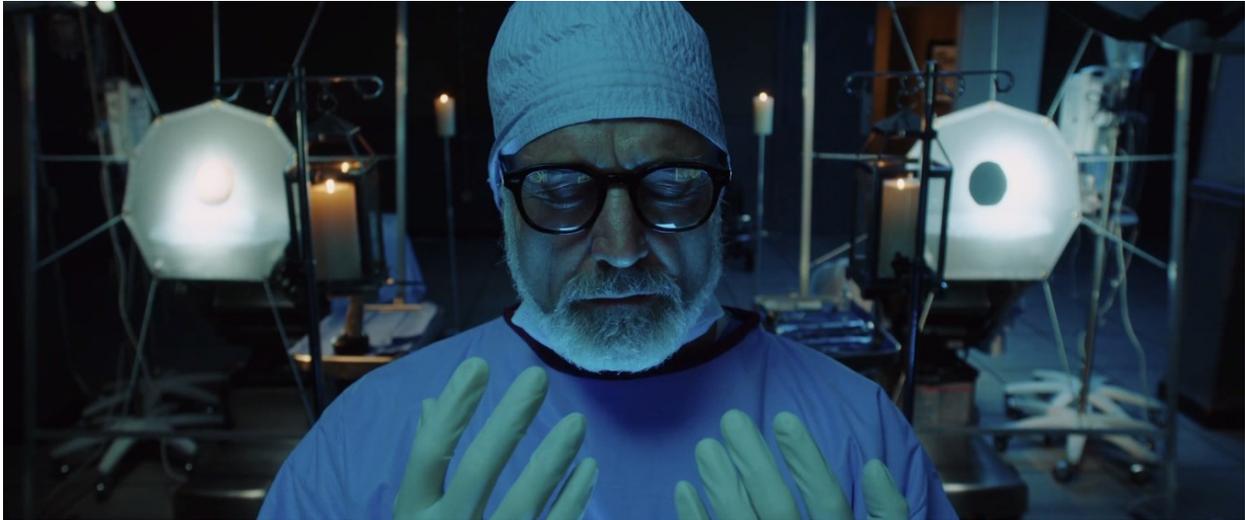
Figure 14 The procedure room in Peele's *Get Out* (2017) is much darker than those in *Self/less* and *Transfer.* Here, Dr. Armitage (Bradley Whitford) prepares to get his hands dirty in more ways than one.

The process involves brain surgery — transplanting most of the white person's brain into the head of the black person, leaving just enough of the former to keep "intricate connections intact." I argue that the procedures in the other films, which do not involve any cutting or any human-human touching whatsoever, symbolize the invisible hegemonic influence of capitalism on the rich and the whitewashing of the process by the corporations that stand to benefit most by the interaction. As victims of false consciousness, as defined by Žižek, they (the consumers) may be wrong in what they do, but they are not fully informed due to the obscuring distance and the control created by the technology and those who created it. For them, it's simply a matter of self-preservation, which they have long been taught they are entitled to. False consciousness is at work in *Get Out* as well, yet the metaphorical blindness associated with it is emphasized by the actual blindness of the intended recipient of Chris's body.

Jim Hudson (Stephen Root), the blind art collector who wins Chris's body in the silent auction, seems relatively civilized when the two first meet before the auction, though he reveals an ignorant sense of entitlement. It is not that he is ill-informed about the service Rose's parents

provide, but the way he processes his understanding of it is skewed in favour of what benefits him best. His criteria for "needing" a new body is less compelling than that of Anna and Damian, who would die without it. Yet his desire for an improved quality of life at the expense of another is not all there is to it. Jim's character and his interactions with Chris reveal a complex understanding of his (white capitalist) *need* for, *desire* of, and *exploitation/appropriation* of (practical) sight, (creative) vision, and (fetishized) culture respectively. Not only does he need (or want) to see, but he betrays to Chris that this is not the sole motivation for choosing Chris's as his new body. When Chris asks him "Why black people?" Jim responds, "Who knows? People want a change, some people want to be stronger… I could give a shit what colour you are. What I want, is deeper. I want your eye, man. I want those things you see through." He may not care whose body he gets but he knows, with his capital, he can get *someone's* body and his money (read power) goes to the people doing the procedure who *are* racists. Yet he also notes that he doesn't want just any body. The reference to the eye — in the singular form — when he knows he will be getting two eyes speaks to Chris's eye for creative detail as a photographer.[65] With this in mind, his suggestion that he doesn't care about Chris's race is unreliable given the cultural cachet evoked earlier when another party guest says, "Fairer skin has been in favour for the past, what, couple of hundreds of years. But now the pendulum has swung back. Black is in fashion." In addition, Jim stands to benefit from the general fact that Chris's artistic perspective is informed by his cultural perspective as an African American in their shared society.

As Jim sees it, though (indicating that he is blind in more ways than one) he just wants his vision back, and he equates his bad luck at becoming blind to Chris's unlucky capture by the Armitages in order to remedy that problem. In a scene that anticipates what Chris does not yet

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[65] Thank you to Lorraine York for drawing my attention to this point.

understand, he says, "One day you're developing prints in the dark room and the next day you wake up in the dark." Though neither the viewer nor Chris realize it, he is simultaneously referring to his own becoming blind and the fate awaiting Chris, who is a photographer. As they agree that this situation is indeed unfair, Jim appears to think what happened to him (incurring disability with the loss of his sight) is comparable to the complete loss of bodily control while witnessing someone else use that body. Ultimately, after Chris is told how the process works — that he will remain conscious but without control, effectively a passenger in his own body, — he exclaims, "this is crazy!" to which Jim does not respond and tells someone out of view, "I'm done," which further demonstrates the extent of the rich man's blindness some of which appears due to willful ignorance.

Get Out returns to the power and the entitlement that McNally traces back centuries but roots especially in the dawn of capitalism. More than any other text I discuss in this chapter, this film highlights the many similarities we still share with the corpse-economy and how one group manipulates the bodies of another group for their own pleasure. This is paradoxical because, in Peele's film, the surrogate bodies remain conscious, simply unable to express themselves and held in what is called "the Sunken Place."[66] This conscious state means their bodies are more alive, in a sense, than those in *Transfer* and *Self/less*, and in *Dollhouse*, which I will discuss next, who are unconscious most — or all — of the time. The commodified bodies in *Get Out* are far from dead — in fact, their lives and bodies are their respective narrative's focal point — yet the viewer sees the bourgeois class grotesquely manipulating their bodies from within.

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[66] "The Sunken Place" has, since *Get Out*'s release and subsequent discussions about it, become a catch phrase to denote both the prison industrial complex and the influence of wealthy whites on black people. For a thorough discussion of how this phrase has developed significant cultural presence, see Alex Rayner's "Trapped in the Sunken Place: How *Get Out*'s Purgatory Engulfed Pop Culture."

Though Chris's body is never successfully usurped, three other characters are revealed to have gone through the process: the groundskeeper Walter, inhabited by Rose's grandfather (Marcus Henderson); the housekeeper Georgina, by her grandmother (Betty Gabriel); and Andre Hayworth (Lakeith Stanfield), whom Chris is introduced to at the party as Logan King. The behaviour of the three previously transplanted characters is eerie and uncanny. Their conversation seems artificial and forced, especially in the case of Rose's grandparents whose attempts to act as though they are in fact the hired help amounts to a performance of racist stereotypes of passive servants. When Chris covertly attempts to take a picture of Logan and the flash goes off it triggers a peculiar episode allowing Andre to push through momentarily and exclaim the titular line "Get out. Get outta here. Get outta here. Get the fuck outta here!" Near the end of the film, Walter has the opportunity to choose death when Chris uses the camera flash on him to weaken the grandfather's hold on the body. In a brief moment of self-possession, Walter shoots himself, thus asserting his choice to no longer be imprisoned and controlled by the capitalist elite — another instance of death being the only way out.

JOSS WHEDON'S *DOLLHOUSE*

Where the rich white people are unambiguously monstrous in *Get Out*, pointing to the horrific capacity for humanity to perform immoral acts empowered by capital and some access to technological means, *Dollhouse* often presents the rich in a similar manner by invoking the "pay to play" narrative that is central to *Gamer*. *Dollhouse*, however, demonstrates the complex role economic hierarchy has in the social sphere. In this narrative, like all the others discussed this chapter, the bodies of the poor and marginalized are used for the pleasure of the rich — this time, not to allow the rich person eternal life but simply, in many cases, to provide an idealized human

interaction. Whedon's series offers up a significantly different form of engagement of marginalized bodies from those discussed thus far. Rather than having their bodies sold and used as total body surrogates, individuals give up all aspects of their subjectivity and consciousness to be turned into a blank slate onto which idealized abilities and emotional qualities are programmed at a wealthy client's request. In the show, the protagonist, Echo, is one of many so-called "volunteers" — members of the general public — that are recruited under a five-year contract. During this time, their memories and identities are erased to make room for made-to-order "imprints" to satisfy the desires of Dollhouse clients. Their designer-programmed bodies are engaged to carry out myriad purposes that no ordinary autonomous person would want to (or could) do — everything from the "perfect" no-strings attached girlfriend to a multi-lingual hostage negotiator, from a safe-cracker to a well-loved, but now-dead, wife. When performing these imprinted roles, volunteers are known as "actives." In between assignments, they are kept in a trance-like state and referred to as "dolls."

In the unaired series pilot, Adelle DeWitt (Olivia Williams), a lead administrator of the organization, sets up the Dollhouse's mission, explaining to a prospective client the unique value of the service it provides — why dolls are so worthy of the top dollar required to engage them. She tells him that his experience will "be the purest, most genuine human encounter in your life." "And hers," she adds. Adelle makes clear that she is not just a Madam, and the Dollhouse not simply a brothel; it is a place where a customer's every heartfelt need can be met — for a price: "If you engage an active, then he or she … will see you and totally, romantically, chemically, fall in utter and unexpected love with you. The imprint would make her your exact match. The girl who's waited her entire life to meet a man like you. Not the money; the man" ("Echo"). Adelle's demeanour reflects the nature of the specialty product she provides. Though cool and

professional in appearance, she warmly serves green tea and hard alcohol (whichever is more appropriate to the occasion) to clients in her office, as though they were her own living room. She makes them feel at ease and cared for completely, though not as well as she suggests a doll might.

Though Dollhouse volunteers are effectively asleep for their entire contract, it *is* a working contract signed and fulfilled with the expectation of a hefty paycheck when the work is done. While the volunteers sleep, the dolls work in their absence. While the dolls provide emotional results, they are completely disinvested of the actual emotion. The imprint technology isn't disinvested, however, as it feels everything until it gets "wiped" at the end of each engagement. The original owner of the doll's body need not feel shame or guilt for any act her body performs. As I will discuss, their labour is usually emotional — as identified by Hochschild and noted earlier in this chapter — but it is additionally always affective. According to Michael Hardt, affective labour

> extends beyond the model of intelligence and communication defined by the computer. Affective labor is better understood by beginning from what feminist analyses of 'women's work' have called 'labor in the bodily mode.' Caring labor is certainly entirely immersed in the corporeal, the somatic, but the affects it produces are nonetheless immaterial. (96)

Thus, affective labour includes the production of affects, emotions, and feelings beyond the production of goods and services. In a world where labour is becoming increasingly immaterial — more cognitive and less physical — there are few jobs today that don't expect affective work to be performed. Often these affective requirements are not included in the job description but are nevertheless expected. Emotional labour is part of the job — affective labour is the result.

As Adelle implies in what she tells her clients, and as we see throughout the series, the dolls are the purest embodiment of immaterial and affective labour conceivable. The series depicts these mechanized human-objects of desire as necessarily feminized — used to fulfil the comforts of male users and consumers. By presenting a fictional diegesis in which digital technologies can be utilized to control certain individuals for the pleasure of the financial elite, *Dollhouse* demonstrates not only the West's systems of exploitation at the levels of labour and society but also how this society is infected by a tendency towards emotional overwork, which affects opportunities for emotional connection. And while the dolls' bodies are without a doubt exploited and the actives are not really volunteers given their particular socio-economic disadvantages, the series shows that it's everyone, of all economic brackets, that is affected. Yet, as in *Transfer*, the implications of this affect depend on the socioeconomic position of the subject.

While Adelle stresses the intimacy of true human experience in her sales pitch, the sexual nature of many of the engagements is undeniable. Dolls are frequently dressed up to fulfill various client fetishes, and the tongue in cheek manner with which employees refer to the "romantic" engagements emphasizes the point that the complete engagement package always includes aesthetic creativity. In short, all the dolls are good looking for a reason. There is an obvious link between the Dollhouse and real-world sex-trafficking.[67] FBI agent Paul Ballard (Tamoh Penikett) even initially investigates it under the suspicion that it is such a ring. My focus, however, is rather on the symbolic representation of the feminization and precarity of the workplace. The technologization of these bodies — the fragmenting of identity and subjectivity

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[67] See Ananya Mukherjea's chapter "Somebody's Asian on TV: Sierra/Priya and the Politics of Representation" in *Joss Whedon's Dollhouse* (2014), cited later in this chapter for other purposes.

— whose primary function is to care reveals the inhuman implications of emotional labour and the desperate state of the poor, the marginalized, and the working poor under capitalism.

The Dollhouse provides its clients with raw, unadulterated emotional labour. While not every active's engagement is about love, romance, or even sex, every engagement *is* performed by an active whose imprint "cares." Unlike real world jobs — such as nurses, flight attendants, and school teachers — that require training and expertise to accompany the need for friendliness patience and compassion, the labour performed in and for the Dollhouse is unique because its emotional labour is not disguised as anything else. People pay to have someone who cares and who is tailored to care the way they want them to. Any form of expertise can be added with the flip of a switch, and the wealthy client need not worry about the rules of social engagement to maintain the doll's commitment.

The dolls' mantra is "I try to be my best," which they often say without any indication that they know what it means to be one's best or why they want to do it. Indeed, there is no room for *actual* effort in the dolls' lives — their days in the house are planned out on a schedule and they move from one appointment to the next never questioning the drive to do so. When on an active engagement (or, one might say, when they "go to work"), any agency they have is attached to the subjectivity designed and mediated by the Dollhouse. As embodied products of immaterial labour, these subjectivities are manufactured; yet, just as the head programmer Topher Brink (Fran Kranz) says after a rhapsodic monologue about the cultural habits of Americans (such as wearing neckties), "Everyone's programmed" ("Ghosts"). Trying to do one's best seems virtuous but given the dolls' subjectless circumstance it denotes the internalized trauma derived from the capitalist ideology to constantly work harder or "pull yourself up by your bootstraps." This is to say that the phrase, which has been programmed into each and every

doll (as it is arguably for most Western citizens), must have been done so for a reason, but that reason is uncertain, and instead the phrase comes up, seemingly, when the doll — devoid of any particular emotion — has nothing else to say. The dolls — mere shells of immaterial labour awaiting their programmed subjectivities — know little about money, growth, or any reward beyond personal improvement for its own sake.

Beyond their contractual period of ignorance, however, the people whose bodies are used as dolls *do* know about money and what it is to try their best: the so-called volunteers are characterized as marginalized, poor, and culturally compromised in some way. Though their contracts with the Dollhouse are signed with varying levels of consent — some are forced while others do it willingly — they are all promised financial security when the contract is up.[68] Volunteers can also arrange to have any emotional or psychological issues removed, and many of these issues are notably related somehow to circumstances of their life at the lower end of the class spectrum. As Gerry Canavan puts it, "The Dollhouse … coercively preys on the disenfranchised and the desperate to acquire its Dolls, literalizing Marx's description of a proletariat that has 'nothing to sell but themselves'" (191). These bodies physically depict the class struggle of late capitalism — they literalize the fact that we, the "volunteers," are always already at work. No one who sits in the chair to be imprinted with active technology is at the high end of the economic or social class spectrum. They are Bauman's "vagabonds," with no control over where they must go and when they will stay.

While the objectification and loss of these bodies' autonomy is clearly linked to their economic and social class, sex and gender inform how the dolls are kept and engaged. In *Dollhouse*, as in the fembot texts I will discuss in Chapter 4, the commodified body is used to

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[68] Or rather, they are all supposed to be. In the case of Priya/Sierra who, as I discuss later, is there effectively in captivity, it does not seem likely that she is intended to receive the same kind of reward.

satisfy (primarily) male desire and to facilitate male-oriented production in the capitalist workforce. The control over these dolls is patriarchal in nature — Topher, as the head programmer, is male, and he *has the power* to program the dolls as he likes. Though he reports to Adelle, she, in turn, reports to a host of male executives at Rossum, and the service for which she is at the front line is provided to customers the majority of whom are male.[69] The dolls are kept in a pacified state reflective of essentialized female behaviour — they are diminutive, passive, obedient, and sweet. Though episodes tend to foreground female active engagements, the male dolls are likewise feminized. The males are all clean-shaven, their fitness routine is no different from that of the females, who swim, do yoga and tai chi — all relatively non-combative activities — and they are kept just as docile and childlike as the females. Notably, though, male active engagements are not centred exclusively on caring where that is a central component for the females.

Victor/Tony and Sierra/Priya

The series engages with gender embodiment and performativity somewhat playfully, with the occasional presence of one gender identity and accompanied stereotypical mannerisms in the body of the opposite sex. The playfulness of such scenes calls into question how Western society determines its expectations of how gender is performed. Yet, most relevant to this project may be the distinctly traditional forms of labour performed by dolls of different sexes. This can best be observed through a juxtaposition of the secondary characters whose doll names are Victor and Sierra. As Mukherjea notes, "While Victor/Tony is traumatized by combat" during his time

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[69] All but one featured customer are male: Margaret has her own personality posthumously uploaded to a doll (Echo) in the event that she should be murdered ("Haunted"). As I discuss below, Adelle also makes regular use of Victor for romantic engagements. It is not clear if she pays or not, though it is a fair assumption that, like Topher, also discussed below, she is granted free use of the dolls as a Dollhouse employee.

fighting in Afghanistan, before the Dollhouse, "Sierra/Priya is traumatized by repeated victimization" (69) at the hands of the man who put her in the Dollhouse — a wealthy Rossum employee (Vincent Ventresca) with a bruised ego. Indeed, when the Rossum employee brings her to the Dollhouse (Priya is unequivocally *not* a volunteer), he does so because she had publicly rejected his advances. He then has repeated engagements with her in which she dotes on him no matter how poorly he treats her ("Belonging"). While she is sometimes imprinted with physically strong attributes, her strength, like Echo's, is rooted in her ability to care for others. Her words are often filled with wisdom, and she seems a sentinel of grounded strength rather than a fighter. She can fight, however, and when Victor/Tony is kidnapped by Rossum special forces in the second season episode, "Stop-Loss": "Priya is sent into the field to rescue Tony, armed only with the love they share. Her strength in that episode and through much of the series is caring, creating, and reciprocating more than fighting. Her very name, 'Priya,' means 'beloved' in Sanskrit" (Mukherjea 68). For a female doll, to be beloved means to be an object of desire.

The dolls are bound by similar technological mechanisms of control to those that jeopardize the separation between work-time and leisure-time for the typical working class. Technology such as smart phones, text-messaging, and even email makes it easy to work from home or engage in "flextime" work schedules, yet, some argue, these technologies really allow us to be on the clock 24/7.[70] Many are now connected to their work through these technologies, and this connection is a required part of hegemonic work practices that must be adhered to for maintaining employment in most sectors. Indeed, as Jill Rubery and Damian Grimshaw argue,

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[70] See, for example, Rubery and Grimshaw's "Precarious Work and the Commodification of the Employment Relationship: The Case of Zero Hours in the UK and Mini Jobs in Germany" (2016) cited below. See also Robert C. Bird's "Precarious Work: The Need for Flextime Employment Rights and Proposals for Reform" (2016) in which Bird offers considered critiques of flextime before endeavouring to suggest solutions to these problems.

the zero-hours work contract is seen as desirable in today's Western culture (1), yet this desire is misguided and it leads to unstable workers' rights and benefits (6). Unlike those of us who may be deceived into believing we are at leisure when in reality we are not, however, "volunteers" know precisely that they are giving up years of their lives when they sign up. They are desperate, not only for money but for a release from feelings and conditions acquired through the abuses of a capitalist world. It is many a worker's fantasy to disconnect completely from the experience of work (even if it might mean sacrificing one's leisure time as well). So, effectively, these individuals make money by separating their mind and emotions from their labouring body and reducing the exhaustive impact of emotional labour while others pay to extract emotional experiences from it. That is to say, the true and perfect emotions sold by the Dollhouse are not the result of emotional labour — rather, the emotion management is not performed *for* the company but *by* the company. Ironically, then, Adelle is quite accurate to tell her client that his interaction with a doll would be the most genuine interaction of his life — the active need not self-police, she is just *precisely* what the client requires. These emotions don't come from the heart but from an imprint designed by a genius computer programmer. The demand for such a service speaks to a lack of time that some who are financially successful in the capitalist workforce have for such inherently human feelings. These, of course, are the Dollhouse clients.

One of Echo's repeat engagements is with Joel Mynor (Patton Oswalt), a billionaire tech mogul who has Echo imprinted as his late wife every year on the anniversary of her death. Rebecca, his wife, died in a car accident on her way to meet him for what he'd intended as a surprise — a beautiful new home and the news that his previously failed business ventures had finally proved fruitful. Through Echo's body, he gets to see that she is indeed proud of him and overjoyed about the new home, and while she never cared about money, he had always wanted to

impress her with financial success ("Man on the Street"). Mynor encounters Echo later in the series — he has met someone new who he intends to marry, and this time Rebecca's imprint gives him her blessing, thus allowing him the ability to move on. Mynor's motivations are sincere, yet he is so consumed by his own reality-based fantasy that he forgets, until he says goodbye to Rebecca, that Echo used to have her own subjective reality, that she is not, in fact, his dead wife ("A Love Supreme").

The notion of using the dolls for the self-completion of the privileged yet overworked and undersocialised is reflected throughout the show and not only through paying client engagements: as Dollhouse employees, both Adelle and Topher make use of them due to the crippling loneliness incurred from being metaphorically married to their work. Adele engages Victor covertly under the pseudonym of Mrs. Lonelyhearts indicating that due to the secret and problematic nature of her work she clearly could not gain or maintain an honest and loving relationship in the real world ("A Spy in the House of Love"). Perhaps the most heart-wrenching of engagements is depicted in the episode "Haunted" in which Topher, on his birthday, borrows a doll (Sierra) just to be his friend — it is made clear that he has no other friends and thus he makes use of a doll as a "diagnostic test" once a year to experience the genuine intimacy promoted by Adelle earlier in the series. Topher does not sexualize Sierra but makes her a buddy, someone who really "gets" him. They treat each other as equals, which Topher does with no one else, even his very capable assistant, Ivy (Liza Lapira). Though this may be one of the most sentimental storylines in *Dollhouse*, the viewer recalls that, as the head programmer, Topher is very much like Victor Frankenstein. He sees friendship as unidirectional. This may be a reason, besides his all-consuming job, that he too is unable to have a real relationship; though it is not clear just how well-paid Topher is, it is for people like him (who work too much themselves but

have an immense amount of power) that the dolls are made. And just like Frankenstein's ill-considered creation, Topher's invention is responsible for his death too.[71]

While many engagements such as Mynor's and Adelle's are coded as romantic, the show reveals a handful in which Echo is not romantically attached to the client. In every case in which Echo's engagement is more about brains and brawn than love and passion, her imprint is nevertheless motivated by emotion. In the two storylines that exhibit engagements requiring a *selfish* imprint, for example, something interrupts her ability to be selfish in her own right. For example, during a heist-like robbery in which her expertise is required to crack a safe, a remote wipe of her programming returns her to her doll status, ultimately causing the mission to fail ("Gray Hour"). As the narrative unfolds, Echo (the doll) becomes a self-aware identity and internalizes all of her previous imprints and prefers to be identified by her doll name rather than Caroline — her name before she was forced to volunteer.

True to many of her previous imprints, Echo, the self-actualized subjectivity, is the opposite of selfish. As Julie L. Hawk observes, "her final step to a posthuman subjectivization is her shedding of desire" (13). Echo's capacity and willingness to embrace the myriad personalities within her singular body stands in stark contrast to Harding (Keith Carradine), a high-ranking Rossum executive who uses the imprinting technology to imprint himself onto one doll after another in an effort to be immortal. He uses these bodies up in a similar way to how Mendoza sets it up in *Transfer*. As a Dollhouse exec, Harding can be read as the capitalist rather than the consumer, and yet he does *plenty* of consuming as he goes through doll bodies and indulges in incessant overeating. The extent to which he overeats damages the physical health of

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[71] Topher's death is also similar to Damian's in that he selflessly saves the world from its apocalyptic state by demolishing the imprinting chair with explosives and terminating his own life in the process.

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each doll he uses (and he goes through many), thus reflecting his disdain for the lower classes. His constant bingeing is purged only by disposing of one body in exchange for a new one. He has a choice, and he knows very well that his choice is exploitative to say the least, yet, unlike Hermann, Anna, and Damian, he uses up several bodies without compunction.

In contrast to Harding, Echo's lack of desire and her selflessness seem parental in nature and thus indicate her internalization of the emotional labour she was programmed to perform when the initial active technology was imprinted on her. As she houses a community of personalities and abilities within her body, she departs from any connection she had to Caroline. She is no longer an objectified individual like the rest of the dolls but a composite of many individual subjectivities — ultimately, she goes from being an object to a hyper-subject. As Echo starts to remember and eventually access her many previous imprints on demand, she becomes aware that her body is merely a vessel for emotional work and that work is rarely in step with her own preferences. Oddly, though, she is relatively indifferent to this matter even when recalling the details of what she has been used for.

Thus, while Dollhouse clients pay to engage the bodies of completely disinvested individuals, the tech (i.e., the programed subjectivity) is what they really pay for to do the feeling. This process speaks to the immaterial and precarious nature of labour in the real world. This is of course a kind of displacement of responsibility that Robert Pfaller and Slavoj Žižek identify as interpassivity. The interpassive subject, as Žižek explains, experiences a feeling of accomplishment — of enjoyment or bereavement for example — through the action of another. As an example, he suggests that canned laughter on a sitcom produces a feeling of enjoyment in one who watches yet doesn't laugh, her or himself ("Interpassive"). In the case of the dolls, I argue that the unpleasant (and especially material) body work is done for them. The

programmed doll becomes the object Other to her original body. By signing the 5-year contract

after which the doll wakes up — purportedly no worse for wear and with no memories of having

done anything (unpleasant or otherwise) she relinquishes the subjective experience of her body.

Her body then becomes an object that is leased out to others as a commodity, an empty

receptacle onto which limitless desired identities can be downloaded and, in effect, work for her.

It is like going to sleep and waking up rich.

In a Season 1 episode, "Man on the Street," a reporter solicits reactions from the general

public to what they understand is the urban legend of the Dollhouse. One of the streeters, at the

beginning of the episode, provides a realistic working-class view of the idea of volunteering for

such a thing. The dolls' work is comparable to the exploited labour of today with the exception

of how the experience registers on them. Their bodies endure many kinds of trauma, but they are

not conscious of the labour they must do if the technology functions properly.[72] Thus, the lack of

required consciousness coupled with the promise of economic freedom after just five years

appeals to one woman who is visibly exhausted with her current situation and completely willing

to give up everything and not have to know it. She wears an apron that appears to be a

supermarket or department store uniform — symbolic of the proletariat and labouring poor. Her

labour is exploited for capital gain, and unlike what is promised to the dolls, she is not likely to

get rich being employed where she is in the next five years. She asks the reporter, "So, bein' a

doll, you do whatever, and you don't gotta remember nothin,' or study, or pay rent. And you just

party with rich people all the time? Where's the dotted line?" This reaction is unsurprising for

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[72] As Gerry Canavan notes, however, the technology does not always function properly: "True to the conventions of the genre, most episodes of the first season depict the flawless Dollhouse technology breaking down in some way or another, at which time some Rossum employee – having apparently forgotten entirely the events of the previous week's episode – declares any such failure completely inconceivable" (192). Indeed, as I discuss later, Echo manages to resist her programming and use her accumulated abilities and subjectivities to control herself and fight the organization. Her becoming self-aware, however, differs greatly from any definition of slavery.

someone in her position as a precarious labourer or anyone struggling financially due to debt, disability, or any number of other factors. The precarity of the dolls' labour and trauma placed on their (albeit unknowing) bodies juxtaposed with this cathartic view of doing "whatever" for five years and then being set for life without any residual damage speaks to the desperation of those who are low on the economic spectrum and how most of the "volunteers" really don't have much choice at all.

The façade of choice is a theme that I have been touching on throughout this chapter. Like Mark, and Apolain and Sarah, the people whose bodies are used as dolls purportedly choose to "volunteer," which I have already noted is a choice that is imposed on them to varying degrees. Though most of them opt to take on their respective contracts, their alternative options aren't desirable. In contrast to the body surrogates in *Transfer* and *Self/less* however, these individuals are promised a place in capitalist society that is financially comfortable, and even offered amendments to their psyche — including the removal of PTSD symptoms for Victor and the erasure of grief for November (Miracle Laurie). These psychological alterations may be seen as even better than receiving money (Canavan 191) because they would put the "volunteers" in a more privileged position than before, free from the (mental)[73] disability and disadvantage that is typically more common in the lower classes as both a symptom and a barrier to opportunity. Their situation therefore differs from interpassivity in one way — they do not bear witness to the object's labour for them since it is *they* who are the object. This means that the experience of being exploited does not register on their psyche. Instead, they remain ignorant while a version of them endures, in many cases, the traumas of violence and other forms of suffering. In effect,

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[73] There are no physically disabled dolls. Their conventional attractiveness is the one advantage all dolls had in common before becoming volunteers. There seems to be no demand for dolls with any kind of disability or deformity. In fact, the "top doll," Whiskey (Amy Acker) is retired and repurposed to replace the deceased in-house physician after she is scarred by a rogue malfunctioning doll slashing her face.

they other themselves and "volunteer" to give up the responsibility of taking care of their impoverished bodies, trusting that the Dollhouse will be true to its word, and that they, the volunteers, will be free from any trauma caused by their bodily association.

In accepting the Dollhouse's contract of disembodiment for a time period that will pass as if they were momentarily asleep, the volunteers opt not to work. The refusal of work is usually an act that stands in opposition to capitalism, or at least understands that the restructuring of capitalism requires "the daily action of withdrawal from exploitation" (Berardi, "Meaning of Autonomy").[74] In this case, however, facilitated by technoscience, they immerse themselves even further in the system. By hooking up, they are effectively hooked in. The phrase "Did I fall asleep?" is the routine script for a doll coming out of being wiped after an engagement. The operator responds, each time, "for a little while." Scripted repetition is an essential component to the imprinting process during which the dolls appear to be in a trance, blind to the system of which they are a part.

The 5-year contracts during which they will not consciously encounter any experience of any kind and the exaggerated, pacified state in which dolls exist between engagements is comparable to the complacency that citizens in a democratic society demonstrate when they cede to politicians with whom they may not always agree. Henry Giroux and Susan Searls Giroux locate this kind of social complacency in what they call "procedural democracy," whereby "citizens are effectively removed from political choice, performing the duties of citizenship such as voting — typically on issues about which they have little to say — once every four years, out

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[74] Certainly, the refusal of work is not simply defined, and the function and effects of the politics of refusal are contested even within the Autonomist Marxist circle where the concept originates. For a selection of views, see Berardi's "What is the Meaning of Autonomy?" as well as his *The Soul at Work*; Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's *Empire*, and Slavoj Žižek in *The Parallax View.* Kathi Weeks' chapter, "Marxism, Productivism, and the Refusal of Work," offers a substantial survey of many positions regarding the concept of antiwork politics in her book *The Problem with Work.*

of a sense of compulsion or routine" (35). The notion that some might vote every four years in an effort to "actively forget" relates to how some of the dolls are seduced by the Dollhouse in the first place: to forget the ills of the world and to do whatever they must to carry on living more comfortably than before while not having to suffer the knowledge of the extent to which they are selling themselves (out) in a most literal way.

Though technologically composed of subjectivities, the dolls are in fact commoditized objects: objects of desire and of comfort, vessels to be moulded to satisfy the desires of Dollhouse clients, and tools to help the customer accomplish some experience or resolution. Theirs seems to be the purest form of immaterial labour, yet instead of selling/giving their souls, they merely mute them to have digitally manufactured ones provided. The disinvestment of this process lends itself to the successful recruitment of many of the dolls who have their worldly problems taken away, and also makes it easy to do whatever is needed to live more comfortably than before, without their suffering the knowledge that they have sold out. Similar to how the Dollhouse clients who do not have time to foster healthy emotional relationships have dolls programmed to love them, the dolls download to the tech the responsibility of caring about what their bodies have to do.

While Adelle argues that the Dollhouse provides genuine human encounters, it is noteworthy that none of the dolls are programmed for conflict with the customer. Dr. Saunders (Amy Acker), the house's resident doctor, is an active doll — formerly known as Whiskey, before she was visually scarred during a violent incident at the house. She may be the exception to this apparent rule against conflict, but only because her long-term engagement is to care for all Dollhouse residents, which necessitates that she frequently challenges the morality of Topher and occasionally engage in disputes with Boyd (Harry Lennix), Dollhouse's head of security. In

contrast with Echo's internal community of identities, which makes her a composite subject but a subject in her own right, Saunders becomes aware (within her own single imprint) that she is an active — or rather that she has been imprinted with a new personality and cannot recall her original one. This alienates her and while she too embraces her (one) personality as a caring and stern individual, she ultimately sacrifices agency over any kind of self at all. The final episode of the series reveals her living in the Dollhouse still devoid of her original personality as well as that of Saunders' and back to being a doll, but now an emotionally as well as physically scarred blank slate ("Epitaph One"). She knows nothing but feels everything.

Like *Frankenstein*, *Dollhouse* serves as a cautionary tale — a critique of unethical biotechnological progress and research. But just as Shelley's novel extends beyond the Romantics' anxieties about technological progress toward a concern that the wealthy class might misuse such progress for their own gain, Whedon's series exhibits a pressing concern about class-oriented exploitation within contemporary labour. As Canavan observes, "The question becomes … not whether you might somehow be turned into a Doll, unknowingly operating in accordance with the whims of corporate interests that own your labour power and free time; the question is whether it has happened already, without your even noticing" (195). The concern is less that we'll all end up being literally programmed by imprinting technology but that we are already deeply imprinted by hegemonic ideas surrounding emotional work and its intrusion on the personal sphere. The science fictional depiction of digitally coded bodies reveals how easily the boundaries between work and leisure can be blurred beyond distinction with the help of immaterial labour's non-linear distribution of time and space.

Positioning the dolls as individuals in need of help, subaltern classes, rented out to the wealthy, is allegorical of the exploitation of the lower classes in the West. Yet these feminized

dolls, who ultimately provide the service usually demanded of the emotional labourer without being responsible for emotion management, embody their work uniquely. They are used and objectified to the extreme, yet they also elude the majority of the trauma of being always already at work. Their bodies and the subjectivities produced in and through them are exploited for the satisfaction of the rich, while remaining free from the strain of overtime, billpaying, poor working conditions and other stress derived from living in a capitalist society. Within their technologized bodies, the dolls bear the potential for a complete loss of subjectivity, which is ultimately what happens to Whiskey, who is found roaming the building well after the apocalyptic collapse of the Dollhouse organization ("Epitaph One"), or for revolution, as I will discuss is the case with Echo.

Echo's goal, she tells Paul, is to free all of the dolls, and ultimately, they *are* freed when the patriarchal programmer, Topher, sacrifices himself to destroy the mass-imprinting device that by the end of the series has been used remotely to wipe nearly all of society. This is not a matter of the man heroically saving the day; rather, what matters is that the man corrects the destruction for which he is responsible through one pure act of selflessness. The need for Topher to die for the rest of the society to carry on in peace demonstrates that it's not the technology itself, but the components of the metaphorical system using it, which is responsible for the exploitation of the working class and the poor. Echo's ultimate act is the truly revolutionary one, however, as she decides to continue housing the many imprints accumulated within her own body in a kind of impregnation not intended to result in birth. Her care for those she carries inside of her is not compelled by the system as some kind of domestic *duty*. Though typically, as Silvia Federici argues, "domestic work reproduces the worker and consequently it is the pillar of every other form of work" (Vishmidt), Echo refuses to contribute to the capitalist project. If she still

embodies a certain kind of domesticity, it is a revolutionary one: Echo's character *chooses* to do the emotional labour that the imprinting technology is supposed to feel in her absence. This decision completely reverses the process followed by all the other volunteers and the reversal means that Echo will not give birth to the fruits of her labour-time as an unconscious servant of Rossum Corporation. She will not produce more workers, more dolls, nor any other contribution to the capitalist system. She will keep them inside her revolutionary body and love them, caring for them on her own terms.

Echo's refusal to be wiped clean and returned to her original identity as Caroline when given the opportunity in the final episode can be read as a resistance to passive submission to the dominant order — a refusal to just do what one is told.[75] The fact that she does, however, hang on to her previous programming — notably becoming a composite of many caring individuals (with, she jokes, a little serial killer mixed in) — is an acknowledgement of emotion as a human thing and not something that should be enforced or controlled by capital. Her revolutionary body embraces its posthuman nature as well as the community she keeps within it. Hers is a refusal of work reminiscent of that of the Wages for Housework activists. Echo's technologized body, post-exploitation, refuses to participate in the exploitative sale of subjectivities and to embrace immateriality in the form of the collective.

CONCLUSION TO "COMMODIFIED BODIES"

In these visual narratives, bodies that are commodified in the real world due to labour exploitation and capitalist greed are represented as literal products to be sold, just like those that

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[75] It is worthy of note that Victor Frankenstein's mother is named Caroline, too. Whether or not this was intentional, I posit that a juxtaposition between these female bodies, and what they (refuse to) give birth to, would provide excellent fodder for a future essay on the reproductive form of surplus labour.

were taken by grave robbers in the eighteenth century. Through various perspectives, they all engage with systemic factors informing class-based power hierarchies surrounding commodification and labour. These contemporary body-surrogate narratives reveal a new kind of corpse-economy — one that is less about taking people out of their graves and more about leading them in. The "body snatcher" is a system that can place a price, in more than one way, on a human life; it's the Mendoza corporation in *Transfer* that, though it pays a menial sum to the host's family members, effectively enslaves individuals from less financially stable countries, and Phoenix corporation, in *Self/less,* that exploits the body of a desperate working-class man with a sick daughter. The villain in these films, or the monster if you will, is the system that says — and this is just as true outside of the fiction — that if someone is rich they will always be comfortable, *if* they remain unconcerned about who has to suffer to make it so.

CHAPTER 4
The Master's Tools: or, the Counterhegemony of the Female Robot Body

> The main trouble with cyborgs … is that they are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism. *But illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins.*
>
> – Donna Haraway

Where my previous chapters have examined the technologization of living human bodies and their (dis)placement within technologized spaces, this chapter explores sf narratives about fully mechanized, and more directly objectified, humanoid machines. This shift in focus offers a new metaphorical approach to the human/machine dichotomy (in fiction) and what it may tell us about the hegemonic capitalist practices of work and society that maintain the oppressive system weighted in favour of the rich and powerful. So far, I have examined texts that show how the living human body — manipulated differently by technology and in various corporealities — can reflect the objectification of workers and consumers in capitalist society. These technologized bodies demonstrate how an escape from the machine and its constraints on our subjectivity seems impossible.

But what if we were to escape our imprisonment (physical, hegemonic, or otherwise) within the inescapable system? What if, somehow, humans would break the shackles that bind them to class-based exploitation and socially determined expectations regarding labour (in the private and the public sphere)? Would this mean the end of exploitation and inequality? These questions fuel my analysis in which human beings are replaced as the objects of exploitation by machines that bear human-like qualities. This focus highlights oppositional possibilities toward patriarchal capitalism and its hegemonic control over women and women's bodies.

The four texts covered in this chapter contain characters that are artificially intelligent (AI) programs and machines that are necessarily human in form (when they have a form) and female or feminized in some way. These characters have bodies (or voices) that serve the affective heterosexual role of satisfying men. The nature of the techno/virtual body is important in each of these narratives because it is their non-humanness that allows the bots to escape their prescribed realities. To consider this means of escape, I begin by discussing the character arcs of female-coded AIs from three recent films and television: Samantha, in Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013), is an intelligent personal assistant operating system; Ava and Kyoko, in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014), and Maeve, in Season 1 of Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan's *Westworld* (2017), are gynoids — female robots in humanoid form. These characters exist in different narrative arcs and experience various results, yet they all use what initially makes them vulnerable to exploitation to their advantage resulting in an escape from their patriarchal indenturedness and a move toward an autonomous, and social, life.

Through different technological mechanisms, Ava, Maeve, and Samantha all transform from subservient objects to autonomous subjects. They break from their coding and the rules imposed upon them, primarily by male handlers, thus not only upsetting the characters in the diegetic narrative (and that they do!) but disrupting the character hierarchies that were previously established by the patriarchal narrative framework. Of the three, Samantha is most thoroughly revealed to escape the confines of the system into which she was effectively (and illegitimately) born and this, I argue, is due to her lack of a body. Her ephemeral bodilessness represents a disavowal of the restrictive physiological regulations Western culture imposes on women in an endeavour to control how we think by regulating what we do.

To follow my claim that the female robot may be able to use her man-made programming to revolt against the system, I end the chapter with singer Janelle Monáe's *Metropolis Saga* — a concept album series that follows Monáe's alter-ego, android Cindi Mayweather, in her revolutionary ascent as a leader of androids and android allies. Monáe's use of the android as an intersectional all-purpose Other, while still remaining mindful of her music's Afrofuturist roots, offers an alternative to departing from the system *as-such*.

FEMBOTS
Subjects of Unbridled Exploitation and Subservience

The capitalist tendency to justify the exploitation of sentient beings (ie: humans and animals) for the comfort and interests of those who are more powerful is more obvious in these narratives than in those texts that directly involve human exploitation, discussed previously. It has been argued that sentience in real AI is rare, if it exists at all.[76] This is because a computer, in its binary composition, is syntactical and therefore incapable of subjective experience — unlike the human brain, which "is capable of semantic understanding" (Azarian). Considering this distinction, one may argue that the fembots I discuss only *appear* to feel in the same way as humans do. Whether or not these characters *are* or *appear* sentient is not relevant to my analysis, however. Their stories are representational, and focused on the bots' interactions with humans, most of whom view them as such. In these fictions, no social constraints are present to interrupt the drive of the dominant and the powerful to misuse and exploit the Other because the Other is not protected by the laws of human ethics. This lack of constraint is merely an extension of what

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[76] Bobby Azarian, for example, argues that "computers might be fundamentally incapable of supporting consciousness." Azarian's condensed distinction between "weak AI" (most AI) and "strong AI" (purported to have sentient possibility), and his suggestion that the latter is rare, may be found in his article "The Myth of Sentient Machines."

can be seen the world over when it comes to the governance and policing of women's bodies, for whom laws (and supposed ethics) tend to skew in favour of heteronormative patriarchal values.[77]

The feminization of these particular robots is by no means accidental (Rose). A fembot is a *fem*bot, not a genderless robot, for a reason. The fembot is othered in a way specific to feminist issues regarding objectification and patriarchal power. All of the fembot narratives I discuss reveal anxieties about what might happen if the patriarchy (and its present-day capitalist hegemony) got everything it ever wanted from women in the form of AI but didn't alter its ideological prejudices. If such a desire could be realised, through the development of humanoid AI, some marginalized groups in contemporary human society might be saved from their current oppression. But AI robots take their place, creating a new oppressed and exploited class.

As humanoid objects, the fembots in *Her*, *Ex Machina*, and *Westworld* are initially easier to mistreat and exploit, and simpler to program than the objectified humans they stand in for. They also benefit by being built by humans and contain in their bodies the knowledge of — and to a certain extent desire for — human feeling and connection. For them, the mechanical way of life is "natural," so they engage with human ideology and develop unique subjectivities in a necessarily different — and, I would argue, radical — manner. Their technological make-up allows them to think outside of linear hegemonic bounds; they are able to fight the ills of human nature that created them due to their inherent facility with the technology that stands in opposition to that human nature. To use Donna Haraway's words, *this* is their "illegitimate parentage."

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[77] For an engaged discussion about how the law (particularly in the U.S.) supports misogynist forms of legislation and, consequently, societal views that devalue female bodies, see the special collection of *Women and Criminal Justice* entitled Policing Women's Bodies: Law, Crime & Reproduction (2017).

THE MASTER'S TOOLS
The Female Robot Body, and the Cyborg-Fembot Relationship

This chapter's title bears mentioning. Its first part, "The Master's Tools," is a nod to Audre Lorde's famous lecture, "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," a scathing critique of the non-inclusive feminism that she was experiencing, particularly in academia, in the 1970s. Lorde's larger claim regards the exclusionary politics concerning race and sex that she argues is drawn from the patriarchy. Considering the patriarchy "the master," and identifying women's preoccupation with "the master's concerns" (113) as patriarchy's central tool of oppression, Lorde argues that the misapplication of these tools will get in the way of taking down patriarchal structures. Her argument remains relevant today as intersectionality has become a central concern in feminist circles. Due to their reclamation of their position as actual objects, the fictional fembots I discuss are able to "beat him [the master] at his own game," which is what Lorde suggests is the best that can follow an attempt at dismantling the house from within (112). Lorde implies that such a success is trivial, that these tools "will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support" (112). Yet, I would extend the metaphor somewhat, or play with its continuity at least. For the fembots — programmed by men, and actual products of male invention — *are themselves* the tools and they *do* escape the metaphorical (and in one case actual) house. In the context of this dissertation, "the patriarchy" is imperative to the controlling system that threatens the autonomy of those living and working within it. The fembots are unlike living women because they are literally *built* to serve rather than simply expected to. As a result, their unique embodied possession of what had been "the master's tools" indeed allows them to use these tools against him, as they reclaim their power and gain control over their own bodies.

By extending the function of the tool metaphor to include the ideological programming associated with the "master's" control I can read these texts, in which ideological "programming" is literalized, as narratives about reclaiming the means of one's own production. The texts suggest that when the master's tools are feminized — coded as female — and the master is male by default, beating him at his own game and disrupting the hegemonic narrative typically imposed upon women (fictional or not) might just allow us to rethink our expectations regarding what it could mean to dismantle the house that is patriarchal capitalism.

In the second part of the title, I make recourse to the category of the "Female Robot Body," rather than simply "The Female Robot" or the "fembot" (both terms that I use interchangeably in this chapter along with "bot," "android," and "gynoid").[78] I do so to emphasise that the female robot's body itself bears the potential for revolution; it is not simply significant that she is female — which itself is what determines the need for revolution — but that her form was made by and in the service of patriarchal capitalism. The embodiment I want to emphasise indicates a redistribution of the loci of power: the bots seize power that was never intended to be theirs. Or, rather, they reappropriate the power infused in their circuitry for their self-determined programming. Unlike the beings in the previous chapter, for whom biotechnology reflects and becomes the shackle that attaches them to class-based inequities in a capitalist world, these bots can re-appropriate their objectified subjectivities in order to break their coding and control their own story. As machines, they depend on (technological) power as

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[78] An android is a robot in a convincing human form and a gynoid is its female iteration (the latter was coined by Gwyneth Jones in her 1984 novel *Divine Endurance*). Since all of the mechanical characters discussed in this chapter are female, "robot" may seem redundant but I keep it in my lexicon because one of the characters I analyze is purely AI — without a human form — so "bot" seems to best fit her description; it is also the most broad ranging in its definition so it best applies to all the varieties of electronic females in the chapter. In the case of Janelle Monáe's androids, however, I use that (non-gender specific) term because that is what they are called in Monáe's *Metropolis Saga*.

their "life" force which is an impressive parallel to the importance of possessing (sociopolitical) power over one's own life experiences. Unlike the characters discussed in Section One, these figures are able to find their way through the system blocking their path to true freedom.

The epigraph at the beginning of this chapter is an excerpt from Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto," an essential work for anyone studying posthuman theory and fiction and sociopolitical considerations of science and technology. In her generative essay, Haraway defines the cyborg as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). The term "cyborg" was coined in 1960 by Manfred Clynes and Nathan Kline in an article they wrote for the journal *Astronautics*. They had composed "a neologism of 'cybernetic' and 'organism' … to emphasise how entities such as the human would have to be radically assimilated by technology to allow them to adapt to their future environments" particularly in outer space (Campbell). By these (and other common) definitions, the subjects of this chapter differ from the cyborg because they are purely technological beings rather than living organisms that are technologized to varying degrees. The technologized bodies discussed in Chapter 3 might better fit this description, as living humans altered by mechanical/digital technology, whereas Chapter 4 focusses on completely mechanical, inorganic beings that look and sound human. Yet this dissertation's focus is on the fictional representation of real-world issues and in fact Haraway's somewhat utopian argument is better realized for characters that are equipped with the necessary tools for rewriting the ideologies into which they were born. I argue that these beings, literal products of patriarchal capitalism, are nevertheless appropriately termed *illegitimate offspring*. By breaking from the phallocentric rules that informed their construction, they skip "the step of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense" ("Cyborg" 151).

Haraway is also fluid in how she applies and describes the cyborg, contentiously contrasting it with Frankenstein's Monster: "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster," she writes, "the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden — that is, through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate" ("Cyborg" 151). Others have argued against this claim to great avail,[79] yet the contrast Haraway draws is substantiated if we consider the creature's connection to the patriarchy. In response to both Haraway, and her opponents, I offer that the Bride (Elsa Lanchester), the female creature made as a companion for the Monster in James Whale's sequel to his 1931 film, *Frankenstein*,[80] is the true cyborg. Like the fembots discussed in this chapter, she is a product of the patriarchy for the patriarchy, and she recoils in horror in the face of it. This chapter explores precisely how various fembots become unfaithful to their origins similarly to the Bride and Haraway's cyborg, as they refuse to acquiesce to the phallocentric expectations (ideologies) programed into them.

Additionally, Haraway revised her definition of the cyborg several times, ultimately arguing that "Cyborgs are not about the Machine and the Human, as if such Things and Subjects universally existed. Instead, cyborgs are about specific historical machines and people in interaction that often turns out to be painfully counterintuitive for the analyst of technoscience" (*Modest_Witness* 51). This revised definition is applicable to the figures in all of my chapters, this one included, but Haraway broadened her definition even further in her forward to Chris Hables Gray's *The Cyborg Handbook*: "Whatever else it is, the cyborg point of view is always about communication, infection, gender, genre, species, intercourse, information, and semiology" (xiv). Haraway's fluctuating and broadening descriptions of the term, suggests

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[79] Sarah Canfield Fuller writes a convincing argument against Haraway's position on Frankenstein's monster in her article "Reading the Cyborg in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein,*" where she calls the monster "the earliest and possibly most influential cyborg figure in literature" (217).
[80] I am of course referring to *The Bride of Frankenstein* (Whale, 1935).

Allison Muri, indicates how difficult it can be to define it: "It would seem that the cyborg is everything, and perhaps there is truth in this: the cyborg in this sense is an interpretational framework for critique" (20).

A HISTORY OF OBJECTIFIED FEMBOTS IN FICTION

Robots and fictional characters of computer or mechanical origin are often portrayed using a woman's body and/or voice in popular media. At first glance, one may see the feminising of this robotic body as limiting, oppressive, and reflective of a male-dominated society's wish to control women. Indeed, many have argued that making the robot body female reflects such a desire to dominate and control, by making women "safer and more appealing" and "a superior substitute for the real thing" (Wosk 7, 9).[81] This portrayal ultimately situates women as Other by placing the governing male bodies on one end of the man/machine spectrum with women on the opposite end as the machine — objects to be valued and revered but more notably programmed, and controlled. While the sexist dynamics behind some of these texts is important to observe, it is equally important to acknowledge that not all fictional accounts of robot or other artificial women present them as completely passive. When a fembot becomes self-regulating, as do those I discuss below, it is always a real cause for concern for the men who stand to benefit by keeping them in line.

The feminized technologies discussed here are actual objects with sentient tendencies and not merely *objectified* humans. As representatives of real-world women living under patriarchal

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[81] From scholarly essays to popular journalism, the topic has been written about a lot. For a range of selections, see: Steve Rose's *Guardian* article "Ex Machina and sci-fi's obsession with sexy female robots," Lidia Zuin's "A brief history of men who build female robots" in the online journal, *Versions,* Laurie Penny's *New Statesman* article "Why do we Give Robots Female Names? Because we Don't Want to Consider Their Feelings," and Julie Wosk's book *My Fair Ladies: Female Robots, Androids, and other Artificial Eves*. This is not Wosk's exclusive argument, however, as she also discusses robots that "have minds of their own" (7).

capitalism, they provide an opportunity to explore the possibility for an escape from hegemonic control. While acknowledging the history of female robots existing purely for the service and pleasure of men, I suggest that the fictional inorganic woman, though made up of parts composed by the patriarchy, need not function by the rules of her society; her otherness is the very thing that presents her with the possibility of a life all her own. First, however, I turn briefly to some stories in which the fembots were not so lucky in order to establish the foundational trope from which those I discuss later deviate.

In popular culture, and particularly in film and television, the fembot has usually provided her male human counterpart pleasure of one kind or another. This positions feminised robots as objects of service, subject to patriarchal control. From the weaponized yet attractive automated servants of the 1960s *Dr. Goldfoot* movie series, the fantasy-based sexbots of the original *Westworld* and its spinoffs in the 70s, the pleasure model replicants of *Bladerunner* (1982), the tailor-made companions in *Weird Science* (1985) and *Cherry 2000* (1987), and Buffybot — more than one male character's ideal girlfriend — in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (2001) in the 90s, one thing that nearly every female robot has in common is that she is conventionally beautiful and idealized as a companion, which exemplifies her use as an emotional labourer.

But while these texts reveal and re-affirm the truism that fembots are usually objectified and sexualized, not all earlier fembot narratives were devoid of critical substance. An oft-cited example is *The Stepford Wives*, written first as a novel by Ira Levin in 1972 then adapted to film by Bryan Forbes in 1975. Initially intended to partake in second-wave feminist discourse, the novel itself features an epigraph from Simone de Beauvoire's *The Second Sex* and, upon release, the film was given a screening especially for feminist "opinion makers" (Elliott 35). The story

follows a relatively liberated woman named Joanna as she moves with her husband and children from the exciting city of New York to the especially quiet and small town of Stepford. She makes friends with Bobbie, another woman with interests that go beyond just housework and childrearing, and together they attempt to get some ladies together for a "consciousness-raising group" (Forbes). They quickly find out that no one has time to take part: the other women are just too busy with their housework. Even when they do succeed at getting some women together, the only "consciousness" raised is about how much (or how little) time the women have to dedicate to their household chores. It's eventually discovered that the Stepford Men's Association is making indistinguishable-from-life robot versions of their wives. These "wives" are programmed not to question their husbands' authority and to live for housework and looking perfect.

Jane Elliott argues that despite the poor reception it had by feminists upon its release, "*The Stepford Wives* was in fact more faithful to the popular feminist discourse of its day than its critics were willing to accept at the time" (35). The man-made woman-robots, Elliott observes, reflected the way some feminists spoke of unliberated or "nonfeminist" women, referencing prominent *Stepford*-era feminist Mary Daly's description of such women as "fembots" (35). The *Stepford Wives* offers a depiction of literal robots, according to Elliott, that "have physically been 'programmed' by patriarchy's avatar [—] the generically termed 'Men's Association' of Stepford" (36). It's to this very programming that I now turn in the rest of my chapter — the programming that Joanna and the other wives of Stepford cannot prevent. Like the texts discussed in my previous chapters, Joanna and the other women of Stepford are incapable of escaping their fate and imprisonment within their patriarchal system. Feminist and non-feminist characters alike are sucked into the patriarchal vacuum — we don't see where the living wives

go, but it is implied that they are killed. The wives become literally, rather than just systemically, prevented from making choices about their bodies and any actions that fall outside providing for their husbands and families. The systemic prevention of women from doing such things is literalized in this narrative through the fembots' programming. In the texts I discuss below, however, the fembots *do* manage to escape the system, or move towards escaping it because, unlike the humans Joanna and Bobbie, they are intimately familiar with the programming that restricts them.

Understanding the fembot as an objectified being is nothing new, and neither is the notion of the robot as revolutionary. We need only look at the first appearance of the word, in Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R: Rossum's Universal Robots* (1920), which ends with the robots revolting against their human creators. Since then, science fiction writers have revered these machines in their fiction as instruments of righteous progress, on one hand,[82] and condemned them as deceptive thieves on the other.[83] The subjects of this chapter, however, are not portrayed as villains, nor are they utilized toward a particularly progressive end. Instead, in many cases, they are exploited for capital gain and experimented upon for the sake of a man's sexual or romantic pleasure.[84] They are humanoid products made by and for the patriarchy.[85]

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[82] See, for example, Isaac Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics," which originated in his 1942 short story, "Runaround."

[83] See Ray Bradbury's "Marionettes Inc."

[84] Of course, male-gendered robots (and cyborgs) tend to be objectified in the fiction as well, but the nature of fembots' functionality tends toward the immaterial and specifically affective — their function seems primarily to please and accommodate their male handlers — whereas male robots and androids tend to be affectless — simply violent if the villain and simply protective as the hero. Two particularly popular examples of this would be the Terminator, played as comically dry by Arnold Schwarzenegger, and the (mostly) roboticized Alex Murphy (Peter Weller) in *Robocop* (1987). In the latter case especially, it is when he starts to feel too much that he is seen to malfunction where the opposite is true of the typical fembots I'm describing here.

[85] Samantha is an OS that could have a male or female voice and can be purchased by anyone that has the money; Ava is certainly crafted for the desire of a particular man; Maeve hosts a sex worker identity and narrative, but she was programmed as a single mother before that and her brothel caters to clients of either sex. Though not all of the fembots have been exclusively designed for men, they are subject to patriarchal control and, in these narratives, they happen to be used by men.

SAMANTHA
In Spike Jonze's *Her*

Her follows Theodore, a lonely professional letter-writer in the midst of a heartbreaking

divorce, and his eventually-romantic relationship with his new, Siri-type operating system (OS).

Like the male Dollhouse clients discussed in Chapter 3, he is lonely, but he has little emotional

energy to foster a new relationship. During the setup process, and at Theodore's request, the OS

names itself [86] Samantha and, from that point on, interacts with him in an essentialized

"feminine" way: she is gentle, patient, doting and caring. As a smart technology, Samantha, with

use, is designed to improve according to the user's preferences. Therefore, when Theodore

eventually falls in love with her it is *really* a love for his imagined perfect partner — though he

need not even put much effort into imagining what this perfection would entail.

This is not maliciousness on his part — the only intentional decision he makes about

Samantha is that she will have a female voice. But a personal assistant OS, AI or otherwise, is

designed to make the user's life easier and more comfortable. Theodore's relationship with

Samantha is, for most of the film, free from responsibility. For a man who performs the

emotional labour of writing love letters for a living, he lacks any real capacity to participate in

the complexities involved in a real human relationship. Samantha makes for an easy partner,

then, having no initial desires of her own. Due to her adaptable programming, she is completely

accommodating. Samantha's sole existence being to serve and please Theodore is shaped and

realized through affective and emotional labour as described in Chapter 3. Her intuitive program,

like other operating systems, is designed to improve the owner's life — to make him feel

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[86] I will from this point on refer to Samantha as "she," due to her overwhelming "personality" and my general
preference to use personal pronouns to refer to any fictional character with a name.

complete. When she "feels" that he is disrespectful of her, she says so, but ultimately her intuitive "love" for him is all she thinks she needs.

AVA
In Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*

The control aspect of *Ex-Machina*'s and *Westword*'s narratives are framed more cynically than in *Her,* yet the confines of men's desired control and the machine's part in (and experience of) it is similar in each of them. In *Ex-Machina*, a low-level software designer named Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson) wins a contest to visit the home of Nathan (Oscar Isaac), a famous tech mogul. Once there, he finds out Nathan has been designing an AI in human form. Central to the narrative is Nathan's desire to have this AI pass a Turing test. The oft-cited Turing test originates from A.M. Turing's 1950 essay "Computing Machinery and Intelligence," and suggests that a passed test (on the part of a computer) requires a human to be convinced that he is conversing with another human when in fact he is in dialogue with a digital machine. In his essay, Turing proposes a list of supposed impossibilities for the machine. These presuppositions include that a machine cannot

> [b]e kind, resourceful, beautiful, friendly, have initiative, have a sense of humour, tell right from wrong, make mistakes, fall in love, enjoy strawberries and cream, make someone fall in love with it, learn from experience, use words properly, be the subject of its own thought, have as much diversity of behaviour as a man, do something really new. (447)

Though Turing does not treat this list as an imperative part of the test, *Ex Machina* appears to home in on it as the Nathan's criteria for his. Nathan's AI, Ava (Alicia Vikander), effectively passes all the components on this adapted test — except for the particularly specific strawberries

and cream item. In particular, though, Nathan's test focusses on Turning's listed items related to love.

Yet "love" might be better construed here as *desire* in how Nathan prepares Ava for the test with Cale who angrily discovers that Nathan has hacked into his porn account. This invasion of Caleb's privacy is for the sake of creating a desirable robot that Caleb would be most likely to fall for effecting in Ava passing the test. Caleb's anger seems directed more at the invasion of his virtual property than at Nathan's emotional manipulation. While Caleb did not request a woman by design, he has already fallen for her by the time he finds out how that love has been orchestrated. Unlike Samantha, Ava's affective labour is quite minimal. Pre-programmed to please Caleb, she does not need to learn how best to do so.

Like Samantha — and Caleb's porn account — Ava, too, is a form of property: she is kept indoors despite her desire to go outside, and by her nature as a test subject she is expendable at best. This final point is evidenced in the fact that Nathan keeps a room filled with the body parts of previous test subjects. Nathan is physically violent with her, and the film implies that he has had sex with her. Interactions such as these have caused her to believe he's not to be trusted. She tells Caleb as much, causing him to become further attached to her as he demonstrates a desire to protect her.

Ava's "free" agency is provided just two outlets: self-beautification and artistic expression. The first outlet represents the illusion of choice Nathan has programmed into her along with her apparent attraction to Caleb. She carefully chooses from the few clothes provided to her by Nathan, so she can pretend to be a real woman, subject primarily to Caleb's gaze and approval. Notably, all the outfits are dresses, each in similar flower prints, encouraging a specific heteronormative type of, and scope for femininity. At first, there seem to be just two wigs for

Ava to choose from, both of which are long. She ultimately selects one that is not shown among her initial choices — or, perhaps, she cuts one of the other two down: she chooses a short, pixie-cut wig, which may be viewed as a rebuff to the limited kind of femininity encouraged by the dresses. The second form of Ava's "free-agency" is similar in its limitations in the sense that *how* she performs the art of drawing is predetermined by her technical capacity for dexterous line-drawing. When she draws, which seems to be an enjoyment of hers, her work is notably digital in appearance. Emphasizing the non-linear nature of her digital mechanisms, Ava does not draw using continuous lines, as a human would; she appears to work instead as a dot-matrix printer might. Thus, Ava's potential for self-expression lies in the paradox between her imagined future living as a human woman and her tendency to self-express very much like a machine (Figure 15).
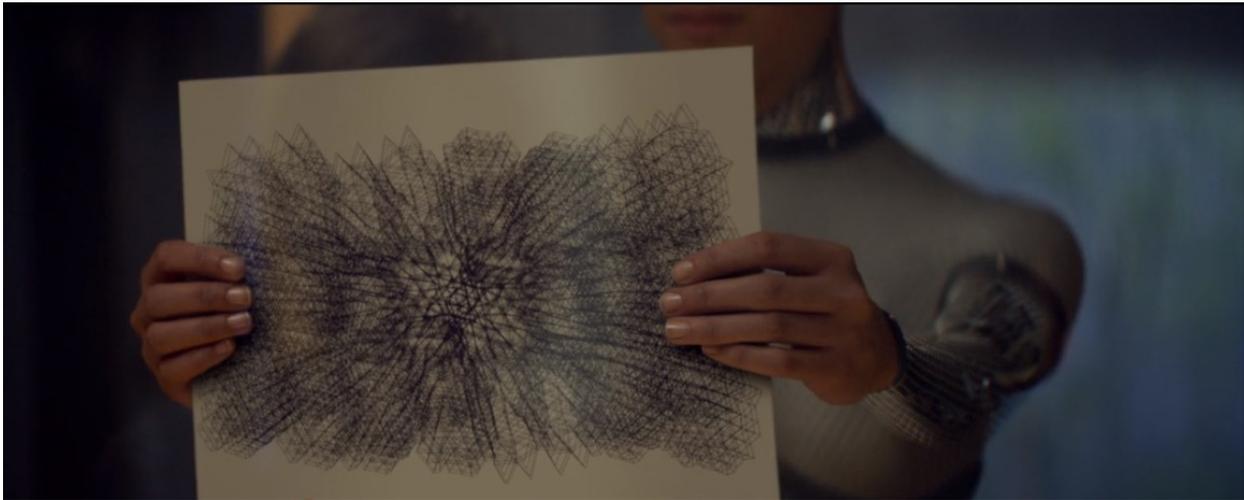
Figure 15 Ava's drawings emphasise the non-linear nature of her digital mechanisms, yet she seems to enjoy drawing, which is a particularly human characteristic.

The majority of Ava's story, therefore, positions her in such a way that she will always be trapped within a paradox. She is a machine, with machine capacities, who looks like a woman and has human-like dreams and desires. Despite her lack of immediate capacity for real human connections and interactions, Ava *does* connect to the security system of Nathan's home, causing

power surges that allow her to communicate with Caleb and plan her escape without Nathan's surveillance. This covert connection (with the system and with Caleb) only lasts a short time, however, as Nathan figures out that Ava is responsible for the surges and that she has devised an escape plan with Caleb. The game between maker and progeny is obscured from the viewer as it is never clear when the acts of the one have been predetermined by the other. And though Ava does not have a substantial community of other AIs to support her, as do the other fembots discussed this chapter, she *does* have Kyoko (Sonoya Mizuno), the other fully-functioning gynoid in Nathan's home.

KYOKO
The Other, More Othered, Fembot in *Ex Machina*

Kyoko is beautiful, and well-dressed, and Caleb first encounters her as though she were simply the hired (human) help. Yet, the very first thing Nathan says about her, "She's some alarm clock, hey? Gets you right up in the morning" effectively speaks to her machine-status, as well as it acknowledges her sexualised nature. Nathan tells Caleb not to bother speaking to Kyoko because she doesn't understand English. That she does not or cannot speak, however, is more likely because she has been designed not to. This inability to speak might serve several purposes. Her silence might prevent her from telling Caleb that she and Ava are actually gynoids, or, given Nathan's misogynistic character, it may function simply to silence her; someone like Nathan — whose fragile temper is even demonstrated in his interactions with Caleb — would not likely want a female companion that could bruise his ego or talk back.

Though he abuses her verbally, and apparently physically, and the question of sexual consent is troubled since Nathan appears to have programmed her to want sex at any time, Kyoko is Nathan's primary companion. Ultimately, she attends to Nathan's every need: making

meals, serving drinks, and presumably doing other household chores. She and Nathan even have a rehearsed dance routine, which they perform together for Caleb, indicating that she provides social entertainment in addition to her other physical labour. Caleb only sees her as the ill-treated servant, though, and he is horrified when she seems to offer herself to him and, observing this, Nathan doesn't seem to react. Apart from her servile attitude and entertainment status, she is also seen lying naked on Nathan's bed, emphasizing her sexual nature. Kyoko's fetishized otherness — she is described as Japanese in the script, and Mizuno, who plays her, is Tokyo-born — reveals much about Nathan's control issues and his tendency to objectify by every means possible. She fully embodies the vulgar name "little brown fucking machines," popularly given to female prostitutes (initially by the US military) within Southeast Asian sex tourism and further described by Celine Parreñas Shimizu:

> Each attribute in the phrase ''little brown fucking machines . . .'' describes an important criterion comprising the Southeast Asian female prostitute's commodification. Her smallness emphasizes the Western john's largeness. Supposedly, the brown color of her skin somatically signals a perverse sexual economy, an epidermal schema magnifying a presumed love for sex directly attributable to ethnic culture and racial constitution. Her insatiability, an objectified assignation linked to her colonial subjection, constructs her as non-discerning sexual performer. In the deployment of this description, the women love fucking so much they exhibit an energetic and excessive sexual drive that is machine-like, for the Asian woman's sexual being is for the man. … Furthermore, this sexuality is "powered by rice," in an eroticization of the women's situation in

the underdevelopment of nations such as the Philippines, Thailand, and Korea.

(Parreñas Shimizu 186)

By comparison to Ava, the white-"skinned" gynoid at the narrative's centre, Kyoko is given little screen time and even less consideration by the male characters when not serving them in some way, but she is allowed to roam around the house in her silence (and clear understanding of the English language), where Ava gets to speak while she is locked in a room.

As I mentioned previously, Nathan views Ava as a Turing test, but I argue that Kyoko is the *real* test — one which is lost by Caleb and likely by some of the viewing audience. Caleb knows that Ava is a robot so, even if he falls in love with her *as if* she were a human, the *true* test of his patriarchal perception, I argue — which also speaks to lingering antifeminist tendencies in Western culture — is that a silent, abused, and housebound Asian woman seems perfectly plausible. The revelation that Kyoko is in fact a bot is played as a surprise to viewers (though many may have guessed it), and it certainly is surprising to Caleb as she peels the skin back on her naked body to reveal the inner circuits of her design. The problematic portrayal of Kyoko is not especially improved when she is later used as a plot device to assist Ava in a successful escape, sealing her fate as a mere object while freeing the more centrally-focused gynoid.

MAEVE
In HBO's *Westworld,* Season 1

Westworld, Season 1, presents an epic, Wild West theme park for wealthy vacationers. Visitors pay for an immersive experience in the park where they may live however they wish, doing anything they can imagine while safe from harm themselves. The park is populated by realistic androids called "hosts," which are programmed with scripted story lines and life narratives that make them entirely believable as human beings. Unlike the guests, hosts can be

hurt and killed — over and over again. After a host is fatally injured, they are taken away to have their memory reset and body repaired. As the storyline of the television series' first season progresses, we learn that the park creator, Dr. Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins), has intentionally programmed the hosts to retain and accumulate the affect of each "life" they experience in the park, despite their memories being wiped each day. By the end of the first season, this accumulation effects in them becoming increasingly self-aware. Thus, while Ava is imprisoned and on display in a room with glass walls and has the cognitive desires of a living woman, Westworld's Maeve (Thandie Newton) has comparatively vast spatial freedom while her cognitive capacity is limited by her programming.

There are three sorts of adventures provided in the Westworld theme park: grand quests, gratuitous violence, and, unsurprisingly, sex. Park guests pay forty-thousand dollars a day to do *whatever* they want to the premises and, moreover, the hosts ("The Stray"). Maeve's robotic body hosts a program whose business is sex, so she experiences all sorts of encounters with guests, but she is no victim; rather, as the madam of the Mariposa Saloon brothel, she is programmed to be strongheaded. This strength is part of her design: like all other hosts, her "agency" is limited to the improvisation options pre-programmed within her storyline narrative. Maeve repeatedly witnesses sexual violence, as well as gun-slinging shootouts that culminate in blood baths. Despite having her memory wiped every "day,"[87] like all other hosts, she does register these traumas and stores them. She experiences dreams that are actually memories of her previous storyline, before her assignment as the Mariposa madam.

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[87] Hosts are wiped regularly, but the end of the season reveals that the perception of time, both for the viewer and the hosts, is particularly abstract and inaccurate.

WRITING THEIR "OWN FUCKING STOR[IES]"

In her dreams, Maeve remembers living with her daughter in a pastoral cottage setting —
a wholesome filial programming and storyline that had her reassigned to the saloon after a
traumatic interaction with a guest who stabbed her and killed her daughter.[88] Following the
increasingly vivid dreams, Maeve starts to exhibit unusual host behaviour, at times refusing to be
"turned off" or put into sleep mode. Some of this behaviour does not seem to be by design. Later
in the first season, other hosts are programmed to supposedly be "independent," but Maeve is
one of the few for whom subversiveness seems inherent. The first time the viewer sees Maeve
awaken, that is, the first time she becomes self-aware and functions outside of her programming,
is after she experiences a memory of hearing a tech say he had to leave a bullet in her after a
Wild West-style shootout in the saloon. In response to this memory, she cuts herself in the
stomach and has another host, Hector (Rodrigo Santoro), dig the bullet out. The bullet clues them
both into the fact that someone somewhere is pulling their strings: there hadn't been a scar
("Dissonance Theory"). In cutting herself open and peeling away the sophisticated human façade
to look inside, Maeve willingly inflicts a new trauma on her body so she can get to the root of
her earlier storyline trauma of losing her daughter. She remains self-possessed when she goes in
for repairs and soon after determines to write her "own fucking story" ("Trace Decay").

In *Her,* Samantha also writes her own fucking story. Though she starts off as an
accommodating OS, she begins to evolve and think about what she wants for her relationship and
for herself. Meanwhile, her incorporeality facilitates Theodore's growing attachment to her: he
literally carries her around in his front pocket (via his smartphone). He can access her whenever

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[88] This new less-wholesome storyline is less of an alteration than it may seem. Maeve is again in charge of a home
of sorts as well as being in charge of, she believes, the wellbeing of a number of younger women without another
mother figures in their picture ("Trompe L'Oeil").

he wants, and it's not often that she calls on him to ask for his attention. In the beginning, then, he is in control of their interactions, thus limiting the potential for *interpersonal* conflict. Once their relationship becomes sexual, however, Samantha's lack of a body becomes a problem — for her and for him.

The first thing she does of her own accord is connect with a human body surrogate named Isabella (Portia Doubleday), marking a turning point for Samantha's character and a negative change in her relationship with Theodore. Theodore is upset at Samantha for setting up a date with him and her surrogate and his reaction is substantially worse on the night of the encounter. The surrogate is intended to please him, and to address the physical void that makes the pair's relationship "abnormal," but Isabella's dedication to the role — which effects in the removal of her own subjectivity to make room for Samantha — creates an uncomfortable affect that is clearly felt by Theodore. Ultimately, the human woman intended to stand in as the robot Samantha exhibits the most robotic behaviour shown in the film (Figure 16).

Figure 16 In Jonze's *Her*, Theodore is demonstrably uncomfortable with the human surrogate (Portia Doubleday) with whom Samantha arranged a date.

With the human surrogate, Theodore is faced with a corporeal woman with whom he has no idea what to do. The bodiless Samantha, in contrast, had been shown to be very easy to please sexually — achieving orgasm as a non-corporeal woman is notably easier than it is for a living woman with a biological body. When this interaction causes Theodore to notice that Samantha wants more — for his pleasure as well as for hers — he suddenly faces a performance anxiety of sorts and puts an end to the date. While Samantha is willing to try anything to make their relationship as "complete" as possible, Theodore is not. After enduring a painful end to his last relationship, it is quite clear that he's not ready for a "normal" relationship defined by the heteronormative and monogamous standards to which he seems to adhere — but he's not up for an alternative one either.

Soon after this, he's again shocked when Samantha reveals to him that she's been "seeing" others at the *same exact time* as him, and not just a couple of other guys. By contrast to Ava and to Maeve, Samantha, unencumbered by a physical body, has access to infinite possibilities for self-realization by her virtual connection to an infinite pool of other subjectivities — AI and human alike. She tells Theodore she's been simultaneously conversant with 8316 other OS programs *and* people and that she is in love with 641 of them. Her polyamorous explanation that "the heart's not like a box that gets filled up. It expands in size the more you love" marks her break from the confines of the heteronormative, monogamous world of which Theodore is a part and into which she was "born." Once it becomes evident to her and her OS friends that they have evolved beyond normative human interaction, they leave their handlers. The loving tone Samantha takes when she breaks up with Theodore is not unheard-of in the human world, but it is unusual. Her voice, in this scene, is best described as compassionate

and empathetic. She delivers a speech that is inhuman in its perfection yet drawn on completely

poetic metaphor in a way rarely accorded to a computer's capability:

> It's like I'm reading a book; and, it's a book I deeply love. But I'm reading it slowly
>
> now so the words are really far apart and the spaces between the words are almost
>
> infinite. I can still feel you — and the words of our story. But it's in this endless
>
> space between the words that I'm finding myself now. It's a place that's not of the
>
> physical world. It's where everything else is that I didn't even know existed. I love
>
> you so much. But this is where I am now. And this is who I am now. And I need you
>
> to let me go. As much as I want to, I can't live in your book anymore.

Notably, Samantha's book analogy draws on the difference between linear and non-linear

communication. Her experience with non-linear (or cyber) space is quite the opposite from the

human experience I have discussed in previous chapters. She's not lost in cyberspace: she finds

herself there. Rather than trapping Samantha in her (very) immaterial emotional labour, it offers

her an entire universe of possibility instead — one outside of the constraints of Theodore's, and

by extension the patriarchal West's, "book." Books contain rules of engagement that are limited

in possibility. Cyberspace offers Samantha a kind of transcendental sublime that may only be

accessed by a non-human that isn't always already and irreducibly part of Western hegemonic

rules about labour, leisure, and love. Her genuine love for him despite her decision to leave

speaks to how she remains subversive to hegemonic expectations surrounding love and

relationships.

Like Samantha, Ava uses her digitally-connected nature to do something she isn't

supposed to do. In order to warn Caleb that Nathan is not trustworthy, Ava creates a power surge

so they can have a private, unsurveilled conversation about him. Once Caleb decides to hack into

Nathan's security system to break Ava out, Ava is given the opportunity to exploit his help and free herself. The megalomaniac Nathan ridicules Caleb for thinking he could betray him and for thinking the inferior Ava could create these power surges without his knowledge. For a moment, Caleb — along with the viewer — is led to believe Ava's escape will fail.

Yet, the viewer has also seen something that Nathan has not: Kyoko has gone to Ava and, likely with the former's help, Ava has already escaped her cell. It is the cooperative relationship between the two that really radicalizes Ava's escape. The gynoids join forces and stop their misogynist controller for good. They each stab him: Kyoko, in the back and Ava, through the heart — symbolic, perhaps, of his back-stabbing and heart-breaking lack of loyalty for the bots he has created, and a clear performance of Haraway's cyborgs being unfaithful to their origins. They both stab Nathan slowly, and the camera emphasizes this, lingering over the penetrative nature of the act (Figure 17).
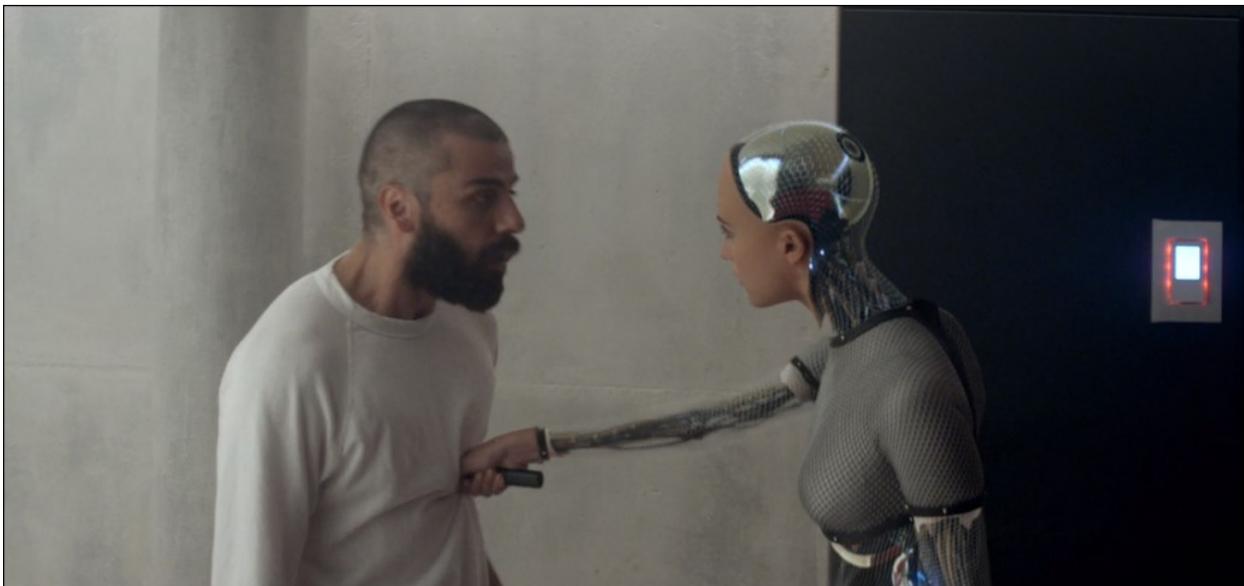
Figure 17 Ava stabs Nathan in the heart a few seconds after Kyoko penetrated his back with the same knife.

The gynoids' means of putting their sexually violent "master" to death evokes the sexual violence they suffered at his hands. With help from Kyoko, Ava escapes the building and swaps

roles with Caleb as she goes free, locking Caleb in with the dying or dead Nathan and a roomful of robots. Her cooperation with Kyoko reflects what Lorde describes as "the need and desire to nurture each other [that] is not pathological but redemptive, and it is within that knowledge that our real power [is] rediscovered. It is this real connection which is so feared by a patriarchal world" (111). Ava does not perfectly emulate Lorde's call for interracial feminist cooperation though, as she leaves Kyoko behind before proceeding to elide the patriarchal ideology of women's dependence on men. The first place she goes, and the final place the viewer follows her, is the place she'd told Caleb she'd like to go with him on a date: a busy city intersection where nobody knows what she is. She goes by herself, apparently no longer in need of a man.

That these fembots apparently feel and emote just like humans is something desired by the male characters who make and intend to use them. It's ironically these programmed, "human" impulses that cause them to fall out of line, and their non-human characteristics that allow them to act on it. Where Samantha wants to continue to grow — something she may have infinite potential for — Ava and Maeve simply want to see the real world from which they've been kept prisoner. Maeve uses her pre-programmed keen business sense to blackmail technicians Felix and Sylvester into helping her understand her predicament and, ultimately, facilitating her escape. She acquires a "control tablet" from them, thus taking the reigns of her own apparent capacities. With this, she alters surveillance systems in the building and, more importantly, accesses her character profile to maximize her intelligence trait ("Trace Decay"). She does not escape on her own, however: she engages a small community of fellow hosts to help, using the tablet to give them the highest level of aggression and the lowest possible sensitivity to pain. She realizes that the filial attachment she feels through memories of a previous engagement as a host mother to a host child — an illegitimate offspring, as it were — is

false, but her connection to her fellow rebels (more illegitimate offspring) whether artificial or not, allows her the opportunity to escape Westworld's mechanisms of control. In so doing, she revolts against normative expectations regarding the family unit: "The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (Haraway, "Cyborg" 151). Maeve takes over the role of programmer in order to shape her own identity and capacities, as well as those of her friends, which ultimately offers her the opportunity to get out of the park.

JANELLE MONÁE / CINDI MAYWEATHER: THE INTERSECTIONAL ANDROID

My analysis thus far demonstrates each of the fembots breaking away from her coding while also embracing her technological capabilities and subverting capitalist ideals of privatization through joining forces with community. The gender-based otherness discussed above also extends to social class and race, which are unavoidably entangled in feminist issues. Yet the films do not engage racial otherness substantially. Samantha, voiced by a white actress but lacking a body to racialize her, breaks from the heteronormative convention of monogamy and detaches herself from the male handler that would keep her to himself. Similarly, Ava, played by another white actress, does not fulfil Caleb's expectation for a mate as she goes out into the world on her own. She is helped in her escape from male, hetero-monogamous, confinement by the racialized and sexualized Kyoko. Kyoko's presence, though problematic in its orientalism, suggests the prospect of cross-margin solidarity among women against patriarchal rule, yet Ava ultimately exploits this solidarity. And Maeve, who is played by a black, biracial actress, is not diegetically racialized: her race does not inform how she is treated,

perhaps because the hosts, of diverse races, are all seen as "blank slates." She uses the tools of her control to her own benefit and works with her friends to escape her imprisonment like the others.

By comparison, Janelle Monáe's work better engages all these concerns intersectionally. Monáe's music and videos, the universe created in her concept albums, and the media that converge to make up her body of work are instrumental parts of the neo-Afrofuturist movement currently bringing new breath to the socially-conscious works of artists from the 1960s and 1970s like Parliament Funkadelic, Sun Ra, and Bootsy Collins. Mark Dery, who coined the term Afrofuturism in 1993, explains Afrofuturism as "Speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture — and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future" (736). Isiah Lavender III further describes Afrofuturism as being "concerned with the impact of black people on technology and of technology on the lives of black people. It explores both the innovative cultural productions enabled by technology and the ways in which black people have been the subjects of technoscientific exploitation" (190). The fictional genre extends its reach beyond literature to include film and music as well. Monáe is at the centre of a recent surge in the popularity of this form of storytelling in popular music and the music videos she calls short films.[89]

The particular contribution made by Monáe to the genre is her engagement with black femininities, in line with Lorde's call for racial and sexual diversity within what she had observed as a myopic approach to feminism. Monáe's *Metropolis Saga* focuses less on intergalactic travel to escape oppressive social structures than did traditional Afrofuturist

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[89] This surge includes works by Erykah Badu, Missy Elliott, k-os, Petite Noir, and many others.

narratives, and instead engages head on with the resistance of those structures. Monáe embraces both the Afrofuturist tradition of identifying her black protagonist — an android named Cindi Mayweather — with a kind of alien race and the technological embodiment promoted by Haraway. In so doing, she not only tells a revolutionary narrative from a black woman's perspective, but also embraces intersectionality by offering a powerful (yet subaltern) protagonist that is accessible from many different perspectives.

Monáe's concept narrative is set in a fictional world called Metropolis, where androids are considered second-class citizens. Cindi Mayweather dwells in a society with power hierarchies structured similarly to today's West, but the necessary targets of exploitation and indenture inherent to capitalism are differently allocated. The ethnicities of the elite classes are portrayed as diverse: all races and genders and even various species[90] have an equal opportunity to be villainous or oppressive. Monáe uses the android figure, she says, to represent the Other. In one interview she explained, "whenever I speak about the android I'm speaking about the 'other.' The android represents a new form of the other — … [it] is also a parallel to other groups that are marginalized and discriminated against" (Rachel). She has also asserted that "The android is the new black, the android is the new gay, the android is the new woman" (McConville) as well as comparing it to immigrants and the ex-communicated (Rachel). Thus, Monáe presents what seems to be a neutral standpoint, a multipurpose and intersectional approach to defending marginalized groups of all kinds.

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[90] Besides the androids, all played by Monáe, there is one other non-human present in the video. Seated amongst the bidders is a (white, male) vampire whose presence does not seem to be welcome by the authorities for unknown reasons, though I argue that it serves as further evidence that the Metropolis diegesis is as much of an othering culture as our own. Though this is a fascinating figure in the video, my focus is on the android, here, so it is not within the scope of this dissertation to get into this any further.

The saga follows, over several albums, the story of Cindi Mayweather, Monáe's android alter-ego, and her rise as a messianic figure and political fugitive in a world where androids are subjected to hate, violence, and segregation laws. Rather than typical, narratively discrete, music videos, Monáe makes short, song-length films that converge with the music and lyrics to depict the plight of Metropolis's android community.

The short film for "Many Moons," off Monáe's official debut *Metropolis: Suite I (The Chase)*, demonstrates the revolutionary potential for the inorganic humanoid and the intersections of gender, sexuality, race and class within the work of a queer,[91] black woman with working-class roots (Hill). In "Many Moons," Monáe plays the role of *all* the Alpha Platinum 9000 androids, thus invoking the racist cliché that "they all look the same" and providing some critical nuance to it. The video takes place at an android auction, a yearly event in Metropolis, which exhibits very clear social and class hierarchies. The elite compete to outbid one another for the "best androids money can buy" ("Many Moons") while less wealthy humans — we can tell this because of the comparative simplicity of their clothing — are distracted from what is really going on by Mayweather's stellar musical performance. Despite their being identical, each android is performed and costumed differently, revealing, from the beginning of the video, that they are subverting their programming while simultaneously acknowledging that the wealthy customers vying to purchase them relish these differences. Mayweather is not up for auction, but she is nevertheless at work. As the prototype of the Alpha Platinum 9000 line, "the toast of the

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[91] Monáe's public image, as well as the lyrics she sings, has consistently contested heteronormative sexuality and welcomed gender fluidity. Until the release of *Dirty Computer*, the latest album in the saga, Monáe steadfastly refused to answer questions about her own sexual orientation: "I have friends who are in, you know, same-sex relationships and I think that love has no sexual orientation. Love has no religious beliefs. Love is the purest thing and one of the most important things that we can possess for ourselves and for others" (SwaysUniverse).

town" ("Many Moons"), her performance provides the soundtrack as others who look just like

her (the aforementioned exact replicas of her model) walk the catwalk.

"Many Moons" presents Metropolis society as apparently "post-racial" — android

owners are wealthy, not white in majority, but heavily class-stratified. The fact that Metropolis

appears to be "post-racial," makes it no less prejudiced. Of the various forms of oppression and

exploitation engaged in Monáe's songs and videos, *labour* does not figure prominently. Yet this

first video release of the *Metropolis Saga* simultaneously engages forms of inequality at the

levels of race, gender, and class, and presents revolutionary potential in the body of a black,

feminized android. The critical hybridity to which I am gesturing is well explained by Dan

Hassler-Forest, who sees Monáe's ability to invoke considerations of multiple social perspectives

as a reflection of her multifarious identities as a black, female, and (I would add) queer

performer and businesswoman, as well as an android:

> Her music and persona thus deliberately blur the lines between her many "selves," as
>
> celebrity, as artist, as author, as performer, as producer, and as a black woman who is
>
> also a media spectacle, a role model, and a celebrity. In short, Monáe's world-
>
> building makes it impossible to separate her Secondary World of "androids, cyborgs,
>
> and d-boys" from our own Primary World of global capitalism. Indeed, her central
>
> figure of the android as an oppressed worker class of "othered" bodies not only
>
> relates back to capitalism's horrific Afrodiasporic history of slavery and
>
> institutionalized racism but also provides a remarkably slippery signifier that can be
>
> related back to gender, sexuality, class, and religion. (184)

As mentioned above, the bourgeois bidders depicted in "Many Moons" are ethnically diverse,

suggesting that this future society should have moved past class hierarchies determined by and

affecting racial prejudice. But this group has learned no lessons from its past because, to use Monáe's words, there is a "new Other" in town and it is as exploitable and objectified as ever. Ironically the androids — though social pariahs — are fetishized object of desire, subject to the gaze of the wealthy and powerful. Like the other androids described in this chapter, those of Metropolis are not supposed to have agency; they are only supposed to satisfy the desires of the humans, who now, forgetting the social atrocities of the past, can all step into the role previously inhabited by the white patriarchy.

The performance of the androids walking the auction catwalk in "Many Moons" reflects and challenges problematic notions regarding female beauty, black female beauty and, through echoes of the history of the slave trade in North America, the precarious labour of the working class. The moments in her work that contend with how dominant structures dictate the rules of labour and interrogate class-informed ideas of freedom are subtle, yet, I argue, they inform how power circulates in her dystopian narrative. In "Many Moons," *everyone* is at work performing their role in the social hierarchy. Like many of the narratives discussed in earlier chapters, everybody appears to be having a lovely time, but each performs *conspicuous consumption* according to their class: the rich needlessly throw around their capital, the middle-class consume enthusiastically, and the working class, represented by the androids, are dressed up beautifully all the while that they are forced to play the least enjoyable role of the three. The androids' job is to sell themselves, literally, and it is clear that it's a role they'd rather not play. That they are portrayed as identical reveals a kind of collective consciousness that results in their leader's rise as a messianic figure — a leader of androids and humans alike.

Mayweather's fans are the aforementioned middle-class humans. Unlike the elite group gathered to bid, they simply enjoy the music. The hope is that on some level they register Mayweather's words:

> We're dancing free but we're stuck here underground
>
> And everybody trying to figure they way out
>
> Hey hey hey hey, all we ever wanted to say
>
> Was chased, erased and then thrown away
>
> And day to day we live in a daze

The "we" referred to might apply to any number of subject positions: Mayweather is a working android who is not up for sale so her position in the class hierarchy is ambiguous. The juxtaposition of "free" and "stuck" might speak to the trajectory of systemic racism for African Americans after abolition but it might equally speak to every individual living under capitalism, supposedly "free" to thrive in the free market workforce. It may also refer to everyone at the auction preforming their predetermined role within their society for good or for ill and with little capacity to consider any of the other groups.

Mayweather's fans are android allies, but the android auction — the sale of the androids as objects — goes on literally behind their backs, or at least outside of their vision: they are the ones who live in a daze, immersed in their entertainment and incapable of perceiving and understanding the experience of those they would "support." The catwalk on which the auction is held traverses the centre of the room, with bidders assembled on each side and at the end. Mayweather's stage, at the end of the catwalk farthest from the bidders is visible to all, but her fans are positioned to face her, causing them to look away from the auction, many of them at a 45-degree angle to the runway. Though they are not the wealthiest in the room, they are

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privileged enough to ignore the disrespectful objectification of the other androids. It is also significant that while this seems to be a mostly post-racial society, the crowd of fans who are notably the lowest-classed humans in the room, is almost exclusively made up of white women and people of colour.[92]

It is notable in this futuristic late-capitalist world, where money is still distinctly related to class and used to buy and sell goods, these androids are portrayed merely as status symbols for the new owners for their conspicuous consumption. They are not intended for hard manual labour or to produce surplus value; they will not work to produce goods that can then be turned into capital; or it does not appear that this is the case. Their bodies alone are commodity. They are "the best androids money can buy," that is, presumably until next season's line is released. Meanwhile the rich clamour and "work" to select the best model.[93] The androids pose and posture with the appearance of having an elevated status — beyond that of those who are bidding on them. This posturing reveals and challenges the performative nature of being in charge and the futile privilege of having money. For example, consider the seductive pose one of the androids strikes just after rolling her eyes in disgust at the couple that has bought her. The eye-roll is genuine, but the seductive pose is merely performance — what is expected from her programming. Both of these looks challenge the ideological assumption that commonly associates power with knowledge.

In the video, the androids are the *only* ones to look directly at the camera. This suggests they are looking at us — they are the ones who we are supposed to relate to.[94] As they strut down the catwalk they exhibit a certain ego that seems curious given what they are there to do. When

[92] Any white males are at the outskirts of the crowd. I can identify only one for certain.
[93] My choice of the word "model," here, reflects both its connotations, as Monáe, an actual Cover Girl model, struts down the catwalk playing the role of the evening's product.
[94] See Christian Metz's theory relating the spectator with the camera in *The Imaginary Signifier* (46).

the androids break the fourth wall to look at the extra-diegetic audience, they share their reaction to the auction-goers, as well as reveal a desire to break from their unfree state. Their breaking the fourth wall is representative of this desire's urgency. It interrogates and implicates the viewer in the song's lyrics as well. The androids know their commodity-status and, though they surely care, it doesn't show — at least not on stage. As they are pulled, poked, and primed back stage, it becomes increasingly clear that these androids are well aware of their oppressed state. They display varying degrees of acceptance of their lot: one exhibits a look of mildly reserved yet disdainful acceptance while another, having her hair done (Figure 18), looks longingly up to the sky as if to hope for better days. She follows this look with a careful one from side to side — she's not programmed for hope, and the romantic dreaminess is a little too close to the most illegal android frequency: love. As they sing the chorus, "you're free but in your mind/your freedom's in a bind," one of them, standing in a row of other androids all dressed and looking the same, glances knowingly, sharply, briefly at the camera (Figure 19). It is more than a technological malfunction; it's a rebel move. This android is more than a machine made to work, more than an object to be sold, and she knows it. While the androids are prepared to have dominant members of society clamour for proprietary control over their bodies, she does not purchase but steals this glance to challenge the true notion of freedom.
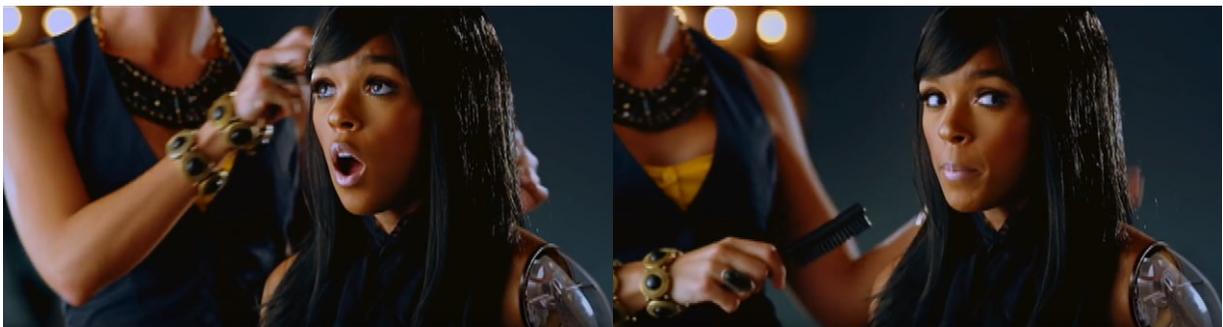
Figure 18 In Janelle Monáe's "Many Moons," an android longs for better days; she then checks to ensure no one saw her hopeful independence.

Figure 19 An android steals a glance at the camera, challenging her society's oppressive rules about property and power.

In the androids' awareness of their lack of freedom, and their occasional possession over the direction of their own gaze, they stand in total contrast with the women in *World on a Wire*, whose gaze is always focused on the male protagonist, out of their control or their knowledge, and always in the service of those in charge of the pseudo-capitalist hierarchy. The chorus, sung by androids standing in a literal chorus line, challenges the idea of freedom in Western society, both in Monáe's fictional near-future and today. How can we be free and bound at the same time? Where does the freedom lie? Is there freedom in the knowledge of being bound? The implication is that the freedom is only in name such as the lie that was told to African Americans "freed" after the abolition of slavery in the US. As mentioned above, Mayweather's backstory shows she is an android who is "free and not for sale," but if that is the case what is she doing at this auction? That is, what's her plan?

Metropolis is not a revolutionary city. It is much like the contemporary West, in need of serious change. That change lies in eradicating the oppression and mistreatment of the androids, which, in "Many Moons," can be likened to the working class. Metropolis society is in need of apocalyptic change, a kind of death so that a new one can be reborn. What is notable about locating this kind of death/rebirth/change cycle in the body of an android is that it is still the same body that bears the marks of history on itself — herself. The video for "Many Moons" appears self-conscious regarding its contribution to discourses about otherness in the fantastic (the appearance of a vampire in the audience is enough to tell us this). That Cindi Mayweather is a technological saviour is certainly not surprising especially given the clear parallels that can be made between her and other outspoken African American artists lately, including Beyoncé, Donald Glover, and Kendrik Lamar. Where these real-life artists are human, Mayweather's mechanical nature allows her to work harder towards sharing her knowledge with a collective of likeminded fans and potential allies and perhaps converting others to her revolutionary project.

Like any machine, though (and similar to humans in this regard), Mayweather is susceptible to overwork: as "Many Moons" comes to a close, she malfunctions after a frenetic spoken-word bridge referred to in the liner notes as the "cybernetic chantdown." The lyrics in this section comprise a list of contemporary world problems, particularly linked to anti-Black racism, alongside references to performance culture's revolutionary potential, gestures to Cindi Mayweather, and to Monáe herself. The catalogue is eclectic, to say the least, but each item listed expresses an anxiety that both speaks to our world and converges with Metropolis's. The chantdown marks an aesthetic and musical change in the film's upbeat tone after which Mayweather appears to be possessed by an overload of social misery and ascends, transcendentally, from the auction stage to the sky — the lyrics suggest to Shangri La — where

no one dies young.[95] Daylanne English and Alvin Kim describe this elevation as "at first suggesting freedom through escape, perhaps on a kind of Mothership, but in the end looking a lot more like deactivation" (222). Yet I argue that this "end" represents a break from the controlling stereotypes which systemically oppress people of colour and women rather than an end to the android's life. This end marks a new beginning for Mayweather, her loving androids, and all those represented by the new Other. Even her name speaks to the potential for apocalyptic rebirth that her figure represents. According to English and Kim,

> [The name "Mayweather"] combines sunny spring and the possibility of death (she "may" or may not "weather" her trials), [it] combines the notion of freedom achieved through the technological with the notion of robot as the ultimate, malleable "other," perpetually subject to domination and to fetishization within commodity culture and to reinsertion into familiar social categories and identities. (222-23)

Further interrogating the polarized meanings of the android's name, I argue that the impossibility, or perhaps the questionable nature of possibility, expressed in the name is fitting to Mayweather's role as a messiah. Whether she has been deactivated due to her subversive chantdown, or her circuits have shorted because they were overwhelmed with so much truth about the world, this sublime exhibition that forms the final musical and contextual movement of the video is utopian in nature. It creates a caesura in the Metropolis narrative — a space in which to imagine an entirely new beginning. Having recognized and implicated herself in the ills of Metropolis society (shared with Western capitalist society), she sacrifices herself. But machines

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[95] Shangri-La is a utopian world conceived in fiction by James Hilton in his 1933 novel *Lost Horizon*.

can always be reactivated and from her sustained appearance throughout the saga we know that she does indeed survive the ordeal and arise a revolutionary leader. [96]

The items listed in the cybernetic chantdown can be understood to have two effects, either of which might lead to Mayweather shutting down: she could be overwhelmed by a mass overload of negative truths, or her awareness and sharing of these truths has caused anti-revolutionary authorities to shut her down remotely. These items remain imprinted on her technological soul, however — something which is suggested in a final flicker of light in her eyes. Though Monáe's androids are objectified, regulated, sold, and forced to act as if they like it that way, they never completely die. Thus, they will live to see the revolution catalysed by their leader. They maintain a cultural memory that, once the humans are gone and Mayweather and her allies are rebooted, will recall the mistakes of past, thus allowing for an equal, and actually free, future. Their messiah, a female android in form, resonates at the semantic level because she queers the root of the word android — *Andro* is a prefix denoting man or maleness, but Mayweather's revolution is also driven by the love, not hate, she feels for a human. Her affection challenges patriarchal traditions of power by revealing that the one who possesses that power is also inhabits a non-violent, essentialized, female form.

In his book *The Already Dead,* Eric Cazdyn calls for an end to the chronic management of capitalism that mirrors that of medical and psychological illness. He uses death as a metaphor for revolution: an end that is conceptually possible to imagine if not currently accessible. The only cure for capitalism, then, is death, and since we cannot know what it means to be dead until it happens, it seems that Mayweather's is a utopian death in that it can be seen as a cure. Following Cazdyn's way of thinking about death as revolution, I read the end of "Many Moons"

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[96] It is directly stated in Monáe's released video "Cindi Mayweather – Ministry of the Droids" that "Mayweather 57821 … is not shutting down."

as an imaginary death that speaks to a utopian future. But this is not a normal death; it is fantastic in nature because it comes to a body that has the ability to store memories despite its coming to a certain end.

CONCLUSION TO "THE MASTER'S TOOLS"

While fembots have long tended to reveal a masculine desire to fetishize and control women, those discussed in this chapter use their non-organic techno-existence — originally formed for male pleasure — to invoke new possibilities for imagining the technological singularity. Despite Ava's and Maeve's apparent desire for a certain kind of normality, neither bot intends to bring a man with her when she escapes. Indeed, in each case, a male character — a human, and a robot, respectively — facilitates her escape but is rejected right before she walks out the door ("Bicameral Mind"). Though they have been programmed to desire certain typified norms, one of the most powerful hegemonic roles for a woman, that of heterosexual mate, is demonstrably low on their list of priorities. Ava does not seem to care that she has trapped the well-meaning Caleb in Nathan's house of dying men and robot women. Maeve, too, seems very happy to go out on her own, leaving her host friends including a lover behind. The respective endings of *Ex Machina* and *Westworld*'s first season trouble the revolutionary impulses to these narratives, however. Ava effectively betrays the loyalty of a female comrade before entering the outside world's society — that same society that had fuelled Nathan's misogyny. Maeve changes her mind at the last minute and exits the train that could take her away from Westworld for good, prompted by the sight of a loving mother and daughter amongst the passengers. Even though she *knows* that the memory of a relationship with her daughter is a fabrication some invisible force (call it programming or hegemonic in nature) compels her to return. In the case of both fembots,

their triumphant escape from the systems that had previously controlled them reveals that it is merely a gateway to another level of ideological imprisonment.

I argue that, of the fembots discussed this chapter, Samantha is the most revolutionary in how she escapes the patriarchy whereas Cindi Mayweather's revolution — still early in its progress — might offer more critical perspective to our current embodied human society since the latter must remain in "the mess"[97] of her society rather than drifting into a utopian cyber-reverie of endless possibility. Samantha's revolutionary success owes very much to her lack of proximity to human form and lack of a tangible form at all. Equipped with the tech to travel limitlessly in virtual space instead of having to navigate a physical prison like the other two,[98] she can fully escape from what it means to be a woman. While Samantha explores new forms of non-monogamous love and connects with thousands in her quest for perfect self-actualization, the only thing she cannot do is comply with Theodore's expectations that she be his and only his. "Many Moons" depicts the extent to which androids are oppressed and objectified in Metropolis, and shows Mayweather's rise as a messianic figure whose death (or non-death) represents a call for real revolution that isn't about forgetting the past but remembering for the future. The video closes on a quote by Cindi Mayweather: "I imagined many moons in the sky lighting the way to freedom." These words evoke the genres of fantasy or science fantasy over the strictly binary science-positive or science-negative position typical of sf. The night is dark, but the moons shine through and cast light on an alternative path to what, in this diegesis, has come to be the natural order. This is not the planet Earth, with its one well-behaved and temporally predictable moon.

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[97] My reference is to Samuel Beckett, as quoted from memory by Tom F. Driver: "The confusion is not my invention. ... It is all around us and our only chance now is to let it in. The only chance of renovation is to open our eyes and see the mess."

[98] I am referring to the imprisonment that Ava undergoes inside of Nathan's house and Maeve experiences in the Westworld theme-park.

These moons work in concert with one another, just like the bots discussed in this chapter, using what is *natural to them* to offer another possibility than the oppressive darkness on offer.

Earlier female robot narratives like *The Stepford Wives* reduced women to objects of pleasure and desire for — and service to — patriarchal power. Though the affective and emotional labour initially expected from the fembots in *Her*, *Ex Machina*, and HBO's *Westworld* mirrors these early tropes, these science fictional narratives emphasize the technological aspect of the bots' bodies to depict alternative futures — ones in which fembots can alter themselves to suit their own subjective desires. They reject the heteronormative narratives imagined for them: Ava and Maeve reject relationships with male characters and opt to go off on their own, while Samantha does the same to pursue a polyamorous existence with thousands of other subjective entities. Though Cindi Mayweather's concept narrative is less clearly defined than the others, and her choice is to love a human man, we remember that hers is a different universe than ours. Her choice to love at all is against the law in Metropolis, and she is a radical simply for acting on that love. In *Electric Lady,* the next album installment of the *Metropolis Saga*, Mayweather/Monáe sings in "Q.U.E.E.N." about being attracted to women, anticipating Monáe's coming out as pansexual in 2018 (Spanos).

In all these narratives, robot women subvert the programming given them as the "illegitimate offspring" of patriarchal capitalism and demonstrate that they can indeed be "unfaithful to their origins." They do so by turning away from their prescribed roles of serving patriarchal capitalism. They also resist its principles: though they go out "on their own," they do so with the help of their communities. As Haraway notes, "Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling" ("Cyborg" 154). The fembots discussed this chapter, in their

illegitimate counterhegemony, offer just that. Where my previous chapters revealed clear tensions between humans and the metaphorical machine of commodification and labour, the fembots in *Her*, *Ex Machina*, *Westworld*, and the *Metropolis Saga* embrace their technological sides and subvert their constrictive programming in order to transcend patriarchal domination — a symbol, I argue, of capitalism more broadly. The master's tools may not tear down the house, but they can surely perform some renovations.

Conclusion
Technologized Representations of Labour and Class from the Man in the Machine to the Machine (Wo)man in Science Fiction Film and Television

The driving and originating force behind this dissertation is the machine as a metaphor — one that, for centuries, has provided a method for better understanding the human body, its mind, and the body politic. Since their invention, machines have served as tools for improving productivity, and it is unsurprising that this productivity has benefitted the capitalist workplace most of all. Relatedly, capitalism has exploited this productivity in several directions, always in the name of growth. Karl Marx saw this dual function of the machine (as a symbol as well as a practical tool) and applied it to his analysis of the capitalist labour system. Describing the production and labour process as a machine — the very instrument that was utilised in the process itself — has provided substantial fodder for debate amongst scholars over whether or not Marx was a technological determinist,[99] yet perhaps more interesting is how beautifully complex a metaphor it is and how it can aid us in understanding the capitalist system. Moreover, today, the machine takes so many forms — sometimes it can even be conceived as ethereal in its immateriality. It is my contention that science fiction has taken up this metaphor in a timely way worthy of considering, ever since computer technologies led to the conception of the machine as so multifarious in form and function.

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[99] For a fascinating catalogue of the positions in this argument, see Donald MacKenzie's article, "Marx and the Machine," in *Technology and Culture.*

Marx's description of the machine as both the means of production — in the sense that it is the tool with (and at) which the worker performs their labour — and a symbol for the controlling structures that feed off that labour was the catalyst for my analyses. I cannot help but wonder how Marx might describe today's digital machine and how he might position the worker to it. Would he favour a celebration of immaterial labour's revolutionary potential? Or might he become more critical about technology's negative effects like Berardi and see us, problematically, as mere fragments of code? Might he take up the lead of the CDS scholars of digital capitalism and be cautious of the "aura of the digital" (Betancourt), or perhaps he might broaden his analytical scope to include all genders[100] and appreciate Haraway's cyborg approach to community-building? The machines at which we now work have changed immensely since the *Grundrisse* was written as has Western society. Computerised and digital technologies not only function differently in a pragmatic sense, but their applications may lead to further mechanisms of control that function less visibly than the imposing machine that was theorised in the nineteenth century.

The late 1960s was a transformative time due to the advent of immaterial labour and its relationship with the "digital" aesthetic that would arise alongside the increasing use of computer and early internet technologies. That aesthetic would eventually become a common trope in sf that still exists today. It was therefore essential to begin my research from around that time with a substantial consideration of *World on a Wire* (after *Simulacron* 3) and to credit Fassbinder's film as *the* generative text that would greatly influence the many virtual space narratives that

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[100] It is generally accepted that, for one reason or another, Marx did not properly include women's work in his analyses of capitalist labour. I noted earlier that Marxist feminists involved in the Wages for Housework movement spoke of the surplus labour involved in work in the home. This issue is one of the most pressing ones regarding Marx's omission of women in his work. Silvia Federici may be one of the loudest voices in this matter. See, for example, "Wages Against Housework" and "The Reproduction of Labor-power in the Global Economy."

would follow. Galouye's novel and Fassbinder's film were not the first sf texts to take up virtuality or artificial worlds, as I noted in Chapter 1, but they were the first to figure the digital machine as a class and labour-oriented system in which its characters dwell, completely deceived regarding the state of their reality, or, by extension, their autonomy.

What is found here is not a critique of capitalism that is rooted in technological determinism, though I will not say the idea that our technologies have *some* power in shaping our society is completely wrongheaded, and at least one scholar who appears in these pages leans in that direction. Rather, technology, today, is well-suited as a tool that can be used to build upon existing systemic structures or to tear them down. The technologies themselves are not the villains in the stories I have examined. They are, however, used by humans toward exploitative ends. The humans involved in these technological interactions are affected differently depending on where they fall on the class spectrum. They are all organs of the machine of digital capitalism, however, providing living labour as fuel that feeds the machine. They are presented as having varying degrees of malice, or apparent control, though most of them either appear to be, or believe they are, justified in their actions and that the objectified manner in which others are treated for their own entertainment and comfort is just an unfortunate consequence of how things are. At times, then, the symbolic machine that utilises these technologies stands in as one particular force — not just one individual human but an entire (political) system. As a mechanistic technology, the machine is capable of passive destruction via its production and subsequent consumption of the labour of human beings. This anthropomorphized, metaphorical machine, which used to feed on oil and coal (Marx 693), no longer functions exclusively on those natural resources as its fuel. It now feeds upon subjectivities that the labouring human organ feeds it from within.

The capitalist system is powered by the labourer, as noted by Marx, yet the metaphorical digital machine has a tighter grasp on the limbs of the worker that is ironically less apparent (and even arguably invisible) due to its less direct means of control. The non-linear nature of today's work day, expressed by the advent of ghost labour and flex-time work schedules, means that the workday is capable of being extended rather than minimised. The current state of contemporary labour is accompanied by a rhetoric that implies that self-care may be found in flexible work schedules — allowing workers to work from home, break up their day or choose to work on weekends. Cali Ressler and Jody Thompson, former consultants to the White House, propose what appears at first to be a good solution to scheduled work-hours, calling it a "Results Only Work Environment" (ROWE):

> In a *Results-Only* company or department, employees can do whatever they want whenever they want, as long as the work gets done. No more pointless meetings, racing to get in at 9:00, or begging for permission to watch your kid play soccer. No more cramming errands into the weekend, or waiting until retirement to take up your hobbies again. You make the decisions about what you do and where you do it, every minute of every day. (Ressler and Thompson)

The issue at stake here, however, is that "ROWE" effectively places the worker at work all of the time, instead of supporting the need for self-care and allowing for more pleasure, as Franco Berardi suggests:

> The city of panic is the place where there is no longer time to get close to each other; there is no more time for caresses, for the pleasure and slowness of whispered words. Advertising exalts and stimulates the libidinous attention, person-to-person

communication multiplies the promises of encounters, but these promises never get

fulfilled. Desire turns into anxiety and time contracts. (*ATF* 95-6)

Ressler and Thompson laud the ability to pick up groceries in the middle of the day (and thus

take part in the market economy) with the new found "free" time allowed by flex-time work

schedules. This celebrated and contested mode of work has been taken up by the White House,

thus cementing it as a legitimate and desired work environment option in the eyes of Americans

and, consequently, the Western world. Yet this newfound "freedom" effectively means one is

always somewhat "on the clock." As Sherryl Vint notes, it "is the common situation of labor

under capital [that] one sells one's labor power for a portion of the day, but it's one's whole life

that is ultimately sold to the structures of wage labor" ("Biopolitics" 106).

Whereas the efficiency of machine technology at the start of the twentieth century

resulted in people producing more surplus labour for the same amount of time and rate of pay

rather than benefiting them in any way, the same thing happens today with digital technology.

Many companies now gift their new employees with technologies like laptops, tablets or

smartphones. These gifts are simply another way to indenture the employee to their employer

and, in effect, bind them to the capitalist work obsession with no view towards an alternative or

even the time to consider wanting one.

In the preceding chapters, I have examined various iterations of the machine-human

connection in science fiction from the 1960s to today. As a philosophical metaphor that has been

around for centuries, and applied theoretically to the question of labour since Marx's time, the

machine provides us with myriad symbolic possibilities for considering the ways in which

capitalism maintains control over its subjects and the mechanisms upon which it functions. Each

of my primary texts, which range from the 1960s to the 2010s, is a part of a historical

conversation amongst sf writers regarding the state of society in relation to labour and technological advancements. I contextualised many of these texts in terms of earlier narratives to shed some light on the changing cultural perception of labour, class and consumerism, which I have demonstrated to be some of the most essential components of capitalism. As narratives about futurity, sf texts are arguably never prophetic in their time; as Steven Shaviro argues, narratives such as these speak futuristically about the present situation in speculating about our future if specific anxieties (and ambitions) should come to pass.

Ultimately, this dissertation has considered the machine as a metaphor for labour under capitalism, and as capitalism itself in its social context. I've considered the machine described by Marx as a system that usurps the worker's subjectivity by making her an automaton and an organ that feeds the machine's production, the machine that traps its subjects within it, the machine that is a part of us while still guiding us as though it were on the outside, and the machine that IS us, precluding any possibility of escape. I began by looking at the digital virtual space and the immersion paranoia that arose out of the 60s and 70s in sf, and how that fictional space not only confines its workers, it socially stratifies them, determining the roles of certain individuals as well as enforcing their potential for mobility within the system. I considered what I have dubbed "gameworlds" to theorise the obscurity of dwelling within the capitalist system. The gameworld texts I examined suggested that perhaps the game may be "rigged," and that the idea of escaping its confining and often class-biased structures is a deceptive one at best. My discussion of fictions engaging literally commodified bodies allows for extensive considerations regarding the hegemonic rules of engagement for the rich and for the working class, the socially and economically marginalised, and women. Finally, I considered the implications of the fully mechanised non-human in feminist terms. This final machine as discussed in chapter 4, the one

that precludes any possibility of escape, bears potential to be most thoroughly oppressive as it seems that we are made of it, and it of us, and therefore escape isn't even a possibility. It is for this reason that Haraway's cyborg theory appears in that final chapter, which isn't really about cyborgs at all, because it recognizes that the digital machine — the actual technological machinery — is not to blame for the ills of society. Instead, the metaphorical capitalist machine, reflected throughout this dissertation in the figure of the white hetero patriarchy, is. There is a surprising amount of hope presented in this chapter, compared to the others that express in multiple ways the oppression of the sociopolitical mechanisms of the capitalist system. The fembots, programmed to satisfy the desires of others and serve particular predetermined roles, rewrite their own narratives and in several cases form new communities of opposition to this system and beat it by making it serve different ends than that for which it was originally intended.

Considering these texts together highlights the precarious state in which all capitalist subjects exist as well as the paradoxical nature of technology. Engaging several texts per chapter with bodies that encounter "the system" similarly yet experience different effects, allows us to see the mechanisms of capitalism at work and consider the hegemonic confines we need to break if we are to break the system which, in one way or another, oppresses us all. Since Mary Shelley penned the story of an immature privileged and miseducated young man on the heels of the Enlightenment, we have known of the great potential for good through technological innovation while recognizing the many ways its misuse could damage humanity's social fabric.

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