

Posthuman female heroines and postfeminist limitations in HBO's *Westworld*

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Abstract

Westworld (2016-present) is one of the most popular and complex television narratives in recent years. Based on the classic 1973 science fiction film of the same title, the show's first two seasons are set in a technologically advanced Western-themed Park where human guests pay to interact in any way they wish with the hosts/androids that populate its world. Yet, unlike the robots of the 1973 version who easily betrayed their mechanical origin, this time the hosts blur the boundaries between human and machine, real and fabricated, thus posing significant questions about posthumanism. Furthermore, the depiction of the hosts as specifically embodied and gendered artificial beings, also raises questions surrounding postfeminism. These two concepts, namely posthumanism and postfeminism, are interwoven in the representation of two of the show's main protagonists, Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton), two female androids that begin to realize their fabricated reality and develop a new subjectivity. The article argues that despite the emancipating possibilities that an emergent posthuman subjectivity suggests, the show's posthuman heroines are finally constrained by the text's humanist and postfeminist limitations.

Introduction

1 *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-present) is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed HBO shows, as verified by the record ratings of its first season (Arandreeva, "Westworld Finale Hits Season High") and its multiple awards and nominations (e.g. a Golden Globe nomination for Best Television Series, among others). *Westworld* is adapted from the classic 1973 science fiction film of the same title, which was written and directed by Michael Crichton. Showrunners Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy and producer J. J. Abrams expanded the original concept, further convoluting the original premise in a labyrinthine structure. The intricate narrative structure of *Westworld*, frequent in a number of contemporary TV shows and characteristic of what Jason Mittell calls "complex TV" (2), equally match the show's perplexing thematic concepts, which complicate and unsettles common perceptions of what means to be human. *Westworld* is a technologically advanced Western-themed Park where visitors pay to interact in any way they wish with the hosts/androids that populate its world. Yet, unlike the robots of the 1973 version who easily betrayed their mechanical origin, this time the hosts blur the boundaries between human and machine, real and fabricated, thus posing significant questions about posthumanism. Furthermore, the depiction of the hosts as specifically embodied and gendered artificial beings, also raises questions surrounding postfeminism.

2 These two concepts, namely posthumanism and postfeminism, are interwoven in the representation of two of the show's main protagonists—Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton), two female androids that begin to realize their fabricated reality. In the pilot, Dolores and Maeve enact rather traditional female roles, providing a concrete example of gender as a repeated performance (Butler 178). The former is the 'good girl,' daughter of a farmer, who goes about her daily chores and likes to paint in her free time, while the latter is the seasoned madam and owner of the town's brothel/saloon. However, once they gradually transcend their coding during *Westworld's* first season, Dolores and Maeve start to rebel against their prescribed gender and species roles. This article aims to elucidate how posthumanism and postfeminism complicate questions regarding identity through *Westworld's* ambiguous representations of Dolores's and Maeve's narrative arcs, drawing from strategic narrative instances of the show's first two seasons. The theoretical context of the article is informed by both critical posthumanism (Haraway, Hayles, Braidotti) and recent work on postfeminism as theory (McRobbie, Horbury), and is applied in the ensuing textual analysis of the two female characters.

Critical Posthumansim and Postfeminism

3 In her seminal article "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s," first published in 1985, Donna Haraway uses the figure of the cyborg to contest the binary dichotomies shaping our world. According to Haraway (158), the cyborg is simultaneously a product of fiction and a social fact that can be deployed as a political metaphor to transgress the dichotomies informing the Cartesian subject of the late capitalist societies. A hybrid of machine and flesh, the cyborg blurs the boundaries between nature and culture, public and private, body and mind, male and female, animal, human and machine, and therefore challenges the taxonomic categories of our post-industrial information societies. Thus, the cyborg as "a creature in a post-gender world" (Haraway 159) charts a possible path of liberation from dualities, such as gender roles and other hierarchical categorizations prescribed for our bodies and our world. Combining poststructuralist/postmodern critical theories and critically embracing the possibilities of technological advancement, the cyborg manifesto comprises the cornerstone of critical posthumanism.

4 The emergence of critical posthumanism from the mid-1990s onwards (Wolfe xii) is characterized by a rich literature that is constantly expanding and differentiating its object of study.

The present article focuses on the work of two authors, whose work is deemed relevant for the present analysis, namely N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. Hayles set the foundations of a posthumanism bound to embodied experience. The author envisions a version of the posthuman that

embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (Hayles 5)

Hayles' conception of the posthuman offers new models of subjectivity that promote "the survival of the humans and of the other life-forms, biological and artificial, with whom we share our planet and ourselves" (291). Braidotti further develops such notions of the posthuman as an expanded and relational subjectivity. The author argues that classical Humanism's restricted conception of the human is what marks the passage to the posthuman. Posthumanism aims to dismantle this humanist subject and re-articulate it in a more complex and relational way. Becoming-posthuman is a process of redefining one's sense of interconnection with "a variety of others, starting from the environmental or eco-others and includ[ing] the technological apparatus (*The Posthuman* 193). In other words, Braidotti describes the posthuman subject in an affirmative, vitalist way as an embodied entity enmeshed with its natural, social, human or technological environment, constantly expanding into multiple different subjectivities. Following Hayles' and Braidotti's work, posthumanism can be defined as a change in a particular conception of the human as an autonomous, self-sufficient subject of liberal humanism. Posthumanism does not signify the end of humanity, and the posthuman is not necessarily a modified, enhanced or in any other bodily way altered human, but a decentered, expanded notion of subjectivity that overcomes the limitations of the western autonomous male subject. Finally, the choice of a popular TV show as our subject is based on the fact that cultural products such as the popular SF narratives in film, television and other media play an important role in shaping our awareness regarding posthumanism (Badmington 8). By providing concrete representations, these popular stories not only inform our understanding and imagination of how a posthuman future may look like but also influence and shape our current techno-cultural reality (Herbrechter 11).

5 Postfeminism is an equally contested term that has multiple signifiers. The term can be used to designate the period that followed second-wave feminism, a critique of second-wave feminism or a "shift in feminist thinking within feminist philosophy and theory", informed by

post-structuralism, postmodernism and postcolonial theory” (Horbury 213). It is this latter discourse that this chapter employs in order to proceed to the analysis of *Westworld*’s posthuman Dolores and Maeve. In the current neoliberal political climate, postfeminism addresses women as autonomous subjects. Yet, this independence does not free them from basic patriarchal rules but works as a superficial enticement or as a way to prove that feminism is no longer valid as women have the same opportunities as men. Angela McRobbie coined the term “double entanglement” (12), to showcase this political ambiguity. Alison Horbury defines the term as “a rhetorical exchange in which women are addressed as privileged subjects of education – with seemingly endless choice, freedom, and power – on the condition of accepting a subtle reworking of the old sexual contract of patriarchy” (215) based on a natural sexual difference. Applied to textual analysis, double entanglement manifests the contradictions inherent in postfeminism, as the same representation can be deemed both stereotypical and regressive as well as progressive and empowering.

6 Notwithstanding that the notion of natural sexual difference may seem at odd with reference to our two artificial female heroines, *Westworld* complicates these terms by interchanging and comingling issues of both sexual and species difference and by blurring the boundaries between artificial and real. The representation of Dolores and Maeve entangles discourses about posthumanism and postfeminism in a conflicting way that both undermines and perpetuates essentialist notions of human subjectivity and gendered identity.

***Westworld*’s Dolores and Maeve: posthumanism meets postfeminism**

7 *Westworld* is a fruitful terrain for both posthuman and postfeminism study. Not only does it follow a rich cinematic tradition of posthuman beings in science fiction that dates back to *Frankenstein* (1931), but being set in a technologically advanced future, where androids perfectly resemble humans, it unsettles notions of an essential human identity. Furthermore, as the narrative conflict begins when Dolores and Maeve realize their true origin and struggle for freedom, issues of gender become paramount.

8 Despite *Westworld*’s narrative complexity, the main premise is simple and imbued with both gender and posthuman issues. The theme park is the creation of two male scientists, Dr. Robert Ford (Anthony Hopkins) and the deceased (and artificially re-engineered) Arnold (Jeffrey Wright) while their first posthuman creation is Dolores, a female. As the park’s name aptly

indicates, one of its most popular towns draws its inspiration from the mythology of the US and depicts a town in the Far West. It is thus convenient and appropriate that the two most important posthuman females in this world follow the stereotypical dichotomy between the Virgin and the Whore. Dolores is the gentle and innocent farmer's daughter who falls in love with a handsome young man and Maeve is the madam in the town's saloon, an experienced, cynical and strong woman. Yet, there is a subtle difference in that they are both posthuman, constructions of male humans for other humans to play with.

9 Dolores is introduced in the show's pilot experiencing the same day in a continuous loop where she plays her prescribed role of a sensitive, obedient daughter who minds her chores and lives in a farm waiting for her beloved and chivalrous Teddy (James Marsden) to come back. Situated between paternal loyalty and romantic love, she represents the classical notion of the woman in the western film as purity, virginity and the home/civilization (Agnew 194). She is coded with an optimistic perspective on her reality, seeing her world as beautiful. However, this beauty is constantly interrupted by violent acts where Dolores becomes the helpless victim of savageries of either male human guests or other male hosts. Gradually, her optimistic loops end with darker thoughts, but the park's technicians try to erase her terrifying memories to restore her to the previous blank status. Yet, her transformation into a self-conscious being cannot be contained in these little loops since "as the recursive looping continues, small deviations can quickly become magnified, leading to the complex interactions and unpredictable evolutions [...]" (Hayles 225).

10 These loops are perhaps the result of the park's creator Dr. Ford's latest update on the hosts, which he labels *reveries*. This new code can be deemed a mistake, because it opens up a small fissure for the androids to access old, supposedly erased memories. It is through such a *reverie* that Dolores' father starts to process a photograph of the outside, 'real' world that he accidentally finds, and consequently has a breakdown. Although Dr. Ford admires and even has tender feeling for his creations, he cannot anticipate the exact repercussions of the *reveries* or the role they can play in the formation of a host's autonomous consciousness. At the end of the pilot, only us, the viewers, witness how Dolores performs her first, tiny but completely un-programmed move: she kills a fly that stands in her neck, signaling that her loop is starting to break. Although Dolores is not conscious of this gesture, it nevertheless signals her emerging self-awareness.

11 In the next three episodes, we watch Dolores' gradual awakening of her consciousness. She starts to hear for the first time an inner voice, telling her to remember. Through surfacing

fragments of memory, she discovers a weapon buried in her garden—an object strictly forbidden for her role in the park but also a significant symbol of the classical western that is mainly associated with male characters. Dolores also experiences memory flashes of her mortal enemy, the Man in Black (Ed Harris), a human male/guest who has repeatedly abused, raped and killed her. Through these memory remnants, Dolores begins to observe things otherwise gone unnoticed. In one of the multiple iterations of her conversation with Teddy after he comes back, she reacts when he tells her that someday soon, they will live the life they dream of. Contrary to her coding, Dolores questions Teddy's statement and observes, rather coldly, that someday soon means never.

12 These embodied instances and encounters of a burgeoning self-awareness exemplify how consciousness—the defining characteristic of the classic humanist subject—is not the driving force of life, but rather an epiphenomenon, a secondary function that arises from a living body through its enmeshing with the environment (Hayles 203). Following this perspective, it can be argued that *Westworld's* guests and hosts share many similarities. An android, similar to a human being is not a cogitating mind located in an insignificant material vessel or an autonomous agent making rational choices through its consciousness; rather, like all living organisms, s/he is the result of an intricate and conditional interaction with their surroundings. It is through these exchanges and interconnectedness with multiple human and non-human others—thus by formulating a posthuman subjectivity (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 96)—that Dolores begins to transcend her coding.

13 The divergence that marks the onset of Dolores' self-awareness occurs in S1E5 (“Contrapasso”), where she helps a human player, William (Jimmi Simpson), when they both find themselves at gunpoint. Instead of running as she is asked by Will, Dolores surprisingly stays and shoots the gun she had previously found buried. It is in this instant of action taking that Dolores performs two things at once. She first discards what her gender role in the Far West expects from her, by appropriating and subverting the most enduring symbol (the gun) in both the fictional and the real world of white, male domination over women, nature and racialized others. This conscious re-writing of her own story as the energetic protagonist and not as the perennial damsel in distress self-reflexively comments on women's hidden stories in both the western film's long history of male heroes and the patriarchal foundation of western societies. Second, Dolores also gains more insight into her posthuman subjectivity, which is “grounded in embodied actuality rather than disembodied information” (Hayles 287) and is shaped “through chaotic dynamics and emergent

structures” (288). Dolores’ subjectivity is “emergent rather than given, distributed rather than located solely in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control removed from it” (Hayles 291). Therefore, this female character exemplifies the posthuman that overcomes the limitations of the classical humanist subject and opens up new paths in our understanding of what it means to be a human. It is these two interrelated aspects— her double articulation as a female and posthuman subject— that lead to Dolores’s realization regarding her role in the park and the greater picture of Westworld. Once her consciousness is freed to a significant extent from her programming, Dolores is finally able to choose her own path.

14 However, this path leads her far away from the subverting potentials of the posthuman as described in Haraway’s cyborg myth. In contradiction with Haraway’s cyborg that is about “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities” (161) and suggests “a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (178), Dolores embodies a rather different version of the posthuman, one that comes full circle to the same classic humanist values. In S2E1 (“Journey into Night”) Dolores says to a group of captured and terrified humans that she has one last role to play, herself. But how does she envision this newly discovered self? Far from being a “creature in a post-gender world” (159) or a being that understands its interconnectedness with humans and non-humans alike, Dolores’s journey seems highly implicated in and resonating the deep ambivalences and contradictions of a postfeminist but still unequal world (Gill and Scharff 3-5). Rather than challenge and bypass the incongruities of Westworld’s human-centric, patriarchal and authoritarian edifice, Dolores reenacts all the binary oppositions of this repressive system by simply inverting the terms of the antithesis. Furthermore, instead of forming complex connections and “assemblages” with multiple others (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 103), she embraces individualism and becomes the autonomous, calculating and self-promoting agent of the classical humanist, and postfeminist culture in a contemporary neoliberal atmosphere. Ultimately, by adopting all the masculine values of war, antagonism and revenge and by re-enacting the us vs. them rhetoric— disregarding all the shades in between— Dolores still remains caught up in the praxis of patriarchy despite her emancipation. Consequently, her emergent posthuman subjectivity is re-inscribed within the limitations and paradoxes of contemporary postfeminism.

15 As Dolores turns from a sweet, innocent rancher's daughter into a ruthless leader, Maeve's trajectory follows a parallel albeit inverse course. Maeve is the strong, cynical and experienced madam in the town's saloon and her everyday loop includes a few scripted verbal exchanges with other hosts of her surroundings and a monologue she delivers to the guests in order to seduce them. This loop is disrupted when in S1E2 ("Chestnut"), Dolores helps Maeve access previous, erased memories. Maeve starts to have flashbacks of a previous blissful life as a mother with a daughter that is disrupted by a violent event. These memory flashes activated by her environment "impart an upward tension to the recursive loops of self-organizing processes so that, like a spring compressed and suddenly released, the processes break out of the pattern of circular self-organization and leap outward into the new" (Hayles 222). However, these images are perceived as a performance malfunction and Maeve is quickly withdrawn for examination by the park's technicians. While she is supposedly shut down on a surgical table in the laboratory's sterile environment, Maeve surprisingly wakes up. Startled by her surroundings, she manages to get a glimpse of the horrors of this unknown world that defines her reality and although the technicians successfully erase this memory and reset her, the fragments of this revelation still remain within, ready to bootstrap her self-consciousness.

16 As Maeve's memory flashes are intensified, she starts to unravel the mysteries of this parallel world. She quickly devises ways to kill herself so that she returns to the lab and soon learns the truth of Westworld in S1E6 ("The Adversary"). In a highly emotional sequence, after Maeve wakes up again in the lab and convinces technician Felix (Leonardo Nam) to show her this other world, we see her touring the immense facilities of the park. Walking slowly and maintaining the demeanor of her coded persona, but with eyes that betray her emerging consciousness and newfound empathy, Maeve walks by spacious rooms, where she sees animals being constructed, fellow hosts' faceless bodies being pumped with blood and other hosts being tested and probed. This haunting, three-minute sequence does not only constitute a narrative trigger as Maeve comprehends the fabrication of her reality but also exemplifies the emergence of posthuman subjectivity on two levels. First, Maeve grasps the artificiality of her nature, that is, her status as just one of this world's constructions and thus her species difference. Second, this sequence serves as an exemplary metaphor for the end of humans "as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice" (Hayles 286) and the emergence of the posthuman which is rather "shaped by the complex interactions within an environment that includes both human and

nonhuman actors” (288). It is exactly this realization that prompts Maeve to alter her software and to benefit from her interconnection with multiple others in order to gain her freedom. She persuades the two technicians to modify her internal characteristics, maximizing her intelligence and minimizing her loyalty. It is in this instance of auto-poietic¹ or self-organizing creativity—that according to biologist Humberto Maturana is equated with life itself (138)—where Maeve emerges as a living, posthuman being.

17 In S1E8 (“Trace Decay”), Maeve decides to escape from Westworld, despite being tormented by flashbacks of her daughter and herself being attacked by the Man in Black. It is exactly in this suffering that some of *Westworld*’s non-human hosts become equated to human beings or “fellow creatures” (Wolfe 77). This common ground that “extend[s] across species lines and bind[s] us, in our shared vulnerability, to other living beings who think and feel, live and die, have needs and desires, and require care just as we do” (140) paves the way to a posthuman subjectivity. Conflicted by past memories, Maeve continues with her escape plans and for that purpose, decides to make allies. She approaches Hector (Rodrigo Santoro), one of her usual encounters in Westworld and reveals the truth about their existence. Although her updated code permits her to voice command other hosts, Maeve lets him choose for himself. By permitting him to freely decide, Maeve exemplifies the affirmative version of the posthuman as an “expanded, relational self” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 60), one that understands how she is entwined and interdependent with all forms of living matter and understands that she must form alliances and creative assemblages to secure her continued survival.

18 However, these emancipating possibilities of an emergent posthuman subjectivity are yet again constrained by the text’s postfeminist limitations. Although Maeve almost succeeds in leaving the park, she decides to stay in order to find her daughter at the last possible minute. Maeve’s sudden loyalty to a fantastic motherhood aligns her representation not only with classical humanist discourses but also with a postfeminist conception of the emancipated yet traditional, ‘natural’ woman. This fantastic motherhood echoes Mary Anne Doane’s argument that the intersection of women and technology in science fiction usually results in conventional representations of the female body and its relation with ‘natural’ reproduction. Such images

¹ Biologists Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela define the concept of autopoiesis or self-making in their study *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* originally published in 1972, as a process where a system’s communication with the environment is prompted through the need of the system to produce and reproduce its own organization (Hayles 136).

underscore “the persistence of the maternal as a sub-theme accompanying these fantasies of artificial femininity” (183). The author maintains that the current proliferation of reproduction technologies “debiologise the maternal” (186), suggesting their potential to unsettle essential notions of motherhood. However, many science fiction films (e.g. *Alien*, *Aliens* and *Blade Runner*) strive to once again associate women with the maternal, re-confirming a natural sexual difference. Discussing the representation of the mechanical woman in the novel *L’Eve future* (1886), Doane contests:

Motherhood acts as a limit to the conceptualisation of femininity as a scientific construction of mechanical and electrical parts. And yet it is also that which infuses the machine with the breath of a human spirit. The maternal and the mechanical synthetic coexist in a relation that is a curious imbrication of dependence and antagonism. (183)

It is exactly this infusion of the maternal in the machine, that animates Maeve throughout the show, re-inscribing an essential female nature in her newfound posthuman subjectivity.

19 Motherhood becomes Maeve’s driving force throughout *Westworld*’s second season as all her actions are motivated by her quest to find her child. Despite acknowledging the artificiality of this memory, the feelings are so powerful that she overcomes any obstacle to meet her offspring again. This is a classical trope in science fiction and other popular cinematic and televisual genres, which dictates that the female protagonist’s power and purpose should be related with a real, surrogate, missing or dead child (among others, see *Aliens* (1992), *Gravity* (2013) and *Arrival* (2016)). Especially the trope of the dead child, which has repeatedly shaped Maeve’s story, links the female characters with trauma. However, “the association between female exceptionality and trauma is problematic, since it either naturalises female suffering as a path to female strength, or punishes exceptional women” (Lovell 75). Maeve’s exceptionality arises from such troubled motherhood, establishing once again a naturalized sexual difference. The union of female power and exceptionality with motherhood in a postfeminist context implies that contemporary culture cannot simply accept a powerful woman in her own right without labeling her as “monstrous” (Creed 3) and that any female extraordinariness must be understood and contained in more accepted and traditional female roles.

20 Additionally, the image of the child also ties *Westworld* and its characters to what Lee Edelman calls “reproductive futurism”. This concept describes the

terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting

outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relation. (Edelman 2)

Reproductive futurism is established around the all-pervasive figure of the child, which stands in for the future, and is the limit of all political visions. The innocent image of the child in need of protection is also framed through heteronormativity and conventional understandings of gender roles. The child is a central figure in Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, where the state regulates its population through control apparatuses that promote gender norms and the privileging of the heterosexual nuclear family. Hence, the image of the child sets the dominant, heteronormative framework within which every political action is shaped "to affirm a structure, to authenticate social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child" (Edelman 3). By depicting Maeve struggling to secure the survival of her child—and sacrificing herself in the process—*Westworld* joins this dominant, humanist discourse that regards the child as "the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (Edelman 3). Despite Maeve's posthuman subjectivity that opens up new subverting possibilities she is—like Dolores—yet again ascribed with the limitations of a humanist and postfeminist discourse.

Conclusions

20 The above analysis of the narrative portraits of Dolores and Maeve shows that despite the disrupting possibilities of an emergent posthuman subjectivity, both posthuman characters are finally constrained by a humanist discourse, where a binary and hierarchical categorization of the world still prevails. Both Dolores and Maeve are re-situated within the limitations of a postfeminist sensibility that foregrounds the notion of the emancipated woman as an individual, free-choosing agent in a neoliberal climate and "point[s] away from structural understandings or collective solutions" (Gill, Kelan, Scharff 6). Their superficial autonomy is ultimately an illusion since both representations are essentially attached to patriarchal stereotypes; Dolores becomes a blood-thirsty leader in the tradition of myriads of male heroes and Maeve sacrifices her newfound identity for motherhood. What is more, their depiction as solitary agents lead to both characters' inability to form any collective socio-political formation. As such, they exemplify the "current of individualism that has almost entirely replaced notions of the social or political, or any idea of individuals as subject to pressures, constraints or influence from outside themselves" (Gill and

Scharff 7). It is telling that the paths of our two posthuman female protagonists intersect only twice, where they have a brief and rather hostile encounter. In their first encounter in E2S2 (“Reunion”), Dolores try to persuade Maeve to join her cause, telling her that they have to fight to keep their freedom. Maeve rejects her proposition, responding with irony. This encounter encapsulates the current impossibility to imagine any collective, political feminist action that overcomes the limitations of both the (historically male) authoritarian and hierarchical politics that Dolores represents and the (neoliberal) individualistic path to self-liberation that Maeve follows.

21 Furthermore, issues of natural sexual difference—one of the defining aspects of postfeminist sensibility (Gill and Scharff 4)—are played out and reworked in a contradictory way. On the one hand, Dolores’ representation transposes issues of natural sexual difference in species difference by perpetuating the same binary and hierarchical logic of humanist and patriarchal discourse and projecting it into species difference. Hence, by inverting the hierarchy and imagining the hosts as a superior species that must replace humans and inherit the Earth, Dolores reproduces the same essentialism that is bound with the notion of natural sexual difference, but this time refracted into another aspect of subjectivity. On the other hand, by embracing her constructed and rather traditional *telos* as a Mother, Maeve simultaneously highlights the constructedness of motherhood and its attachment to the notion of natural sexual difference but also inevitably accepts them. In this way, despite that *Westworld* cleverly constructs the park as an allegory of the patriarchal edifice and its women as subjugated subjects, suggesting that patriarchy is a mythical discourse in danger, the series also reflects a postfeminist sensibility that once again entangles its female protagonists in the same dichotomous and essentialist discourse associated with the concept of a natural sexual difference.

22 The conflicting representations and discourses surrounding both Dolores and Maeve underscore the impasse film theorists arrive at when using postfeminist tools to unpack the meanings of contemporary narratives and the need for their revision or new theorization in order to reach a new understanding of these complicated narratives. The entanglement of postfeminism and critical posthumanism may offer such a renewed perspective by expanding the notion of difference in all aspects of subjectivity and embracing it not as an essentialist term that generates inequalities but as “the starting point for transformative practice” (Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory*, 143). Furthermore, critical posthumanism can reframe the impasses of postfeminist theory by suggesting a “post-anthropocentric turn” (Braidotti, *The Posthuman* 57-58) that unsettles the

human/non-human binary and other hierarchical oppositions and allows for new forms of subjectivity to emerge. Notwithstanding *Westworld's* dissonant representations, the show still poses significant questions about posthumanism and postfeminism and envisions the emergence of new subjectivities that disrupt humans' dominant position in the world, while it also further complicates gender issues and points to theoretical limitations regarding postfeminist methodologies.

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