Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences
Department of American Culture and Literature

FEMALE CODED ARTIFICIAL BEINGS IN SELECTED AMERICAN SCIENCE FICTION FILMS, 1960s-2000s

Aylin Pekanık

Master's Thesis

Ankara, 2019

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Aylin PEKANIK

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Aylin PEKANIK

to my beloved family, blood and chosen...

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ÖZET

PEKANIK, Aylin. "1960lar-2000ler Dönemi Amerikan Bilim Kurgu Filmlerinde Kadın Olarak Kodlanan Yapay Varlıklar." Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2019.

Bu tez Norman Taurog'un *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965), Duncan Gibbins'in *Eve of Destruction* (1991), Bryan Forbes'un *The Stepford Wives* (1975), Frank Oz'un *The Stepford Wives* (2004), Alex Garland'ın *Ex Machina* (2014) ve Spike Jonze'un *Her* (2013) filmlerindeki kadın olarak kodlanmış (biyolojik cinsiyeti olmasa bile cinsiyet rolleri atanmış) yapay varlıkların ve bilim kurgu kapsamında neyi temsil ettiklerinin bir analizidir. Yapay varlık kavramına, insanlığın durumu, fiziksel özerklik ve insan gelişimi için bir metafor olarak odaklanılacaktır. Erkek olarak kodlanan yapay varlıklar insan ırkı hakkında tarafsız bir yorum olarak kullanılabilirken, kadın olarak kodlanan yapay varlıkların kadınlarla ilgili belirli ideallerin bir dışavurumu olarak sunulmasının bu metaforları nasıl yansıttığı incelenecektir. Bu örnekler incelenerek, kadın olarak kodlanan yapay varlık tasvirlerinin kadının ataerkil düşüncede gelecekteki ideal yerinin ve erkek bakışının ürünü olduğu savunulacaktır. Kadın imgeleri ve seksapelliği öne çıkaran tasvirler, erkek bakışına göre "mükemmel kadın" idealini desteklemekte ve kadın vücudunu metaforik ve fiziksel olarak nesneleştirilmektedir. Bu tezde, kadın olarak kodlanan yapay karakterlerin böyle gösterilmesinin insan rolünü geliştirme amacına aykırı olduğu ve bu yaklaşımın insan normlarının sınırlarından bağımsız var olma potansiyellerinin önüne geçtiği savunulacak ve örnekler üzerinden gösterilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler

Robot, Android, Fembot, Jinoid, Yapay Zeka, Cinsiyet, Norman Taurog, Bryan Forbes, Frank Oz, Spike Jonze, Alex Garland

ABSTRACT

PEKANIK, Aylin. “Female Coded Artificial Beings In Selected American Science Fiction Films, 1960s-2000s.” Master’s Thesis, Ankara, 2019.

This thesis is an analysis of depictions of “female coded” (being assigned gender traits even in the absence of a biological sex) artificial beings in Norman Taurog’s *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965), Duncan Gibbins’ *Eve of Destruction* (1991), Bryan Forbes’ *The Stepford Wives* (1975), Frank Oz’s *The Stepford Wives* (2004), Alex Garland’s *Ex Machina* (2014) and Spike Jonze’s *Her* (2013) and what they represent within the scope of science fiction. This thesis will focus on the concept of the artificial being as a metaphor for the human condition, bodily autonomy, and human progress. It will analyze how the depictions of male-coded artificial beings function as universal commentary about humankind in general while female coded artificial beings represent manifestations of specific ideas about women. Through these examples, this study will argue that the portrayal of female coded artificial beings is a product of the male gaze and the idealized place of women in society according to patriarchal standards. The visual portrayals, which include female signifiers and sexualized visual representations, further promote the concept of “the perfect woman” as understood from the point of view of the male gaze and the gendered objectification of female body in the metaphorical and physical senses. It will further argue that such presentation of artificial characters go against the purpose of transgressing the limitations of the human condition and that this approach hinders their potential to exist outside the boundaries of human structures and standards.

Key Words

Robot, Android, Fembot, Gynoid, A.I., Gender, Norman Taurog, Bryan Forbes, Frank Oz, Spike Jonze, Alex Garland

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INTRODUCTION

Never be limited by other people's limited imaginations.
Mae Jemison

The idea of constructing artificial beings has been considered a common theme in science fiction history (Roberts 82), not only because it is visually interesting but also because it is a concept rich in thematic and symbolic potential. The issue can be enhanced to explore questions concerning the human condition and be utilized to reach extensive probabilities regarding the question of what it means to be human. In its simplest form, it is a way of replicating the human race or the human experience but with additional improvements. However, the concept of improving human beings varies greatly depending on the author. Like any other concept, the concept of artificial beings such as robots,[1] androids,[2] cyborgs,[3] and artificial intelligence (AI)[4] have been limited by the boundaries of the artists who utilize them and consequently, by the conventions that these artists assumed from the society in which they live in, resulting in the creation of different types of artificial beings for different purposes. Some of these beings are presented as simple servants (Trappl et al. 97), others as human replicas (Simon) and some are allowed to have self-awareness. However, these distinctions become even more pronounced regarding the appearance of the characters. The artificial characters are almost always gender coded[5] and are presented according to the gender binary of male/female. While the male-coded ones are able to represent a more neutral, universal expression of human condition, female coded ones tend to represent a more narrow understanding of human women in society.

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[1] Robot is defined as "a machine that resembles a living creature in being capable of moving independently and performing complex actions" ("Robot").
[2] Androids are robots which have specifically human appearances ("Android").
[3] Short for cybernetic organism, cyborg refers to a person "whose physical abilities are extended beyond normal human limitations by mechanical elements built into the body" ("Cyborg").
[4] Artificial intelligence refers to "the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings" (Copeland).
[5] Gender coding is assigning particular traits or behaviors exclusively or predominantly to males or females (Nugent).

The representation of female coded artificial beings have a certain pattern, such as objectified visuals, narrative themes of oppression and attempts at progressing beyond human nature which can be observed in many works both in literature and cinema. This thesis will analyze a selection of films between 1960s and 2000s; *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (dir. Norman Taurog, 1965), *Eve of Destruction* (dir. Duncan Gibbins, 1991), *The Stepford Wives* (dir. Bryan Forbes, 1975), *The Stepford Wives* (dir. Frank Oz, 2004), *Her* (dir. Spike Jonze, 2013) and *Ex Machina* (dir. Alex Garland, 2014) with a focus on the narrative and visual representations of the female coded artificial characters. This thesis will bring the discrepancies between the portrayals of male and female coded artificial characters to light by analyzing these works with regard to the delineation and treatment of these artificial characters within their own narratives. It will argue that the nature of science fiction as an acceptably futuristic genre founded on the concept of change and the traditional portrayal of female coded characters conflict with one another. After displaying their development in history thus far as characters created as both symbols of human progress and as non-human constructs inherently different from humans, it will further argue that allowing these artificial characters to go beyond human conventions and gender roles is the natural conclusion of this development and thus, being represented by a strictly human perspective limits their potential to reach a post-humanist state and displays humans' desire to control the progression of their own creations.

Before examining the specific place of gender regarding non-human characters in science fiction, an analysis of the history of artificial beings is necessary. The idea of constructing artificial beings can be traced back to early times of human history. One of the oldest myths about artificial creation is coincidentally a tale of constructing the ideal woman; the tale of Pygmalion and Galatea in Greek mythology. Pygmalion, a talented sculptor, is disillusioned with the less than perfect women around him and isolates himself from them. Ultimately, he makes an ivory statue representing his ideal of womanhood, then falls in love with his own creation, which he names Galatea. Seeing this display of love, the goddess of love Aphrodite brings Galatea to life and they get

married (“Pygmalion”). The purpose of this tale is to showcase a sentimental love story and the power of the gods. However, this tale also demonstrates various basic themes that would go on to form the basis of artificial creation; the isolation of the inventor, the unrestricted imagination pushing the limits of convention and most importantly, creating a humanoid with the purpose of perfecting the human condition. This tale may not feature a literal robot, but it planted the seeds of a potential creation story by combining human curiosity and ambition.

Another story of constructing an artificial being is the myth of the Golem in Judaism. In Ashkenazi Hasidic lore, the golem is a creature made of clay who would come to life and serve his creators by doing tasks assigned to him (Oreck). The concept of the Golem in a simple form was first encountered in the *Talmud* (475 CE), which described Adam as a Golem (Gohen). Later, a more comprehensive account of a Golem appeared on *The Sefer Yezirah* (second century CE), often referred to as a guide to magical usage by some western European Jews in the Middle Ages, which contained instructions on how to make a golem (Oreck). There are many different Golem stories, most famous of which is the Golem of Prague, which was created out of clay from the banks of the Vltava River by the chief Rabbi of Prague Judah Loew Ben Bezalel (1520-1609) and was brought to life through rituals and Hebrew incantations to defend the Prague ghetto from anti-Semitic attacks (Green). Unlike the Pygmalion myth, which explores the future trope of the artificial creation as companion, the Golem is a protective figure whose enhanced strength is carefully designed in accordance with the intentions of its creator. With this story, the latent but comprehensive potential of the artificial being and its many facets begin to emerge as “it can be victim or villain, Jew or non-Jew, man or woman—or sometimes both. Over the centuries it has been used to connote war, community, isolation, hope and despair” (Cooper). The Golem, just like the robot, shifted and evolved, “changed forms in accordance [with] the metaphysical systems serving as the background of discussion” (Idel 272). It became a protector, a destroyer, a symbol of humanity’s creativity or a symbol of its hubris.

Homer's *Iliad* (762 BCE) featured an imagined automata as the half-god Hephaestus creates mobile tripodal creatures capable of attending the gods. Aristotle (384-322 BCE) describes Hephaestus' tripods as prototypes of a potential working class which could replace slaves ("Robots"). These ideas have proved to be essential for the foundation of the modern iteration of this theme. The early concepts of automatons were created by the Muslim polymath Ebul Iz Al-Jazari (1136-1206), who recorded his ideas of constructed mechanical devices that bear a striking resemblance to the modern idea of robots in the thirteenth century (Çırak and Yörük 180). Around 1495, Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) transformed similar ideas into drawings. His notebooks, rediscovered in the 1950s, contained drawings of a mechanical knight which had the ability to move its body ("A Brief History of Robotics"). Since then, there have been various examples of scientists and innovators trying to reconstruct the human image in the form of machines; from Rene Descartes' mechanical doll that looked like his deceased daughter Francine, which he carried with him (Hemal and Menon 6) to Hanson Robotics' Sophia, activated on February 14, 2016 whose incredible human likeness and her unique interactions with people all over the world have made her a cultural icon ("Sophia").

These developments were also reflected in the world of literature and authors started to incorporate these elements into their stories. The life-size singing puppet Olimpia in the short story "The Sandman" by the German author E.T.A. Hoffman in 1816 and a bipedal humanoid mechanism in the novel *The Steam Man of the Prairies* by Edward S. Ellis in 1868 mark the beginning of the automated figures in fiction (Lovece 8). Lyman Frank Baum's 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* featured a mechanical humanoid called Tin Man looking for a heart of his own. His 1907 novel *Ozma of Oz* featured another mechanical construct named Tik-Tok which was powered by clockwork movements for his mental activity, movement and speech and could not wind these movements by himself (Baum 24). The 1920 film *The Golem* (dir. Paul Wegener) featured a clay creature of magical origins which was created to liberate his Jewish masters from oppression only to turn against its master. The same year saw one

of the biggest developments in the history of science fiction as Czech writer Karel Čapek's 1920 play *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* denotes the first time a fictional humanoid was referred to as a "robot." The coining of the term was attributed to Karel's brother Josef Čapek (Margolius 5). The word is derived from *robotnik* which means "forced worker," *robota* which refers to "forced labor, compulsory service, drudgery," and from *robotiti* meaning "to work, drudge" and, if the meaning is traced back even further, from the Old Slavic *rabota* meaning "servitude" and from *rabu* meaning "slave" (D. Harper). This etymological theme of servitude will be seen throughout science fiction history in regard to the purposes of robots. E.V. Odle's novel *The Clockwork Man* (1923) featured a man of the future who has a clockwork mechanism built into his head that regulates his entire body. Later, David Rorvik popularized the idea in his nonfiction novel *As Man Becomes Machine* (1971), writing of the "melding" of human and machine and of a "new era of participant evolution" (151).

The role of artificial characters in the science fiction genre has constantly evolved. What started as a character which simply existed as a tool gradually evolved into a symbol of humanity's will to replicate itself. As the image of the robot became more and more human-like, the denotation of the character was expanded. While the specific humanoid appearance evoked "the feelings of shock, panic with the mixture of awe for the technology" (Meskó) in humans, this humanoid appearance gave the artificial being new connotations as robot stories started to depict human anxieties. Science fiction as a genre has a "long-standing [...] tradition of negotiating ontological differences between human beings and machine Others: nature/technology, subject/object, free/programmed, and reproductive/replicant" (Hellstrand 11). These dichotomies signified both potential benefits and possible consequences.

While artificial beings signified the potential for immortality through transcendence, ease through helping humans, gratification through the fulfilment of humans' desires and dominance through acting as a military force, these potential benefits also presented fears of inhumanity, obsolescence, alienation, and uprising (Cave and Dihal 75-76) as the idea of artificial beings achieving sentience became more prominent. Science fiction

narratives about constructing artificial beings also started to carry an underlying concern regarding the intentions of the being. The machine's simple purpose of functioning as a tool for humans was questioned as humans started being concerned that they were not simply creating tools but building their competition and future replacements (Barfield 228).

These anxieties were also caused by the mere visuality of the constructs. The physical aspects of the non-human constructs brought with them questions about what a human should look like, which led to the concept of the Uncanny Valley. Before its technological connotations, the concept of the uncanny was coined by Freud as an instance in which something can be "simultaneously familiar and foreign," a condition that produces a feeling of strange discomfort (Freud 13). The concept of the Uncanny Valley in particular was first identified by the robotics professor Masahiro Mori as "bukimi no tani genshō" in 1970 (Mori 98) which was later translated as "uncanny valley" by Jasia Reichardt, in his 1978 book *Robots: Fact, Fiction, and Prediction* (Kageki). The Uncanny Valley hypothesis predicts that an entity appearing almost human risks eliciting cold and eerie feelings in viewers (MacDorman and Chattopadhyay 132), while more mechanical, non-humanoid artificial beings will not cause such strong reactions. This phenomenon exists on a delicate spectrum as "an agent's appearance is made more human-like, people's disposition toward it becomes more positive, until a point at which increasing human-likeness leads to the agent being considered strange, unfamiliar and disconcerting" (Saygın et al. 414). Thus, the reactions to a humanoid android differ according to certain limits that are crossed while creating the human likeness.

The desire to reconstruct the human form while having an internal reaction to its near human appearance is an understandable contradistinction. There are many possible reasons for this response. It could be a form of mortality salience in which the robots' immortal and invincible nature forces oneself to confront their immortality in different ways:

> (1) A mechanism with a human facade and a mechanical interior plays on our subconscious fear that we are all just soulless machines. (2) Androids in various states of

> mutilation, decapitation, or disassembly are reminiscent of a battlefield after a conflict and, as such, serve as a reminder of our mortality. (3) Since most androids are copies of actual people, they are doppelgangers and may elicit a fear of being replaced, on the job, in a relationship, and so on. (4) The jerkiness of an android's movements could be unsettling because it elicits a fear of losing bodily control. (Priya 9)

Another possible cause might be a sense of possible violation of human norms as the Uncanny Valley occurs with entities that elicit a model of a human other but do not measure up to it (MacDorman 399), a being that is close to a human but not exactly the same. A study which examined humans' reactions to the movements of mechanical robots and androids shows that while the human brain is capable of accepting a mechanical entity moving in humanlike ways, a humanoid entity moving in a way that closely resembles but slightly differs from human movements elicits a negative reaction (Saygın et al. 413). This is related to the concept of "predictive coding" which allows humans to generate predictions about the environment based on a lifetime of experience and causes an uneasy sensation should the prediction does not match the outcome (415).

Lastly, the Uncanny Valley may occur because of a perceived threat to the human identity itself. Psychiatrist Irvin Yalom posits that in order to avoid existential anxiety stemming from the human condition, one's place in the universe and the inevitability of death, humans create a defense mechanism he names "specialness" which is a belief that centers the self above all else, isolating it from the realities of the world such as death and aging by regarding them as forces that only plague other people (Yalom 96). A humanoid "living" robot might expose the universality of the human experience and cause these defenses to collapse (118). They can also pose a threat to the concept of human identity itself by challenging an individual's sense of personal and human identity and pushing for a redefinition of it (MacDorman et al. 508).

This fear regarding the redefinition of the human condition also ties into the concept of transhumanism. Transhumanism is the idea that humans should use technology to "control the future evolution our species" (O'Connell 6). The progress of technology allows humans to not only create artificial beings, but also modify themselves. These modifications can vary; from eradicating the aging process and augmenting the body and the mind, to merging with machines and remaking oneself in the image of one's higher

ideals (6). While these possibilities are a sign of a better future for some, for others it is a source of anxiety similar to the potential of developing robotics. According to Francis Fukuyama, the advantages of transhumanism comes at a "frightful moral cost" (Fukuyama) as he discusses the possibility of certain human essences being destroyed:

> For all our obvious faults, we humans are miraculously complex products of a long evolutionary process -- products whose whole is much more than the sum of our parts. Our good characteristics are intimately connected to our bad ones: If we weren't violent and aggressive, we wouldn't be able to defend ourselves; if we didn't have feelings of exclusivity, we wouldn't be loyal to those close to us; if we never felt jealousy, we would also never feel love. Even our mortality plays a critical function in allowing our species as a whole to survive and adapt. [...] Modifying any one of our key characteristics inevitably entails modifying a complex, interlinked package of traits, and we will never be able to anticipate the ultimate outcome. (Fukuyama)

From Fukuyama's perspective, humans have a complex structure which is difficult to break down into parts and reconstruct in an ideal image. This ambiguity forms the basis of certain fears regarding both transhumanism and robotics. Trying to put together a human being or to modify one means dissolving the concept of "specialness" and reducing humans to spare parts. For many critics, these types of endeavours create the possibility of the creation of a new type of human, redefinition of humanity and even destruction of the human identity as these endeavours force humans to "reassess who we are and what it means to be human" (Bess).

Ideas of transhumanism can also be seen in science fiction as the genre "reinforces the separation of mind and body that underpins transhumanist prophecies" (King and Page 109)Although transhumanism and robotics seem to diverge on the surface, as one's starting point is a real human and the other's is an artificial construct, the various ways in which artificial beings are constructed in real life and depicted in fiction are a manifestation of many transhumanist desires and fears. The way humans construct artificial beings reflect both the way they wish to augment the human condition and their fears regarding how human beings might be changed with technology. As transhumanism gains traction and humans start to actualize their ideas of the ideal human condition, the artificial being becomes an embodiment of these ideals and symbolizes how human being who achieved true transhumanism might look like. Within this perspective, the validity of the classic killer robot archetype becomes

irrelevant as the artificial being could cause humans to become extinct simply by existing as an augmented version of humans without showing any aggression towards them. Whether the result is an original human simply augmented for improvement or an entirely new and alien species, this evolution of artificial beings inspire and provoke people to question the nature, the design, and the intent of both humans and robotic entities.

Many science fiction narratives try to answer this question through speculation or resolve it with direct action, the most important example being Isaac Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics" which are a set of rules designed to keep artificial beings under human control.[6] With the popular and far-reaching use of artificial beings in science fiction, the genre left behind the initial definition of robots as a fascination or a novelty and started to delve more into their place in the narrative. Modern science fiction reaches beyond the simple concept of building a machine and deals with the implications and consequences of building a machine. With the technological developments both in real life robotics and visual effects, the genre was able to depict artificial beings which are seemingly perfect replicas of humans. While this caused fear and anxiety, as mentioned above, it initiated a new potential with respect to fiction.

As depictions of artificial beings became more humanoid, they also started to carry more human attributes. This gave them a thematic potential in regard to the presentation of the various facets of humanity including gender. This is achieved through various literary devices such as symbolism, allegory and coding. As the concept of coding will be primarily utilized in this thesis, it is important to define it and differentiate it from other similar literary concepts. Literary devices such as allegory, symbolism, or

[6] Asimov first laid down the "Three Laws of Robotics" in his short story "Runaround" (Asimov 26). The rules are as follows:

1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

metaphor are utilized consciously, and they suggest a certain intentionality. However, coding may be invoked subconsciously:

> It is also important to differentiate between allegory; story elements that are meant to have a one-to-one correlation with something outside of the story [and coding]. [...] Allegory is not the same as coding which lifts elements from the real world to provide a shorthand message based on the presumed worldview of the audience. [...] Coding is a neutral term. Allegory exists as a statement of authorial intent, coding may or may not even be a conscious choice. With stories made by and for humans, there is always coding. (L. Ellis)

Coding is a natural occurrence stemming from the society's influence on the author. In the case of gender coding, the genderless artificial characters may denote gender regardless of the author's original intent. The author may even utilize certain character traits within the narrative to develop the character without realizing that these traits are recognized as gender signifiers not because of biological difference, but because of the meaning attributed to them by the society. These attributions, which inform the majority of gender as a social construct, are biases "which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, [...] activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control" ("Understanding Implicit Bias") and they are utilized by authors both intentionally and unintentionally to create female coded artificial beings. The author may enhance the initial coding into a more complex examination of gender or they can decide not to acknowledge its existence. The nature of coding as both an involuntary detail and a very visible presentation shows that any narrative that utilizes female coded artificial beings can be examined thoroughly in terms of gender representation.

In relation to how modern science fiction incorporates the concept of constructing female coded forms, a look at the way gender roles are handled within the genre in a broader scope is necessary as the way human female characters are treated within the genre directly affects the treatment of female coded artificial characters. Despite being a futuristic genre with regard to technological changes, some science fiction narratives are known to have a problem with depicting societal changes as the genre's history is filled with works that approach their human female characters from a specific angle in

accordance with the traditional gender roles in society (Lutgendorff). These female characters are also mostly supporting characters, "enhancing the male hero's central status in the narrative" (Kac-Vergne 1). There are various examples of these types of human female characters in science fiction cinema. From the immoral, working "vamp" [7] women in *Them!* (dir. Gordon Douglas, 1954) and *The Wasp Women* (dir. Roger Corman and Jack Hill, 1959) being turned into literal monsters (George 84) to the character of Kay in *Creature from the Black Lagoon* (dir. Jack Arnold, 1964) only functioning as a damsel in distress,[8] or to the moral women in *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (dir. Philip Kaufman, 1978) being turned into immoral, corrupted vamps who try to corrupt other women and assault the conventional values of family life (Harvey 31), science fiction has a history of putting their human female characters in restricting boxes. Likewise, science fiction narratives that utilize the concept of constructing humanoids also incorporate these conventions into their narratives.

While creating a new being in human form is also an important part of many male-coded cyborgs and their stories, the construction of a woman presents more obvious, strict, and express themes. The journey of the female cyborg, bears resemblance to the progression of human female characters in fiction (Topping). Like the examples mentioned before, they go through the same process of starting as a two dimensional, and strictly visual presence and then developing into fleshed out characters. Similar to human female characters, there is a limit to how much they are allowed to develop. However, their nature brings with it unique problems. The first one is being caught in the old and enduring plot point of "constructing the perfect woman" (Melzer 202). The male coded, and human shaped cyborgs tell a story about the human condition and imagination while a significant portion of female coded cyborgs are used in stories specifically about shaping women into a patriarchal, heteronormative "ideal" and the shaping is usually done by men. Ultimately, as this thesis will examine in detail,

[7] Vamp: "a woman who uses her charm or wiles to seduce and exploit men" ("Vamp")
[8] Damsel in distress: It refers to a trope in fiction where a woman is in trouble and needs a man's help ("Damsel in distress"). The trope is quite popular in many different genres such as science fiction, fantasy, horror and superhero fiction.

the way virtual women are treated reveals a great deal about "how *actual* women are allowed to be treated, and what desires shape that treatment" (Cross, "When Robots...").

The gendering can be traced back to the terminology of the genre. The terms robot and android were created as gendered terms. When the older term, "robot" was coined in 1921, "robotess" was also coined as an alternative at the same time (Čapek 99) and while the former became a globally recognized term, the latter faded into obscurity. "Android" was coined from the Greek root ἀνδρ- (andr-), "man" (male, as opposed to anthrop-, human being) and the suffix -oid, "having the form or likeness of" ("Android"). The term "gynoid," which refers to robots with female forms, was introduced much later by Gwyneth Jones in her 1985 novel *Divine Endurance*. However, the term "android" is currently used to refer to any humanoid synthetic creation. The gender specific terms come with specific associations that are impossible to ignore.

Before analyzing theories, an elaboration on the specific medium of cinema will be necessary. Cinema is a layered medium where the dialogue is not the only way with which the scene conveys information and instead utilizes what filmmaker Martin Scorsese calls visual literacy which includes acting, the angle of the camera, the use of certain lenses, lighting, framing etc. and expresses ideas and emotions through a visual form (Scorsese). The theory of film language posits that a film uses these elements along with dialogue within a single scene and every single element is intentional. From the design of a character to the way the camera frames them, every visual element is present to tell a story. Therefore, a film can impart a lot of information about a character without openly verbalizing the intent. As Reynold Humphries asks while examining the films of Jean-Luc Godard, "What values and ideas are already contained in an image from the fact of its mere presence?" (13) Cinema's visuality is capable of depicting a wide range of topics and themes:

> Cinema's dynamism, its capacity to arrange and rearrange time and motion, thus reveals its dimensions that are deeply social, historical, industrial, technological, philosophical, political, aesthetic, psychological, personal, and so forth. The aggregate of these multiple dimensions indeed is cinema. For enthusiasts, cinema rewards study like few other objects precisely because its reach is so great that it is never exhausted, its scope

> so varied that one rarely finds oneself thinking along a single plane of thought. Cinema is about everything and always about itself. (Villarejo 9)

Cinema is not necessarily more or less capable of imparting nuance. It simply conveys details in a different manner than written mediums. Written mediums convey details in a more literal manner, contain more in-depth depictions of events, settings and characters which may be considered to be more intimate to the reader, making them feel like observers that have insight into the character's thoughts and feelings (Endashaw). Cinema lacks the textual clearity of the written medium but spreads and hides various layers among the many element that make film language.

However, as well as being able to create layers, cinema's focus on imagery also has the potential to confine the meaning. The visual aspect of the characters are the focus in a film and because of cinema's status as a more mainstream and widespread medium, the visual aspect is usually designed to show a more common and familiar depiction. For this reason, the written medium lends itself better to more abstract, unconventional depictions of non-human characters while the visual medium demands their objectification. The audience may believe that the negative connotations associated with the concept of objectification may be rendered null in regard to the nature of the artificial character as a literal object. However, what the female coded cyborg represents is a reflection of the society, particularly the gender roles enforced by the society. All characters, regardless of their organic status, carry signals in two seperate manners:

> • Denotation: the primary direct "given" meaning the sign has – e.g. a military uniform and insignia will denote a particular class or rank (private, sergeant, captain, general and so on).
> • Connotation: the secondary indirect meaning derived from what the sign "suggests" – for example, military uniforms may connote valour, manliness, oppression, conformity and so on – as the result of collective cultural attitudes or unique personal associations. (Edgar-Hunt et al. 27)

Like all signals, gendered signals also convey significant information and when used in an oblivious or imprecise manner they may purport clashing meanings. Catching these details and their place in society may be easier for female creators who encounter and are forced to acknowledge enforced gender roles a lot more than male creators.

However, the fact that female creators are given less opportunities and resources to direct science fiction movies prevents alternative representations being shown on screen. The latter point is true for all genres of film but this is especially prevalent in science fiction as it tends to be viewed as a "boys only club" (Lang). After discussing the specific potential, limitations and demands of the visual medium, presenting actual examples of the difference between depictions of male and female androids will paint a more clear picture of the place of the female form in stories about artificial beings.

Male-coded robots and androids are allowed to take unfamiliar or simply practical forms, making way for an imaginative and futuristic aesthetic. There are many examples of this such as: Gort (see fig. 1) in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (dir. Robert Wise, 1951); HAL 9000 (see fig. 2) in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (dir. Stanley Kubrick, 1968); the anthropomorphic servant droid Sonny (see fig. 3) in *I. Robot* (dir. Alex Proyas, 2004); AUTO (see fig. 4) in *WALL-E* (dir. Andrew Stanton, 2008); GERTY (see fig. 5) in *Moon* (dir. Duncan Jones, 2009); and TARS (see fig. 6) in *Interstellar* (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2014).

Female coded artificial beings with female voices are not only less common but also tend to be presented within a specific gendered condition. These characters have a more specific appearance, clearly designed to attract the assumed male audience. Maschinenmensch, the first and most influential depiction of a female coded android on screen (see fig. 7) in *Metropolis* (dir. Fritz Lang, 1927); Dot Matrix (see fig. 8) in *Spaceballs* (dir. Mel Brooks, 1987); The Alienator (see fig. 9) in *The Alienator* (dir. Fred Olen Ray, 1990); and T-X (see fig. 10) in *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (dir. Jonathan Mostow, 2003) are some of the better known examples.

In terms of narrative portrayals, male-coded artificial beings are allowed to have a variety of functions in the story. Chappie from *Chappie* (dir. Neill Blomkamp, 2015), Johnny Five from *Short Circuit* (dir. John Badham, 1986), The Iron Giant from *The Iron Giant* (dir. Brad Bird, 1999), Wall-E from *WALL-E,* and Baymax from *Big Hero Six* (dir. Don Hall and Chris Williams, 2014) are cheerful robots in family films trying to find themselves or support their human friends. David from *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*

(dir. Steven Spielberg, 2001) and Daryl from *D.A.R.Y. L.* (dir. Simon Wincer, 1985) are designed in the forms of little children and their stories are about children protecting themselves against the world. C-3PO from *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope* (dir. George Lucas, 1977) and Marvin in *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (dir. Garth Jennings, 2005) function as comic reliefs. Sonny from *I, Robot*, Andrew Martin from *The Bicentennial Man* (dir. Chris Columbus, 1999), David from *Prometheus* (dir. Ridley Scott, 2012) and Roy Batty from *Blade Runner* (dir. Ridley Scott, 1982) struggle with their artificial natures and try to find their individuality. *Transformers* (dir. Michael Bay, 2007) features a variety of male coded robots as heroes, villains and comic reliefs.

However, female coded artificial characters tend to have specific functions within the story. FemBots from *Austin Powers: International Man Of Mystery* (dir. Jay Roach, 1997) are designed as sexy women in bikinis and have guns in their bras. Lisa in *Weird Science* (dir. John Hughes, 1985), Pris from *Blade Runner* and Cherry 2000 from *Cherry 2000* (dir. Steve De Jarnatt*,* 1987*)* are sex robots. *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (dir. Michael Bay, 2009) has two female coded transformers; Alice, who is a decepticon in the shape of a sexy woman sent to spy on the male protagonist and turns into a literal monster with a long tail and tongue when her intentions are revealed, and Arcee, who is a pink colored autobot and does not get any speaking lines before she is killed in battle. Finally, although she does gain a bit of character development, Rachel from *Blade Runner* functions as the embodiment of the mysterious femme fatale and becomes the desired object of the male protagonist.

All of these examples give the impression that they were created with specific ideas in mind. In these robots, specific parts were added that would not be included on a physically gender neutral robot, or one that is coded male. In addition, the physical bodies are almost always conventionally attractive. Kathleen Richardson notes that female robot characters are just pieces of full people—a beautiful body, a caretaking nature—and do not possess full intelligence. She further elaborates on this objectification by drawing comparisons:

> Sometimes the female robots have "violent" characteristics (as *Terminator 3*'s T-X character), but it's always presented in a beautiful form. Women, whatever their

> qualities—intelligent, vulnerable, strong—are always presented in an attractive form, as if the package is the only way to deliver these qualities. Male intelligence, strength, vulnerabilities, etc. can be delivered in a multiple and varied kind of outer packaging. (Richardson, "Ex Machina")

In these examples, the assumed female androids and A.I.s appear to be treated in a different manner by the narrative than their male counterparts. Their femaleness is essential and deliberate in their story. They are not envisioned as artificial beings with their own, unique condition but are premeditated creations, carefully constructed to reflect the many ideas that the society attributes to the concept of women.

This portrayal of female coded artificial beings is opposed by many critics. In her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway opposes this portrayal by presenting an image of the cyborg that can push beyond the boundaries of humanity. Haraway accepts the cyborg as a representation of humanity, as "a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality" (150). However, she also sees that this connection to humanity does not necessarily mean a strict adherence to gender roles and heteronormative structures. The cyborg can be used to show humanity's true potential instead of being used only to enforce the power structures that hold back humanity. For Haraway, cyborgs exist independently of the world order: "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" (151). According to Haraway, they are not tied to heteronormative structures and exist in a postgender state. Haraway draws parallels between cyborgs and mythic monsters in that "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations" (180). Just like classic monsters, cyborgs can challenge preexisting notions of not only womanhood but also personhood: "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (181). This does not have to mean that the cyborg has to be viewed as a completely alien being. The idea of removing one's self from a binary, heteronormative existence is already a concept human beings are trying to achieve. This is not a recent endeavor as Simone de Beauvoir expressed her theory of how "one is not born a woman, but becomes one" (301) in the 1940s, and in 1990, Judith Butler followed this by

suggesting that “gender is performative” (34). Along with the long and still in-progress history of the LGBTQIA+ community and the queer theory they have produced and garnered, the concept of transcending human binaries is no longer an obscure concept.

Haraway's essay is an iconic text in the history of feminist criticism in science fiction. However, often described as “lyrical and exuberant, often criticised, often out of style, but an enduring work of feminist scripture” (G. Jones 327), it is viewed as an utopic portrait by various critics. Although science fiction is an inherently futuristic genre, it does not mean that it has always been a progressive genre and the works which maintain the current status quo within their narratives have received crticism. Like all genres, science fiction is as progressive as the authors and directors who utilize the genre allow it to be. Despite the efforts and accomplishments of many female creators, science fiction continues to be seen as a male dominated genre by many (Clute and Nicholls 1088).

As previously mentioned, there is a noticeable absence of female perspectives, especially in the world of film, and this means sensitive topics such as objectification of female bodies and the representation of female coded androids are mostly handled by male directors. Claudia Springer points to the dominance in popular science fiction films of the hyper violent, invincible and aggressively phallic cyborg, which in her view reinforces traditional gender stereotypes and a “misogynistic resistance to change” (104). According to Mary Catherine Harper, despite liberating possibilities and the potential for transgression, “all cyborgs, whether in cyberpunk, feminist cyborg literature, or living in the real world, are still undeniably the dream-children of a positivist, rationalist, American technology built by [white] middle-class men of the previous two centuries” (405). Even in the real life application of these concepts, the boundaries and conventions of the society limit progress. As Victoria Pitts states: “The radicalism of body modifiers is limited by social forces—sometimes the very same social forces they seek to oppose, including the patriarchy, Western ethnocentrism, symbolic imperialism, pathologization and consumerism” (189). Although Pitts makes

this comment for the real life application of body modifying, this statement can be extended to the portrayal of female coded artificial beings in movies.

While progressivism is not considered to be a fundamental aspect of science fiction by many authors and directors, the reason why it is expected from science fiction more than any other genre, and its absence stands out has more to do with the foundations and essence of the genre:

> Science fiction is the literature of change. More precisely, science fiction is the kind of literature that most explicitly and self-consciously takes change as its subject and its teleology… [and it has an] even stronger commitment to the postulate that the world can best be understood through change, whether rapid and radical or evolutionary over great periods of time. (Landon 11)

Science fiction may look at the future optimistically to see how it can be changed or it may present a cautionary tale by examining what the state of the world will be if humans do not do anything to change it. Whether the time is the far future or near future or even modern day, the genre's unique perspective on the power of change fuels its authors to envision a better world. With regard to the topic of gender, the genre also has the potential to distill hundreds of years of prejudices and stereotypes to its basis and construct an improved vision of the future and through it, the past and the present. The authors and other creators who utilize science fiction are aware of its foresight and potential for demonstrating and inspiring progress. Therefore, when this potential is not utilized, it emerges as a deliberate choice to maintain the status quo instead of a simple oversight. This pattern can be observed in many different types of science fiction narratives whether they are insightful or shallow. Even the simplest science fiction story, created more for entertainment than examination, not only reflects the society it was made in but is also founded on change and should be evaluated on the basis of its potential. As science fiction author Robert Heinlein states, "Science fiction, even the corniest of it, even the most outlandish of it, no matter how badly it's written, has a distinct therapeutic value because all of it has as its primary postulate that the world does change" (Candelaria and Gunn 281). All science fiction, whether it features a futuristic setting, a slightly altered current climate or even an alternate past which has taken a

different route, is based on change. Therefore, maintaining traditional rules and roles regarding any and all social structures is at odds with the basic principles of the genre.

In light of all these concepts, treating artificial characters in fiction as gendered beings and categorizing them according to a gender binary seems too regressive for such a progressive genre. Science fiction is capable of asking questions about constructed gender categories, "the materiality or discursiveness of bodies biologically marked by sexual difference, the differences in power and agency between those identified as having masculine rationality and those marked by feminine multiple relationships" (M. C. Harper 401) and utilizing the conclusions to create better narratives about gendered artificial beings. Depending on the authors who utilize the genre, it has the potential to bring these issues to light or reinforce the same stereotypes and boundaries. As Rob Latham puts it, "these inherent contradictions and compromised origins do not necessarily disable cyborg strategies, so long as practitioners […] bear in mind the dialectic of cooptation and transgression built inexorable into them" (414). Examining the different ways science fiction has contributed to the furthering of gender roles does not mean completely rejecting science fiction's ability to achieve non-gendered stories but instead it allows the genre to explore the many different ways society's desires and anxieties about the future manifest in the fiction it creates.

This thesis argues that pushing the imagination by envisioning a fundamentally divergent species is compatible with the genre's connection to change while pushing for the status quo goes against its prospective advancement of humanity's understanding of gender. With this perspective in place, this thesis will analyze the various attempts at portraying female coded artificial beings and how these attempts differ in certain aspects such as purpose, development of the characters, the representation of gender roles and the deconstruction of tropes but also stay the same in other certain aspects such as visual imagery, reinforcing stereotypes and the place of the characters in the narrative. Through this analysis, the thesis will argue that the way these narratives reflect human anxieties not only reiterate conservative ideas regarding the place of women in society but these outdated portrayals are at odds with the foresighted nature

of science fiction and the concept of change which is baked into every single science fiction narrative.

All the works which will be analyzed in this thesis handle the subject matter in different ways and because of this, their shortcomings and developments are revealed in different ways. Instead of a chronological approach, a thematic one is adopted for the analysis of these works as the history of American science fiction cinema does not follow a progressive pattern. Just like the progress of feminism in America and American society's reaction to its many stages, American science fiction cinema also underwent certain stages of progress and consequent backlash. Science fiction cinema starts with very basic portrayals of female coded artificial beings that focus on their visuality, then shifts the focus onto more nuanced depictions which explores their roles as female formed creations and what that means in the grand scheme of things, only to regress back to early, shallow depictions of objectified women whose only purpose is to appeal to the eye and serve the male gaze. Certainly, there is a clear progress with the advance of technology and the evolution of the science fiction genre itself. However, because of the nature of cinema as mainstream entertainment as well as an art form, the portrayals vary even within the same timeframe. A progressive and intelligent science fiction film can be immediately followed by a simple, easily digested popcorn movie that is only interested in giving the audience a more ubiquitous and accustomed depiction. Because of this inconsistent trajectory, drawing a straight and chronological line between the early and modern science fiction cinema is nearly impossible. The thematic categorization will help show certain patterns that emerged within this seemingly unorderly progression.

As discussed previously, science fiction cinema features many examples of female coded artificial characters. However, this thesis will focus on a selection of six films which clearly highlight certain patterns in the genre by dividing them into three categories. The first chapter of the thesis will focus on the beginnings of the representation of female coded artificial beings. At this stage, the genre is utilizing the concept of change in regard to the technology but not when it comes to gender roles. In

this chapter, the emphasis on the visual aspects of these characters by the narrative will be examined through the definition and analysis of the theory known in film studies as the male gaze and how this theory is utilized in regard to the concept and image of body in science fiction. After this analysis, this theory will be applied to Norman Taurog's *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965) and Duncan Gibbins' *Eve of Destruction* (1991). They will be examined with regard to the different ways they portray their objectified female coded characters within the narrative.

The second chapter will examine the next wave of portrayals of artificial beings which shifts the focus from the visuality to the use of artificial characters as social commentary. At this stage, science fiction is utilized to acknowledge and explore the changes in society with regard to gender roles. This chapter will focus more on the human passion of recreating the human form and attribute meaning to these forms by way of humanization and how this humanization and the consequent dehumanization becomes a reflection of the way society views women. After this examination, Bryan Forbes' 1975 film *The Stepford Wives* and Frank Oz's 2004 remake of the same name will be analyzed and compared in terms of their portrayal and criticism of gender roles and how the differences between their approaches reflect the different feminist perspectives in their respective eras.

The third chapter will examine the final stage of this character type, the evolution beyond the restrictions of their human forms, objectified through the eyes of humans, and the restrictions of the task of imitating the human condition, a duty once again placed upon them by their human creators. At this final stage, the genre embraces the concept of utilizing change regarding artificial characters but it is still tethered to traditional concepts of gender and womanhood to a certain extent. This chapter will focus on the artificial characters who try to break free of and transcend humanity and gain their individuality in their own, unique ways while still being partially grounded in humanity and its conventions. Then, the gendered artificial characters in Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) and Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) will be examined in terms of the

different ways they transcend humanity by integrating their individuality with their human inclinations and creating a new species.

Examining all of these different approaches and patterns will not only reveal the different layers and perspectives of individual science fiction authors and directors but also the collective consciousness of these creators who are inspired by the society they live in. This will display the way humans try to relate to fiction by recreating their experiences in increasingly larger scales and how the way society views these experiences is reflected on the roles of character archetypes. In doing so, this thesis endeavors to further the understanding of science fiction's function to reflect and speculate about humanity and how these various representations of gendered artificial beings demonstrate the way society views, critiques and maintains certain gender roles. The pattern that emerges through this examination will help understand and better the place of both artificial and organic female characters in the world of science fiction.

CHAPTER I:
THE ARTIFICIAL BEING AS SHELL

There are plenty of images of women in science fiction.
There are hardly any women.
Joanna Russ

The way female coded artificial beings are depicted in science fiction cinema is a reflection of the way human female characters are depicted in cinema at large. They are sexually objectified through certain tools of film language and this framing affects their function in narratives. They are often two dimensional characters who are treated as props or tools for the male characters to use. Their sexual appeal combined with their hollow characteristics transform them into true shells, and prevent them from reaching their potential in science fiction narratives.

1.1. Recreating The Female Form Through The Male Gaze

The concept of bodily awareness is a unifying element in human condition as "constituting a body in its non-negotiable physicality is still what it entails to be human" (Du Preeze XI). The body's status as "a ubiquitous element in perceptual experience and (is) the most familiar object people encounter" (Longo and Haggard 140) makes it a necessary focus in stories depicting the human condition. However, this common experience is also a varied one as humans can experience bodily awareness in different ways. Although possessing a body is a monolithic experience in a physical sense, research shows that bodily awareness is decomposed into distinct and dissociable components that are not simply different parts of the body but instead the different feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that one has toward one's body (140-141). Therefore, every individuals sense of bodily awareness is different and unique.

This sense of bodily awareness emerges as a unique physical manifestation titled representation which is the physical portrayal of mental bodily awareness, and humans utilize these representations to express themselves as individuals in the world. Self-consciousness is why humans modify and customize their physical presentations and is an integral part of what it means to be human in comparison with the psychology of other animals (Rochat 345). These presentations aren't influenced solely by individual personalities as the culture and the environment surrounding the individual during their childhood is also important in determining the forms and expressions of emerging self consciousness (4). Therefore, this embodiment of inner disposition is constantly under heavy exposure to images and ideas about what embodiment should look like according to the standards of society.

The manipulation of the body image affects every member of society regardless of their social status, race, sexual identity, class, and gender identity. The specific manipulation of women's body representations stem from certain societal standards regarding gender roles which are manifested in various forms. One common aspect of these standards is the fact that they are formed according to the will of the ones who hold power in society as our bodies are maps of power as well as identity (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto" 159). These standards are long standing as "the grand narratives of modern thought were constructed within hetero-normative principles of identity" (Dimulescu 505) which created dichotomies regarding body and representations of body. Visually, they are manifested as certain expectations and representations that form a specifically gendered body image which includes sexualization, loss of ownership and commodification. Within this framework, gender transcends biological components and becomes a set of rules, "a pervasive and powerful method of social control that both produces and restricts one's mode of being" (King 38). Gender and its expectations are both a constant and also a rigid mould which does not leave much room for free and singular body representation. As Judith Butler states, gender becomes a performance that cannot be separated from "the political and cultural intersections in which it is

invariably produced and maintained" (3). It is less a simple aspect of human experience and more a set of rigid rules humans are expected to obey.

The limited expectations of body representation can be observed throughout history, yet the dominance and prevalence of mass media intensified the effect of these expectations (Douglas 14). The unique sense of individuality and universality of bodily awareness creates a desire to see the body and representations of bodily awareness in fiction. However, these fictional representations are not exempt from societal expectations of real life bodies. Influenced by societal gender roles, mass media promotes images of sexualized and objectified women as the ideal and in return, these images influence women in real life. Even though the experiences of individual women differ, the wide influence and conformity of mass media ultimately creates a shared history for women (19). This shared image is an externally attractive mould which appears to be hollow inside. As the physical attractiveness of women and female characters is glorified above all else, women become nothing more than shells designed to be watched.

The issue of bodily awareness and representation also occupies an important place in the visual medium of film as a crucial and familiar element of the narrative. As a group of humans with the unifying experience of embodiment, the audience seeks the familiar sight of the human body both for comfort and connection with a hint of self centering:

> The cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking, but it also goes further, developing scopophilia in its narcissistic aspect. The conventions of mainstream film focus attention on the human form. Scale, space, stories are all anthropomorphic. Here, curiosity and the wish to look intermingle with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body, the relationship between the human form and its surroundings, the visible presence of the person in the world. (Mulvey 836)

The significant place that visuality occupies in film relies both on the common familiarity of possessing a body and on the image of the body as a separate entity. It is both an extension of one's self and an individual object. Thus, the audience can view it both as their personal avatar and an isolated spectacle to consume. This idea of the body as a spectacle is particularly significant with regard to female or female coded bodies in film. In film, the camera takes on the role of the human perspective as it guides the

audience to spectate and experience various types of body consciousness. This voyeuristic artificial gaze is referred to as the "male gaze." First coined by Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," the phrase refers to the idea that the camera acts as the eyes of the assumed male viewer; so when a woman, or a female coded character, is shown in a way that pronounces her physical features over her importance as an individual character, it is because the viewer sees her through a specifically heterosexual male perspective:

> In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact, so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Women displayed as sexual objects is the leit-motiff of erotic spectacle: from pin-ups to strip-tease, from Ziedfeld to Busby Berkeley, she holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire. (Mulvey 837)

It is important to note that the specific content of a particular scene does not matter when it comes to objectification. As Ann Kaplan states, "the spectator is obviously in the voyeur position when there are sex scenes on the screen, but screen images of women are sexualized no matter what the women are doing literally or what kind of plot may be involved" (30). Thus, the female character is framed as an object not because of the needs of the scene, but because of the expectations of the audience. The specific movements of the camera as it sweeps over and focuses on seperate parts of the female body in a voyeuristic manner is a culmination of mainstream cinema tradition, the expectations of the audience and the way male characters are written as these characters' behavior towards these female characters and their physicality is also a contributing factor. These female characters and their sexuality exist on two levels as they function both "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen" (838). This tension is flowing as it feeds into one other and shaping the expectations of the audience in terms of both how a female character and a male character should be displayed. The male gaze does not reflect the actual gender ratio of a given audience but the dominant perspective. The female

character is framed according to the sensibilities of the assumed heterosexual male viewer because "the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him" (Berger 64). By presenting the women as objects, the male gaze puts emphasis on the visual importance of a female character. This situation then creates a constant image of women on screen which leads to more depictions in this manner. It locks the female character into a frozen convention and traps her within a box.

It is important to point out that any work of fiction will reflect the viewpoint of its creator. Separating the visual cues of a film from the vision of its director is impossible, so the way the camera captures the characters is directly affected by it as a result. However, the source of the male gaze is not solely the perspective of the male director. The male gaze is a culmination of three perspectives; the person behind the camera, the characters within the film and the spectator, in this case, the assumed male audience (Devereaux 342). So in a way, the concept of "constructing a woman" as seen in science fiction films can be directly linked to the director constructing their female characters with a certain visual style that reflects the frozen convention of the male gaze which is then accepted and reinforced by the spectator. These depictions are designed in a way that reinforce essentialist ideas of femininity (Grebowicz 18).

The film is a unique medium which makes great use of visual language just as much as or even more so than it does dialogue. Therefore, separating the visual representation of a character from their narrative representation is impossible. What is considered by the world of cinema as "film language" dictates that every visual aspect of a film is used the way words are used in literature. As Hudlin points out, "Shots become words, sequences become sentences, scenes become paragraphs, edits become punctuation" (47). Within this perspective, the visual cues convey a preconceived message about the female character before the audience can familiarize themselves with the character through her dialogue and actions. It is a convention that casts the woman as a passive party who can only influence the narrative through her physicality. In other words, "Men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at"

(Berger 45). Male characters are the agents of action who drive the story forward with their decisions while the female characters spend most of their screen time existing as a spectacle.

The film language may invoke the male gaze even in cases where the female coded characters are given layers and agency within the narrative. As explained before, the subconscious nature of coding brings with it dormant but still effective imagery which is then involuntarily processed by the audience. In her series about deconstructing the *Transformers* franchise according to film theory, Lindsay Ellis conducts a social experiment as she asks the audience to describe the character of Mikaela Banes portrayed by Megan Fox. The responses are dominantly negative with many people in the audience wondering if she even has a character. After examining the character of Mikaela and arguing that she is the best written character in the film, Ellis comes to the conclusion that her visual portrayal causes the audience to overlook the textual themes of the film:

> Audiences thought it was a given that Michaela was worse written or acted than any of the other characters in the movie when she very clearly wasn't, but people didn't notice that there was indeed more than meets the eye because the camera was sending a different message than the script, namely that Mikaela is not here as a character who grows and changes over the course of a narrative but as gratuitous eye candy. (Ellis)

Whether the character is a one dimensional vessel solely created for her visuals or a three dimensional individual with her own personal agency, if her visuals are designed to be objectified, the character provokes a certain stereotypical image within the mind of the audience which in return partially diminishes the message the narrative is trying to create regarding the individuality of the character. This not only disrupts the female character's growth but the narrative as a whole:

> The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. [...] For a moment the sexual impact of the performing woman takes the film into a no-man's-land outside its own space and time. (Mulvey 837)

The spectacle abruptly disrupts the narrative with sexual imagery and hinders character progression. The camera has a language of its own and "what the audience remembers is what the camera tells them" (Ellis). When crucial scenes or character moments are intercut with objectifying shots of the female characters, the visual message takes precedence over the text due to the physicality of film language.

Furthermore, these images reach further than the narrative itself as they have lasting consequences in real life. The constant focus on the idealized "perfect woman" in films create certain expectations in real life which makes women view meeting a specific standard of beauty as a natural part of womanhood:

> The idealized male screen heroes give back to the male spectator his more perfect mirror self, together with a sense of mastery and control. In contrast, the female is given only powerless, victimized figures who, far from perfect, reinforce the basic sense of worthlessness that already exists. (Kaplan 28)

Multiple studies have shown that these figures and the expectations they create cause significant mental health issues in the female audience members such as eating disorders, low self-esteem and depression (APA Task Force on the Sexualization of Girls). The dominant presence of objectified female bodies in so many different genres create an inescapable overexposure to dangerous concepts in regard to gender roles. These latent concepts can even be instilled in women via films with active female characters such as science fiction or superhero genres. As previously mentioned, films with three dimensional female characters with agency may still utilize objectification and sexualization to fit into the narrative of mainstream cinema and while these characters can inspire female audience members in certain ways, their visual cues can still cause damaging effects in regard to their views on gender roles, body esteem, and self-objectification (Pennell and Behm-Morawitz 211).

These issues regarding the presentation of non-robotic human female characters are carried over to the gendered artificial characters. One of the traits that early on-screen representations of the gendered artificial beings inherit from human female characters is their predominantly visual function. Both share some of the same tropes; the

pronounced sexuality, lack of agency and bodily autonomy.[9] However, the non-human nature of artificial beings is used to justify an even further lack of agency to the point of being completely devoid of personality. One dimensional human female characters devoid of depth or layers are common in the world of film:

> It is by now axiomatic that the female subject is the object rather than the subject of the gaze in mainstream narrative cinema. She is excluded from authoritative vision not only at the level of the enunciation, but at that of the fiction. At the same time she functions as an organizing spectacle, as the lack of which structures the symbolic order and sustains the relay of male glances. (Silverman 309)

However, these female coded artificial characters take it a step further with male characters having total control of all of their faculties and even voices. The clear difference between how the male coded androids and the female coded ones are framed by the gaze of the camera and how they are treated within the narrative makes all the difference. Visually, these characters are defined by their objectification and within the narrative, they are defined by what they mean for the male hero. The passive role which they inherit from human characters is shaped into a more pronounced objectification through their nature as literal objects. They become symbols rather than developed characters as their existence is used as a tool to comment on the actions of the male characters. As director Budd Boetticher puts it:

> What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance. (Mulvey 837)

In the specific context of artificially created characters, it could be argued that they should be regarded as pure vessels, only visually similar to humans but created with the express purpose of being controlled. This approach to artificial beings is common in early science fiction cinema. As previously explained, the origins of the term "robot" as a worker bounds the base function of the robot to servitude and no matter how much the concept has changed and been incorporated in various ways, this base function is still

[9] Bodily autonomy is defined as the right to self governance over one's own body without external influence or coercion and is considered to be a fundamental human right. ("Bodily Autonomy")

present. The robot is still a tool with which humans try to shape the world around them. However, the robot is also a source of anxiety as they carry the potential to oppose humans. This anxiety regarding robots is also not relegated to the land of fiction. The real life implications of being taken over or becoming obsolete is very much alive within the scientific community. With the rapid pace of advancing technology, it is believed that robots will take over the workforce in many ways:

> Specifically in the way that machines—algorithms—are starting to pick up cognitive tasks. In a limited sense, they're starting to think like people. It's not like in agriculture, where machines were just displacing muscle power for mechanical activities. They're starting to encroach on that fundamental capability that sets us apart as a species—the ability to think. The second thing [that is different than the Industrial Revolution] is that information technology is so ubiquitous. It's going to invade the entire economy, every employment sector. So there isn't really a safe haven for workers. It's really going to impact across the board. I think it's going to make virtually every industry less labor-intensive. (Ford)

The juxtaposition of the robot as a creation specifically constructed for labor and the anxiety of losing labor which is an important driving force for humans creates a deep anxiety that causes humans to take drastic cautions. For robot creators, fictional or real, developing their creations to the best they can be and still trapping them within the confines of dependency upon humans is an important and delicate balance.

In this context, the role of the female coded robots becomes even clearer. This particular archetype carries the general function of serving humans while also having to represent the specific role of serving male creators. The difference between the representation of male and female coded artificial beings begin at this point. If the creation carries gender neutral visual codes, which are presented as neutral but represent male coded signifiers, the creation's purpose and therefore the source of his discomfort is serving under a human creator who thinks he is a superior species. Due to humans' superiority complex regarding beings that they label as inferior (Cubbage), the conflict between the human and the non-human characters originate from the power relations of class or level which does not carry any sexual undertones. If the creation carries female visual codes, she has to grapple with the added function of serving the very specific ideals the human male creator set out for her. As previously mentioned, the female look of the creation is a

direct result of a deliberate attempt at recreating the woman in a shape or form better suited for the male creator. Therefore, the female coded creation cannot simply function as a worker but her design forces her into assuming the role of a woman within society.

The robot does not have instincts which forces her into the social shape of a woman just because she looks like one. However, the intents of the male creator steer her towards certain roles and activities with which the fictional creator tries to recreate the woman experience for his personal gain. Even with gender neutral robots, the creator may have some form of personal gain in creating the robot; such as material gain, the pursuit of knowledge, recreating the familiar human body consciousness or searching for enlightenment. However, in the case of the female coded robot, in addition to these personal gains, the creator is also in search of reinforcing gender roles and sexual gratification. This hypothesis is not inexpedient as this approach is not limited to fiction. There are many instances of female coded androids created by male inventors who design them in gender specific ways, such as Aiko who was designed with specific sensors in many areas including her genitals (Trung), the robotic sex dolls made by the RealDoll company (Sharkey et al. 3) and many robots designed with specifically female signifiers because they work in fields traditionally associated with women such as maids, personal assistants or museum guides (Lewis). These examples show that the image of the woman as a externally beautiful shell is reflected on the artificial female characters. With the way they can be designed for a specific purpose, they can be molded into truly empty shells whose only goal is to attract the attention of the men who created them.

With the way women are treated in society, this might very well be an example of the objectification of women taken to its logical extension (Lafrance). Therefore, the female coded artificial being becomes a hollow shell simply because she is gendered and this physicality prevents the character from achieving agency. This chapter will focus on science fiction movies with these types of female coded robots who function as more passive characters within the narrative, mostly serve a visual purpose and whose reason for existing is tightly linked to their creator's desires, even in films where they are given

relatively more personal agency. *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965) signifies the beginnings of the construction as the fembots are made purely for the benefit of their male creator. The second film *Eve of Destruction* (1991) combines the female robot as tool concept with the strong independent femme fatale trope as the female robot starts to seemingly gain a little bit of individuality only to be reduced to a tool gone rogue and framed as a villain while still being objectified through the male gaze. These films' focus on the concept of "constructing the ideal woman" as decided by society signifies the starting point of the the female coded character's journey throughout the history of science fiction cinema and forms the basis of the playing god motif which will be encountered in all steps of this journey.

1.2. The Beginnings of "The Construction of a Woman" in *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* (1965)

As a creation designed and influenced by humans, the robot is an extension of various aspects of human condition. As such, it is capable of taking many forms; it can represent positive aspects such as human will and desire, or, as previously mentioned, it can be a manifestation of human anxieties. In regard to the female coded robot, this archetype took many shapes through science fiction cinema. However, one shape which both influenced and took precedence over all the others was the image of the highly sexualized fembot who embodies the "perfect woman" and ready to serve men. The beginnings of this trope can be seen in the science fiction classic *Metropolis* (1927) where Maschinenmensch, in the shape of Maria, embodies a dangerously beautiful female persona and seduces a lustful mob with her dance, inciting them to riot. In the 1949 film *The Perfect Woman* (dir. Bernard Knowles) female coded robot Olga, created by Prof. Ernest Belman, is referred to as the perfect woman as she cannot speak or eat but does what she is told. These early individual examples are rare and as they were made in an era where the image of the female robot was still new and novel, they vaguely touch upon subjects such as objectification or the concept of women as lure. The image of the physically strong, specifically designed and sexualized fembot, which later became a common trope in science fiction cinema, properly starts with Norman

Taurog's *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* which is a culmination of all the sexualized human female characters and the robots combined to embody the perfect woman. It is the inception of many specific visual and narrative tropes which are later turned into cliché and incorporated in popular films such as *Westworld (*Dir. Michael Crichton, 1973*)* and *Austin Powers: International Man Of Mystery*.

Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine tells the story of Dr. Goldfoot, portrayed by Vincent Price, who has created a machine called the Bikini Machine to create bikini-clad attractive women who then seduce wealthy men into signing their wealth away to the doctor. Under the superficial layer, the film delves into many different aspects of this archetype. While it is a distillation consisting of various tropes from various science fiction and action films, the film's most obvious inspiration is the James Bond film *Goldfinger* (dir. Guy Hamilton, 1964). *Dr. Goldfoot'*s design of the fembots invokes certain tropes used in the depiction of the female love interests in James Bond films called Bond Girls These female characters are known for being conventionally attractive, sexy women who function as an adjunct to the male protagonist and "framed as objects of sex, violence, or both, and often considered easily dispensable" (Dill-Shackleford, et al. 330). The fembots in Dr. Goldfoot are an extreme interpretation of the concept of Bond Girls as the numerous bikini-clad fembots who are designed to fit into very specific roles and to have no character traits or narrative presence other than the limiting box of love interest invoke the countless and forgettable Bond Girls who are a very intrinsic aspect of the James Bond series but also do not affect the films' stories in any meaningful way.

Much like the Bond Girls, the physical aspect of the robots is the dominant theme in the foreground. They are specifically designed to be conventionally attractive women who can use their looks to charm the men they target. They are always outfitted with bikinis (see fig. 11) and only put on less revealing outfits when they go outside to capture their targets. However, sexual appeal is only one aspect of their physicality. The method with which they are created, emerging from the machine wearing a bikini and ready to serve, evokes a blunt and striking image of mass production.

Mass production is a practice that is both beneficial and necessary in the modern world but also evokes a certain discomfort in humans. The imagery of the worker on the assembly line is an image that symbolizes the dull feeling of doing impersonal work instead of creating sympathy with a personal touch between the employer and employee (Somashekar 217). Mass production also evokes negative feelings in consumers as the transition between the artisan who crafts tailor-made and customizable goods with the direct guidance of the consumer to the supply chains which can produce all types of products in a short amount of time made the products widely available and easily obtainable but also created an obstacle between people and individuality (Walker). Therefore, the thought that the practice of mass production can be applied to human embodiment may seem like an inconceivable notion. Mass production which is solely for producing objects which are iterated over and over again with the exact same functions conflict with human production which is individual and intimate with a unique result. It is through this contrast that humans differentiate and isolate themselves from the products they consume. They are unique, irreplicable and irreplaceable. This sense of individuality is especially distinct in American culture which prioritizes individualism, autonomy and a strong sense of personal space (Rosenbaum). Within this framework, individuality is seperate from personality and may even take precedence over it:

> Individual is the real I; personality only seeming. Personality is the incarnation of individuality. [...] It is our personalities that greet one another when we meet...do business, discuss politics and the cost of living, and speculate learnedly as to the nature of immortality. Individuality, on the contrary, is the inmost kernel of our being, is essentially isolated, and seldom, if ever, meets another individuality face to face. (Rogers 514)

Within this context, it is safe to assume that having certain characteristics does not reflect uniqueness as personality can change and adapt and individuality seems to be the real uniqueness through which humans designate and isolate themselves in the crowd of personalities.

Body consciousness is a part of this individuality as bodily autonomy is a big part of the human experience. However, body consciousness also has a conflicting nature as it

creates a desire to both keep body integrity but also constantly redesigns and improves the body. Through history, humans have both been afraid of shattering bodily integrity and had an urge to add on it in an attempt to fix what they perceive as flaws:

> The history of the body is neither a history of scientific knowledge about the body nor a history of the ideologies that (mis)represent the body. Rather it is a history of "body building," of the different modes of construction of the human body. The body perceived in this way is not a reality to be uncovered in a positivistic description of an organism nor is it a transhistorical set of needs and desires to be freed from an equally transhistorical form of repression. This body is instead a reality constantly produced, an effect of techniques promoting specific gestures and postures. sensations and feelings. (Feher 159)

In the modern era, humans are not particularly against breaking the body down to its parts, examine it and upgrade it according to the fast pace of the modern world. Then one question prevails: Why do they have feelings of anxiety regarding the producing of robots? This question can be answered by going back to the concept of autonomy. As discussed before, humans are capable of accepting non-organic bodies or body parts when they are attached to humans with whom they share a bodily connection or when the improvements are overseen by fellow humans. Only when the artificial constructs created by humans seize the means of production do they start feeling anxious as this takes away their control over their own evolution.

Therefore, the loss of individuality and human control is a part of the Uncanny Valley effect as it is not just the near human look that is unnerving but also the same humanoid look duplicated over and over again which takes away from the "specialness" of humans. Therefore, when examined through the framework of body consciousness, the robotic body clearly represents an unnerving contradiction that carries both the unique features of humanity and the generic features of artificiality. In this context, The Bikini Machine symbolizes a massive mechanism within which humans and their individuality are lost. Their unmatched qualities are fed into the machine which learns, adapts and manages to recreate a version of the human condition which is altered and improved upon to remove any flaws that might be carried over from humans. The combination of the assembly line imagery and the feelings of static monotone it evokes and the way humanoid bodies on it are treated as identical mechanical parts or even food, like

"pizzas emerging from great ovens" (S. Anderson 815), a disturbing possibility is brought into the light. Humans are no longer unique or special as they can be replaced with perfect versions through an apathetic asexual production process.

The dual nature of mass production manifests in an even greater scope in a gendered context. Just as the assembly line symbolizes both a stagnant existence and a widely available and necessary resource, the hordes of conventionally attractive and similar looking women produced by the Bikini Machine are both positioned as an evil scheme designed by a mad scientist and a fascinating design meant to be considered a triumph of technology and willpower. Men overtaking the production process and appropriating it to their liking is a cornerstone of robotic narratives:

> Mankind seems never to have been entirely satisfied with natural generation as a means of reproducing the species; with astonishing regularity the desire has surfaced to take matters into one's own hands, to go the whole way, even to go one better without the inconvenience of sharing the procreative process with womankind. (Glaser and Rossbach 8)

The desire to isolate women from the procreative process comes from the desire to reshape the female form based on the standard of society. The aforementioned real life attempts to reshape the female form is translated to fiction in the form of mass production and objectification of female coded robots.

The objectification becomes both metaphorical and quite literal in this context as the fembots are products designed as objects and meant to be used. The male gaze that sees women as seperate body parts meant to be looked at works on two layers as the fembots are both attractive women positioned to let the audience specifically spectate their bodies and also bodies made of metal who are devoid of individuality and any purpose other than to serve the doctor. Objectification is the isolation of a woman's body or body parts from herself (Fredrickson and Roberts 175) and in this context, not only the fembots are isolated from their conventionally attractive bodies but the audience is also removed from the fembots as characters and are encouraged to only see them as objects.

The mass production angle combined with the objectification instantly creates a binary dynamic with the humans as consumer and their female coded creations as products.

The fembots' origins as products to be consumed is shaped into a two pronged metaphor. The female coded robot is clearly influenced by and represents female characters as a whole. However, the distinction between the human and non-human pertaining to their nature as a product is used to justify their objectification. As Fredrickson and Roberts state, "once sexually objectified, the worth of a woman's body or body part is directly equated to its physical appearance or potential sexual function and is treated like it exists solely for others to use or consume" (174). This consumer/product dynamic between the scientist and the robots is a propulsion of the concept of women as commodity commonly seen in media in different ways:

> **The artificial look:** Women are glorified as ideas of flawless beauty. Studio lighting, photo doctoring, airbrushing glamorize women into beautiful ornaments. [...] **Dismemberment:** A woman is broken down into parts, with each part packaged as an attractive and alluring good. [...] **Commodification:** Media imagery of women in the guise of women emancipation, positions females simply as objects of male gaze. Associations are often made between a woman's body and some product; and in doing so morality and ethics are often sacrificed. [...] **The Beauty Myth:** Creates a fake image of what it means to be a "desirable woman". (KA 168)

Various facets of women's existence are amplified, dramatized, misrepresented or removed to fit a mold which is then imposed on the masses. The female experience becomes a franchise and the various aspects of womanhood, no matter how mundane or explicit (Douglas 17), are commodified and sold as merchandise which are designed and customized in specific ways to focalize on certain features and visuals but ultimately serve the same narrative. When the doctor's male servant Igor tries to touch one of the fembots, the doctor stops him by literally ordering him to "get his hand off the merchandise!" (*Dr. Goldfoot,* 00:38:54).

The robots are not only mass produced as products but also as servants. The fembots are a pinnacle example of the human as boss and the robot as servant or worker trope which started with Čapek's worker robots. They are constructed by the doctor specifically to serve his needs and their existence revolves around their work. They do not have lives outside this purpose, they live in the doctor's laboratory serving him and training and only get out for their missions. Their every aspect is carefully built according to the doctor's needs. Their entire sense of self, their memories, education and personality are

channeled towards their work and the augmentations they receive are always about their specific targets.

The image of the worker who has no private life or desire to improve not only as workforce but as a person is seen as a secret ideal by modern capitalistic notion but at the same time a secret fear. Therefore, freeing humans by releasing them from the need to work becomes a utopian desire. The theme of humankind as a superior being untethered by subordinate actions like work is directly connected to the creation of robots as a substitute workforce. As Domin states in *R.U.R.*, "Man shall be free and supreme; he shall have no other aim, no other labor, no other care than to perfect himself. He shall serve neither matter nor man. He will not be a machine and a device for production. He will be Lord of creation" (Čapek 26). This unbalanced dynamic naturally creates an anxiety towards a potential shift in the dynamic in which humans may be put into an inferior position and ruled by robots. As the robot Radius orders the human he captured, "You will work! You will build for us! You will serve us!" (Čapek 86) he demonstrates the humans' fear of losing power.

The next stage of the boss/worker dynamic is the master/slave dynamic. The robot as a slave to humans is regarded as an unfortunate situation not only because the idea of a being whose singular purpose is to serve without any compensation or recreation has problematic connotations but also this position of power humans possess may affect them negatively and make them vulnerable, alienated, and automated masters (Coeckelbergh 219). However, an opposing argument to the slavery issue is that robots cannot be enslaved as they are not being forced against their will, that is, their will is also a construct:

> It is easy, given our cultural associations, to assume that robot servitude automatically amounts to robot slavery. This assumption begs a question of interest, however. A necessary condition for slavery, I take it, is to be forced into work contrary to your will. But it seems possible to design robots from scratch so that they want to serve us in more or less particular ways. In such cases the robots are not slaves, since they are not working against their will. (Petersen 45)

Petersen states that robot servitude is permissible as long as humans do not infringe upon the rights of a sentient being with wants and desires. He proposes an arrangement

he calls “engineered robot servitude” which he describes as “the building and employment of non-human persons who desire, by design, to do tasks humans find unpleasant or inconvenient” (45). From this point of view, the robot is incapable of having a voice but it is also incapable of understanding the need to have a voice. The robot cannot object to this condition and it will never want to. Without a frame of reference or prior experience, the robot is simply oblivious to the idea of agency and it is content within this ignorant state. Petersen emphasizes that these robots should be constructed from scratch and is adamantly against what he calls “post-identity modification” which is “the manipulation of an already existent person’s desires to new servile desires that would have been against the pre-modified person’s will” (45). As long as the construct is a blank slate upon which the creator can project and indoctrinate his will and desires, there is no need for accountability.

This idea of the robot as a blank slate who does not carry any instincts, wishes, ambitions and independence can be observed clearly in *Dr. Goldfoot*. The fembots are not simply workers but selfless slaves; selfless not in the sense that they prioritize others’ well being above theirs, but in the sense that they are entirely devoid of a sense of self that might give them instincts such as concern for their well being. They constantly exhibit a sense of absolute contentment, are always happy, easy going and never complain. Although this type of behavior is very common for female characters in early color films, in this specific context, the robots are quite literally indoctrinated into being happy and agreeable, and they are not capable of or allowed to harbour feelings of degradation or abasement.

They are also indoctrinated to make them the perfect lure as they have been programmed to be capable of possessing different personalities, voices and accents. The doctor is able to upload relevant information directly into their brains using another machine (see fig. 12). They are indoctrinated with specific knowledge relating to the profession or interests of their male targets, one of them learns medical knowledge to be able to intelligently talk to a wealthy surgeon while another receives musical education to seduce a rich composer. They are constructed as the perfect women, every aspect of

their existence designed to cater to their creators and other men around them. They have no control over their own actions. They can only act through commands given to them by Dr. Goldfoot as he has direct control of their faculties via a remote control. Diane, a.k.a. No.11, who serves as the main protagonist amongst all the fembots, is seen throwing herself at Craig Gamble with a solitary purpose. She does not seem to be able to think of anything else other than seducing him. When she states, "I just adore being kissed. In fact you could say I'm insatiable" (00:07:07), it is not an act of empowered sexuality but a literal programming which makes her unwillingly insatiable.

The isolating effect of the objectification is also reflected on the contrast between their lack of self identity and their significant role in the film. They are constantly on screen and drive the plot forwards but they do not have a three dimensional place within the narrative. Just as they are used as simple tools by Dr. Goldfoot, so they are used as simple tools by the film itself. When they do begin to move away from the doctor's control, it is not because of a hidden free will surfacing but because of malfunction. This lack of agency becomes more apparent as the film nears the end and the conflict is distilled to its essence which is the power dynamic between Dr. Goldfoot and the two male protagonists trying to thwart him. Although the characters Craig Gamble and Todd Armstrong become involved with the plot because of their attraction to No.11, she ultimately becomes a desired object being passed around and after the two protagonists defeat the villain they are not interested in engaging with Diane. Her sole purpose was to be desired just enough so that the male protagonists could meet and challenge the main villain of the story.

If these fembots are examined solely within Petersen's perspective, it could be said that it is simply their job to obey the doctor's commands and, as they are artificial beings made from scratch, this solves the issues of immorality. However, these female coded characters do not exist in a vacuum. As previously mentioned, the concept of coding dictates that the female characteristics they possess make them a symbol for female human characters and when examined within this framework, their position as subservient slaves under the control of a man becomes a rich metaphor. The contrast

between the visual cues, which is female coded characters happily submitting to the will of men, and the underlying context, which is their absolute lack of agency, merge to create a sexist caricature of women.

This subservience also invokes a specific violence and raises another question as to the morality of using female coded robots to fulfil male desires. Ann Kaplan states that voyeurism, which is an inherent aspect of the male gaze, is not a passive act as the male gaze has a possessive power over the female characters and this voyeurism, "linked to disparagement, has a sadistic side, and is involved with pleasure through control or domination and with punishing the woman" (Kaplan 31). This aspect of the male gaze is essential to they fembot' subservience as serving the doctor is not the only way the fembot submit to him. When No.11 makes a mistake and neglects to get Todd Armstrong to sign the power of attorney, Dr. Goldfoot threatens to discipline No.11 in "the Chair," which is later revealed to be an electric chair where he tortures No.11 to teach her a lesson (see fig. 13). This treatment continues as he forces her to clean the floors while a bodyguard shocks her with an electrical stick. Another similar scene occurs in the third act where Dr. Goldfoot, No.11 and the two male protagonists are eating dinner and suddenly the dinner is interrupted by one of the robots screaming and running around the dinner table while being chased by the bodyguard with a stick on fire. After they leave the room, the doctor refers to the screams as "giggles," saying he should remind the robot not to giggle during dinner (1:03:13). These violent instances in the middle of a film which otherwise has a comical and light hearted tone create a whiplash that is quickly glossed over and never addressed. The robots in the film are presented as simple machines capable of being brainwashed into being agreeable so the disciplining scenes come across as unnecessary, glorified depictions of violence which are not explored or addressed by the characters or the narrative itself.

However, the violence is not only physical. During the dinner scene, Todd wants to speak to Diane in the hopes that maybe he can get through to her. The doctor allows him to talk to her but he also informs him that he reprogrammed her so that she can only understand and speak Japanese. Although it is played as a joke, taking away the voice of

a character who already does not have any agency of her own has certain implications. The film goes back and forth between a light hearted tone where the female robots flirt with men and small scenes where they are abused and treated as mere objects.

Violence against women in films is an old tradition in American cinema. Graphic depictions of women being assaulted have been used as plot points, motivation for male characters and sometimes even humor. However, violent depictions in film have lasting effects on the audience. In August 1984, *the New York Times* published a story titled "Violence Against Women in Films," which covered a study from the American Psychological Association confirming violence as a sexual stimulant for men, as well as a survey, which found that "one in eight movies commercially released in 1983 depicted violent acts against women, a sharp increase from 1982 when the rate was one movie in 20" (Coleman). Thirty years later, in 2014, writer Ann Hornaday writes about the historic indulgence of the male director's fantasy in connection with "sexualized violence" against women (Hornaday). Citing then-new films like *A Walk Among The Tombstones* (dir. Scott Frank, 2014) and *The Equalizer* (dir. Antoine Fuqua, 2014), Hornaday states that acts of violence on screen have a desensitizing effect on people and that these acts are used as purely aesthetic elements, allowing filmmakers to indulge fantasies of sexualized violence while pretending to abhor them:

> I'm not suggesting that movies cause violence against women or encourage the abuse of children. What I am suggesting is that violence exists within a continuum of culturally sanctioned, ritualized aggression — from Sunday afternoon football games to Quentin Tarantino — that itself exists on a continuum, from the symbolic, cleansing and cathartic to the desensitizing, exploitative and profoundly hypocritical. As spectators, we occupy our own version of that continuum, one that starts with outrage and ends with visceral pleasure. It's ludicrous to assume we can realistically address one without honestly confronting the other. (Hornaday)

Written in two different eras, these studies identify the same trope which has traditionally been utilized by Hollywood in regard to their treatment of female character. These images are not simple depictions of unrealistic violence. As stated, they have real life ramifications as they contribute to the normalization of violence against woman. As the audience becomes accustomed to these sequences, they start to realize or note them in film less and less. This normalization then becomes the standard for both fictional and

non-fictional situations as violence against women and the reactions to it become diametrically opposed as the former increases and the latter decreases.

Beyond the medium of cinema, the creation of robots specifically designed with certain features by male scientists raises moral questions about the ramifications of this act in real life. Men's desires to possess robots have been called into question as the possibility of a man acquiring or creating a robot who looks identical to real life women then proceeding to use them to fulfil toxic fantasies have been considered:

> A machine, like the portrayal of women in pornography, prostitution and the media are entirely objects for male gratification. But women aren't like what males see in pornography or in prostitution or in popular media. In these areas women are coerced or told how to be have act or behave with a threat of money or violence. In real life, women really have their own thoughts and feelings and preferences and desires. It seems logical that if this extreme control can't be experienced by men with real women, the only next step is to create artificial objects. (Richardson, "Why Female")

This is a dangerous possibility as it would create an unchecked power imbalance which is protected under the guise of freedom. Technically, it could be argued that humans can acquire robots and utilize them as they see fit as long as they do not hurt any humans. However, the implications of such an act lay the way open to abuses of power. Philosopher Blay Whitby posits the question, "How would you feel about your ex-boyfriend getting a robot that looked exactly like you, just in order to beat it up every night?" (Whitby) drawing attention to the possibility that men could use these robots to act out dangerous fantasies and indirectly target women and the real life human women who are the actual targets of these fantasies would not be able to stop them which could lead to such toxic urges becoming normalized.

These unexamined depictions combined with the pronounced sexuality of the robots and the vigorous use of the male gaze demonstrate a common theme in regard to human female characters in cinema but applied to non-human characters for the first time. The tropes established in this film, physically strong but beautiful female coded robots who are designed to be the perfect woman and are constantly degraded for stepping out of line, were very influential in science fiction cinema and set precedent to future similar depictions.

1.3. The Femme Fatale In Artificial Form In *Eve of Destruction* (1991)

Female characters have evolved in various ways throughout the history of cinema. The silent companion became the conniving villain who turned into the underdeveloped hero and many other tropes emerged within the narrative. One of the relatively recent and enduring tropes that emerged in cinema is the *femme fatale*. The women as seductresses is a common and old theme in fiction as mythology is filled with stories of seducer women disturbing the status quo (Krishnaraj 39). However, the femme fatale is a more specific and recent framework as combines multiple elements from different tropes and flourishes them with a vamp aesthetic.

With its striking visuality and narrative power, the trope of the femme fatale has an important place in cinema. This particular iteration of this archetype flourished during the film noir boom in 1940s and can be observed in many characters such as the passionate dancer Gilda in *Gilda* (dir. Charles Vidor, 1946), the ghost-like criminal Kathie Moffat in *Out of the Past* (dir. Jacques Tourneur, 1947), the adulterer Vicki Buckley in *Human Desire* (dir. Fritz Lang, 1954), the dangerous Alex Forrest in *Fatal Attraction* (dir. Adrian Lyne, 1987), the manipulative Catherine Tramell in *Basic Instinct* (dir. Paul Verhoeven 1992) and the seductress Kathryn Merteuil in *Cruel Intentions* (dir. Roger Krumble, 1999). The classic femme fatale in cinema merges the characteristics of the old temptress archetype with the sexualized new imagery of female characters:

> The femme fatale is the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her most striking characteristics, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable. In thus transforming the threat of the woman into secret, something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered. (Doanne 1)

The femme fatale has a conflicting duality as a character. She both represents a threat to the gender status quo which judges the way women behave in society but she is also presented in a way that lines up with the way female characters are expected to look in cinema such as attractive, sexy or exotic. Although this two sided presentation might seem contradictory, according to author Susan J. Douglas, conflicting representations of

women is a regular occurrence in mass media. Douglas posits that society has always had conflicting expectations of women:

> As we consider the metamorphosis that millions of women, and men, for that matter, experienced over the past three decades, we immediately confront the well-known female yin and yang of solid confidence and abject insecurity. In a variety of ways the mass media helped make us the cultural schizophrenics we are today, women who rebel against yet submit to prevailing images about what a desirable, worthwhile woman should be. Our collective history of interacting with and being shaped by mass media has endangered in many women a kind of cultural identity crisis. (Douglas 8)

This collective contradiction of womanhood is derived from the various expectations placed on her in which she has to simultaneously occupy a whole host of personas in an attempt to satisfy the needs of society (13). This contrast is reflected in the various representations of female characters who are trapped within many different boxes created by the same hegemonic system. Femme fatale is no exception as her pronounced sexuality is both feared and desired by the established patriarchal order. She very rarely taps into the fears or desires of women and functions as a female character who is born out of male experiences and anxieties. Their visual design supports this angle. Often, these characters are designed with the male audience's enjoyment in mind. Their revealing and impractical clothes aren't the result of their own free will but of the conscious decision made by the filmmaker to attract a heterosexual male audience. During the film itself, the male gaze is often invoked with the camera following these female characters with an objectifying lens. All of this culminates to create a trend in writing female characters which can be still observed in big budget movies today.

The femme fatale also fits into the modernized version of strength which has become another cliché of female characters, although this particular trope extends beyond the femme fatale archetype as it can even be applied to female characters who are deemed to be morally sound by the narrative. This is a recent trope named "strong independent woman" that tries to equate presenting female characters as physically strong, cold blooded with actual depth and character development (Valibeigi). The conflicting nature of female body image can be clearly observed in this trope as these characters have vaguely empowering qualities but they still fit a male-desired notion of sexuality. In

many cases, these female character's freedom is only superficial. A closer look reveals that these characters are founded upon a very ambiguous and shallow understanding of what makes a character strong. While these characters are physically strong, they are devoid of layers, motives, individuality, flaws or anything that might humanize them:

> Maybe the problem is semantic. Maybe what people mean when they say "strong female characters" is female characters who are "strong," i.e., interesting or complex or well written — "strong" in the sense that they figure predominantly in the story, rather than recede decoratively into the background. But I get the feeling that what most people mean or hear when they say or hear "strong female character" is female characters who are tough, cold, terse, taciturn and prone to scowling and not saying goodbye when they hang up the phone. [...] "Strong women characters" are a canard. They refer to the old-fashioned "strong, silent type," a type that tolerates very little blubbering, dithering, neuroticism, anxiety, melancholy or any other character flaw or weakness that makes a character unpredictable and human. (Chocano)

Additionally, many of these characters have no agency of their own. They lack a very important aspect of being a compelling character: the ability to choose their path and decide their actions themselves. When they are side characters, many of them are treated as props or background decorations as opposed to the male figure who is "free to command the stage, a stage of spatial illusion in which he articulates the look and creates the action" (Mulvey 839). Even when they are the main characters, they tend to also become sidelined in their own stories.

It is important to note that simply creating a physically strong female character is not a disrespectful approach. In fact, after years of only existing as damsels in distress, it is important to give female characters the capacity to stand up for themselves. Therefore, there is nothing inherently wrong with action heroines as long as they are three dimensional, developed characters. However the "strong independent woman" trope symbolizes something else entirely. As parodied by Kate Beaton in a series of comic strips titled "Strong Female Characters" (see fig. 14), it describes a woman with vaguely empowering qualities who still fits a male-desired notion of sexuality. It creates the notion that physical strength directly leads to character depth without any real character progression. However, the reason that female characters have a weak presence within the narrative is not because of physical strength but a lack of growth. As long as these

characters show depth, agency and a sense of direction, they do not need to possess physical strength to be considered strong:

> The fallacy in Hollywood is that if you're making a "feminist" story, the woman kicks ass and wins. That's not feminist, that's macho. A movie about a weak, vulnerable woman can be feminist if it shows a real person that we can empathize with. (Portman)

In many cases, these female characters' freedom is only superficial. A closer look reveals that these characters are founded upon a very ambiguous and shallow understanding of what makes a woman strong. It is a trope that insinuates depth but fails to deliver it. While these characters are physically strong, they are devoid of characteristics that might humanize them.

The concept of character agency is especially significant for the analysis of the female android archetype as the ability to choose their path and decide their actions themselves are important aspects of a compelling character. Even though characters cannot have actual agency as they are fictional constructs, the illusion of autonomy is crucial for the narrative. A character's actions create "an operative paradox of realism where the world experienced by characters is open-ended and contingent, where the particular chains of cause-and-effect that comprise the novel's plot appear as the consequence of characters' choices" (Wang 291). This approach to agency is more illusory and collective as it defines the mechanics of a narrative as a whole. Therefore, a more direct and relevant definition of character agency with a specific focus on female characters may be necessary:

> Character agency is […] a demonstration of the character's ability to make decisions and affect the story. This character has motivations all her own. She is active more than she is reactive. She pushes on the plot more than the plot pushes on her. Even better, the plot exists as a direct result of the character's actions.The story exists because of the character. The character does not exist because of the story. (Wendig)

These direct decisions, however artificial they may be, are the signals that suggest movement in the character's arc. They convey to the audience that the character is not stagnant and that they can make their story move forward on their own. However, with their origin as automatons designed to obey orders combined with the narrative's refusal

to grant them willpower and initiative and aforementioned issues of objectification, these early depictions of female coded artificial characters lack this basis upon which a multi layered character can be built. When they are side characters, many of them are treated as props or background decorations while the main story is centered around the male characters. Even when they are the main characters, they tend to also become sidelined in their own stories.

Within the framework of this examination of the femme fatale trope, *Eve of Destruction* is in a unique position. It is a mixture of the sexualized femme fatale trope and a continuation of the android as a human tool theme, but this time in both a literal and metaphorical way. On the surface, the film tells the story of EVE VIII, an android programmed to look exactly like her creator Dr. Eve Simmons. When she is damaged during a bank robbery, EVE VIII taps into repressed memories that belong to Dr. Simmons and set off on a journey retracing her life and wreaking havoc on the way. In reality, the story is about Dr. Eve Simmons herself and Colonel Jim McQuade trying to stop EVE VIII.

EVE VIII is described as state of the art, the labor of years of experiments by the military to create the perfect human look alike. Not only does she have the doctor's physical attributes but also her thoughts, feelings and memories which makes her more human like. Before her escape, she embodies the perfect artificial tool designed to replicate humans but also to possess immense power. It is stated that she is designed for surveillance work but can also be used as a potent battle weapon. After her escape, she becomes the perfect embodiment of the femme fatale. Her attractiveness is amplified with the way she dresses. Upon her escape, she immediately acquires black and red colored clothes, these striking colors and her choice to wear these colors even though she has practical clothes being used to convey the message that she is breaking free of the mold created for her and moving into the femme fatale persona (see fig. 15). This non-human embodiment of the femme fatale poses an even bigger threat as it is a combination of "the threat of a rising female consciousness and the increasing

industrialisation of reality into a dangerous union between woman-machine" (Du Preeze 132).

The woman as lure trope which is seen in *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* transforms into woman as seductress in *Eve of Destruction* as the woman's intentions turn sinister. This is a common trope which positions women as dangerous temptresses who use their sexual appeal to trap men. This trope is applied to both human and non-human characters, though the non-human incarnations of this trope are presented as more dangerous because of the non-human nature of the female coded character:

> We have a whole collection of supernatural creatures using their sexuality to manipulate and control men in order to fulfill some nefarious plan of doom. You'll notice that these supernatural creatures are not necessarily enjoying or exploring their sexuality, they're not even really being genuinely sexual, they are just using it to manipulate and trick men. So we see over and over again female characters written as The Evil Demon Seductress who are portraying women as manipulative, conniving and controlling, that these demon women always have ulterior motives, and that there sexuality is dangerous and they'll probably bite your head off. The harmful misogynist myth that this tropes reinforces is that women primarily use their so-called sexual power as a way to manipulate, trick and control men. This fallacy is widespread and pervasive and some men even claim that women hold more power in society purely based on this absurd myth. (Sarkeesian)

The non-human and soulless seductress, who uses sexual traits associated with human women, is an additional source of anxiety as it ties into the aforementioned anxieties about a humanoid body devoid of humanity.

The beginning of the film has an expository montage where the audience receives verbal and visual information about EVE VIII. While her qualities are described, the camera frames her body from a clearly sexual perspective with deliberate close ups and sweeping shots. This continues throughout the film with the camera constantly embodying the male gaze and sweeping over her body. This becomes quite literal in one particular scene where a man is shown looking at EVE VIII followed by a shot in which the camera sweeps over her body in a clearly objectifying manner (see fig. 16). However, these visual elements are not limited to the camera movements which exist outside of the film's universe. During the film, EVE VIII constantly invokes the power of looking. Her directed and suggestive looks are a main focus throughout the film and

she constantly uses these to manipulate the men around her. It is a clear demonstration of the act of looking as a non-neutral act. As Lisa Cartwright and Marita Sturken state: "Through looking, we negotiate social relationships and meanings. Looking is a practice much like speaking, writing, or signing. Looking involves learning to interpret and, like other practices, looking involves relationships of power" (10). These relationships of power are examined throughout the film; between EVE VIII and her creator, EVE VIII and the men mistreating her and even Dr. Simmons and Colonel McQuade. EVE VIII constantly encounters male characters who mistreat her and her violent reactions and the way they are framed create a conflicting message. The male characters who abuse her are clearly positioned as being immoral, however, her violent tendencies are also framed as immoral and she is shown as a dangerous experiment that has to be exterminated.

The film has a blunt subtext about technology as Colonel McQuade is constantly pitted against Dr. Eve Simmons in a clear primitive vs. science power relation. The film, which starts with praise for military's technological progress, starts to ask questions about the ramifications of technological advancement:

> "She's a battlefield nuclear weapon. She is designed to be deployed at hostile countries. She is our answer to their space shield." [...] "You really do think you are God. Except doctor, when God created his Eve, he did it to shake us up a little bit. Now you've gone one better and designed one that'll blow us all away." (*Eve of Destruction,* 00:52:22-00:53:26*)*

The duality of the title becomes more prominent as the film progresses. Aside from the clear use of the saying eve of destruction to refer to annihilation, the title also references the Bible myth of Eve as the first woman created who committed the first sin by eating the fruit of knowledge and inviting Adam to do the same as well (Freedman and Myers).

The way the film focuses on EVE VIII's exploits gives the impression that the film is about her. However, it soon becomes apparent this is an illusion. Under the femme fatale narrative and action scenes lies a very simple android as an extension of human desires motif. After EVE VIII kills several men at a bar she visits, Dr. Simmons realizes that EVE VIII's actions have a pattern as she states, "she is going through my life, only there are no barriers, no stop signs. Whatever damage she sustained destroyed all her

inhibitions. She's doing things I might think about doing but would never dare to do, or have the courage to do" (1:09:09-1:09:32). Since she possesses the doctor's memories, EVE VIII is locked into a behavioral pattern where she tries to go through the doctor's secret wishes desires such as visiting a bar which she always wanted to visit as a teenager, trying to find her abusive father who killed her mother, and kidnapping her son. Thus, EVE VIII becomes the literal embodiment of the doctor's repressed emotions. This embodiment of repression resembles Freud's theory of hysteria in which a person's subconscious can create a new body that is an amalgamation of the secret desires it hides:

> [...] a theory of repression, according to which a person can "know" something unconsciously without "knowing" consciously. The spectacular scenes of hysteria are accordingly interpreted as bodily manifestations of dark and hidden (sexual) secrets. It is argued that hysterical women's performances actually embody their guilty consciences about their hidden sexual desires, which cannot otherwise be vented in public. The body is therefore attempting to tell the "truth" about a guilty mind, which does not know its own secrets to the full. (Du Preeze 22)

It can be argued that EVE VIII becomes a literal embodiment of this theory by sharing a mind with the doctor. EVE VIII is a symbol for not just one but multiple emotions and desires that the doctor repressed over the years. She visits the bar to live the doctor's old sexual fantasies which is a reflection of her desires. She tries to find her abusive father which is a manifestation of her hatred. She is also triggered by hearing derogatory words from men which is a relic from her old life with her abusive father. Lastly, her kidnapping the doctor's son is not out of hatred or the desire to hurt but rather a reflection of her anxieties regarding motherhood as she constantly ask him "You miss me don't you? Timmy, I love you, you know that" (1:17:02) even while she's kidnapping him.

One common thread tying all her actions together is violence. Whether it be exploring her sexuality, taking revenge or trying to be a good mother, her urges manifest themselves as violent acts of aggression. This embodiment is also utilized to position the doctor and EVE VIII as opposites. Although EVE VIII's destructive tendencies are fueled by the doctor's deep desires, she is clearly presented as the right path. Her

non-revealing clothing, helpful nature and her place as a mother positions her as an harmless and proper character. In contrast, EVE VIII is sexualized, dangerous and aimless. At a particular scene in the bar when she seduces a man, the way the film situates her in the scene evokes the castration complex which is the fear of loss or damage to the penis (Schwartz 204). First the frame positions her face right between the men's legs in a striking image of prevailing male sexuality (see fig. 17). However, after hearing the man's derogatory language towards her, EVE VIII violently castrates him and goes on a killing spree. The trope of the castrating woman as an emasculating force against men is evoked as she both literally castrates a man but also undermines him through her disobedient actions.

On the surface, through the narrative decision to make EVE VIII literally embody the fears and desires of Dr. Simmons, the film seemingly subverts a very common trope that the femme fatale character usually invokes. This archetype is known for straying from the roles society associates with woman, one of which is motherhood. The femme fatale is a lone wanderer, removed from structure and functioning as a solitary force that traps the pure characters who follow the status quo. Therefore, the femme fatale symbolizes the anxiety of women who have the freedom to draw a different path for themselves, her rejection of motherhood being one of her most threatening traits since denying the immortality and posterity of men leads to the ultimate destruction of the male (Allen 193).

However, a closer look reveals that all of this character development is an illusion as all the decisions EVE VIII makes, which suggest that she has agency or a personality even though it is an immoral one, is revealed to be an extension of Dr. Simmons' life. EVE VIII has no path of her own that she is willingly following to set herself free. She is a literal pawn in the doctor's game of life. She has inklings of a blooming personality with the way she reacts to the world around her. However, any semblance of an arc where she might grow is abandoned in favor of developing the doctor's character which is a clear parallel to the way female characters traditionally tend to sacrifice their development in favor of developing male characters. Her search for motherhood could have been a

breaking of the mold regarding the femme fatale trope, but this too is an echo passed down to her from the doctor. As a character, EVE VIII is in a unique position because as a femme fatale she is the embodiment of male fears and desires, but as a character within this particular narrative, she is the embodiment of a female character's fears and desires.

She has the illusion of change as her journey through the doctor's repressed emotions give the impression of a fleshed out character with her wants and needs and an unpredictable behavior pattern. However, underneath this exterior, she is a vessel which the narrative uses to explore and develop the human character As the charming but dangerous femme fatale persona, the desperate android soul searching and a literal tool with which the human characters search for themselves, she seems to have it all. Her body being identical to Dr. Simmons is a narrative tool which is used to familiarize the audience with the doctor and direct them to draw clear comparisons between the two characters. The doctor is painted in a much better light as the responsible and capable mother and EVE VIII as her worst self, an example of what she could have been if she hadn't followed the status quo and repressed her urges. Here, the artificial being is an extension of humanity and a vessel utilized to explore the human condition. EVE VIII's lack of original characteristics casts a shadow on the beginnings of an individuality within the narrative. She becomes a spectacle, entertaining to watch because she is a source of sexuality and violence, but ultimately a side character. She is not just a literal device to be used by humans, she is a literary device as well, as her entire existence is used as a metaphor for the doctor.

Eve of Destruction signifies important changes since *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*. The former film's perspective of its female androids as mass produced products was an exaggerated one. However, *Eve of Destruction* leaves behind one trope and replaces it with another. Although the new archetype might not be quite as obviously objectified and submissive as old incarnations of female characters, it still fails to break the actual mold. The overly sexualized strong femme fatale image may create the illusion that the character will be allowed to have agency in the narrative. However, it is revealed that although EVE VIII's visual presentation may suggest

otherwise, she is still an underdeveloped character who is designed to be the embodiment of a human's fears and desires.

CHAPTER II:
THE ARTIFICIAL BEING AS HUMAN CONDITION

Programmed for love, she can be quite tender
See how I'm kind, nothing offends her
She vacuums the carpet and doesn't complain
She'll walk the dog in the pouring rain

Was (Not Was), "Robot Girl"

Previous examples of artificial beings were simple props within the narrative. They functioned simply as spectacles and didn't carry any deep connotations. However, another type of depiction of artificial beings is presenting them as metaphors for the human condition. These characters may signify various kinds of human experiences, one of which is oppression and inequality. Artificial beings have the potential to be utilized to reflect society's oppression of women and the gender roles forced upon them. However, this representation still does not give the artificial characters a voice as they become simple conduits through which humans can tell stories about the problems they personally face.

2.1. Imagining The Artificial In The Human Image

As a genre, science fiction has a visually alien but thematically human nature as it utilizes technological elements but uses simple storytelling which "explores the human condition, [...] addresses how people experience and relate to the world" (Zaharick). Even through its many iterations, the main focus of science fiction remained the same: putting the current state of humanity and human condition in perspective by speculating about the future. The basis of the human condition is three major instincts; self-preservation, reproduction and greed (Taflinger). Protecting and preserving one's self is a basic instinct that breeds fear, anxiety and other types of defensive emotions. Reproduction commonly means breeding to keep the species alive. However, it could also be interpreted as the need to recreate and reflect the current generation through the

next for posterity, to deconstruct and reform the self to not only keep the species alive but also to elevate its existence. Lastly, greed is derived from the first two instincts. The need to both protect and further the self results in curiosity and fear which often feed each other. All of these instincts are reflected in the science fiction genre.

New discoveries and new narrative endeavors within the science fiction canon come from the curiosity of the creators and their instinct to preserve and cultivate themselves. Likewise, depictions of a bleak, and dystopian society also come from the many current anxieties humans harbour, usually tied to anxieties regarding their passion to create and recreate in the first place. In her introduction to her 1969 science fiction novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. LeGuin comments on a common misconception regarding the science fiction genre and defines it as a thought-experiment:

> Science fiction is often described, and even defined, as extrapolative. The science fiction writer is supposed to take a trend or phenomenon of the here-and-now, purify and intensify it for dramatic effect, and extend it into the future. "If this goes on, this is what will happen."[...] Fortunately, though extrapolation is an element in science fiction, it isn't the name of the game by any means. It is far too rationalist and simplistic to satisfy the imaginative mind, whether the writer's or the reader's. [...] The purpose of a thought-experiment...is not to predict the future...but to describe reality, the present world. Science fiction is not predictive; it is descriptive. (8)

According to this definition, science fiction's purpose is to contextualize the present day under the guise of predicting the future. It takes the various branches of current society and interprets and comprehends them by reaching towards the future. A creator's depiction of the future not only reflects their predictions but also the branches of society by which they were inspired. Therefore, it can be stated that the speculative elements of science fiction are both a major part of the genre and also a tool with which the creator can reflect the world around them onto their narrative. In this sense, as one of the many tools science fiction uses to comment on the human condition, artificial characters are also not exempt from being utilized to tell a human story. In fact, they have proved to be a versatile metaphor through which creators delineate humans in their various forms. The cyborg can be "a cultural figuration, a post-feminist metaphor, a monster emergent from flesh and technology and a powerful collective movement" (Sued 95). Since their integration into science fiction, the concepts of robots and

androids in fiction have been a vehicle for humans to express their opinions about the human condition, human struggles and human ideals on their own terms, which resulted in artificial creations becoming vessels through which human concepts of gender performance and identity have been expressed.

The narrative motif of artificial characters take many shapes. They can be used as a metaphor for human progress, directed evolution[10] or could even be a clever analogy for an advanced god complex which pave the way for the construction of a creation in human's own image. However, they have also been used as social commentary on the human condition. Their use in the genre has been contradictory and as characters, they represent a much more complex analogy for humans as opposed to other non-human characters in the genre:

> In principle, the physical and social gulf between humans and androids in science fiction films is far greater than that between humans aliens. Aliens, regardless of the color of their skin or the shape of their ears, are still living beings, but androids—no matter how completely they mimic the image of their human creators—are still machines. Made rather than born, they are designed for the express purpose of being placed under human control, used to meet human needs, and then discarded when they are no longer useful [...] In practice, however, android characters come across as "just like us" more readily, and more comprehensively, than alien ones. Their humanity—which embraces intelligence, self-awareness, and in some cases even emotion—is more apparent on screen than the underlying technology that produces it. The mismatch between androids' appearance (human) and social status (tool) has driven the plots of science fiction films from *Metropolis* (1927) to the present day. (Van Riper 23)

These artificial characters serve a dual purpose within the narrative. They represent both human struggles and condition and also an evolution of the human species. Isaac Asimov's description of science fiction, "that branch of literature which deals with the reaction of human beings to changes in science and technology" (Ingersoll 24), also suggests a constant tie to the human condition. According to Haraway, a cyborg is a creature of "social reality" as well as a creature of fiction (149). Therefore, even futuristic concepts in the genre tend to be used to convey a message about the current condition of humans. However, the route this progress takes is very much influenced by who is creating these characters, which creates a certain pattern. The authors envision

[10] Directed evolution: Also known as self directed or participant evolution, it means seizing control of various technological evolutionary tools to control the human evolutionary process (Mehlman 96). The term has been widely embraced by transhumanism community.

the posthuman character as a higher being, yet saddle this being with old-fashioned human concepts and misconceptions through attribution. This attribution does not stop at mere gender assignment. It becomes a metaphor for gender roles, objectification and the concept of male-as-norm (Danesi 183).

Artificial characters are capable of encompassing a wide range of human experiences, depending on the writer who is constructing them. This allegorical importance can be observed from the beginnings of these characters to their latest incarnations. The common theme of artificial beings as tools is inspired by the struggle of the working class. Karel Čapek's original robots were artificial workers rising up against the masters who created them, in a literary work written and performed in the early days of the Soviet revolution. What Van Riper described earlier as a mismatch between an androids' appearance as a human and its social status as a tool in M*etropolis* (1927) is also an extension of the human condition. The robots in *Metropolis* are being exploited right alongside their human counterparts. The class allegory is mixed with gender relations to cinematically represent the inversion of causality between work and sexuality (Stoicea 21). In a genre which constantly utilizes the concept of post-social unity, android as racial allegory also becomes significant. From the mixture of man vs. robot and white vs. black clash in *I, Robot* (Brayton 72) to the freedom seeking, segregated, heavily racially coded androids in David Cage's 2018 video game *Detroit: Become Huma*n (Graber-Stiehl), artificial beings have been used to represent society's anxieties regarding racial tension.

Android as sexual allegory is also a common theme in various science fiction works. Inheriting the role of dangerous sexual deviant from early horror monsters who shaped the repressed but familiar inclinations of humans into unfamiliar and monstrous non-human forms coming back to haunt the repressed (Wood 10), the android embodies the fear of unconventional expressions of sexuality. The origins of the image of the female coded android who uses sexuality to manipulate humans can be traced all the way back to *Metropolis* and the juxtaposition of male fears of powerful technologies with fears of female sexuality (Huyssen 224) and has endured to this day, *Ex Machina*

(2014) being a very recent example. In addition to the metaphor of uncontrollable robots as untameable female sexuality, androids may also signify a more modern concern regarding gender. With the evolution of science fiction, artificial beings may not have to simply be a metaphor for isolation anymore. They could be a tool with which isolated individuals could reproduce apparatuses, take part in assisted reproduction and design new technologies to facilitate gender transition/confirmation (Jarvis 3). Now cyborg itself can be an individual who takes control of its selfhood and would then be in danger of being labeled a deviation, "a blasphemy against the will of the Creator" (Čapek 35) which is an argument commonly expressed towards marginalized groups in real life.

Through the varied depictions of the artificial being, its treatment as the Other remains a constant theme. Although the android is not a real Other compared to other marginalized groups who deal with these discriminations in real life, the imagined Otherness of the android not only reflects the society but also helps the audience relate to the othering of isolated individuals through the use of fiction. The robotic Other enhances awareness of the real Other's suffering and subjugation in terms of class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender identity and disability. The robotic Other essentially becomes a mirror for the audience. It represents their alter ego, a fictional Other they can both relate to and see the reflection of a part of society they do not interact with often (Humphrey 6).

Certain aspects of the human condition are favored when it comes to depictions of female artificial beings and the way they relate to the struggles of human women. Certain struggles that encapsulate the virulence of gender roles can be encountered constantly. One of them is bodily autonomy, which is one of the basic human anxieties and a common obstacle that androids have to overcome in fiction. The question of bodily autonomy is directly linked to the origins of androids as representations of the human desire to recreate the human form.

As discussed in Chapter I, reconstructing the female form is a particularly prevalent way of trying to create "the perfect woman" and as a carefully constructed image of the

ideal woman, the female android has to achieve consciousness first and foremost by reclaiming her body. This reclaiming is a direct parallel to the way women in real life struggle to take control of their identity and imagery which have been co-opted or taken away completely by the health movement in the U.S., colonialism, misogyny, racial bias and ableism (Haraway, "The Virtual Speculum" 22). Trying to control the way the world sees the individual becomes not only important but also inevitable when this certain perspective has important repercussions for both the individual and the entire group they belong to. As the female android is a such a visually and functionally distinct symbol, commenting on the struggle of bodily autonomy through the android is an obvious choice. In certain instances, these two concepts intersect as body modification has been used by women as a way to insert their control over their own bodies. According to this phenomenon, marking and transforming the body can symbolically "reclaim" the body from its victimization and objectification in patriarchal culture (Pitts 49).

Another human struggle reflected onto the android is the search for purpose. As previously mentioned, two of the three major human instincts are self-preservation and greed which breed fear and curiosity at the same time. The combination of these two seemingly opposite instincts create a need for purpose, both to protect and to further oneself which in return eventuates in progress:

> Purpose can be characterized as a central, self-organizing life aim. Central in that when present, purpose is a predominant theme of a person's identity. Self-organizing in that it provides a framework for systematic behavior patterns in everyday life. As a life aim, a purpose generates continual goals and targets for efforts to be devoted. A purpose provides a bedrock foundation that allows a person to be more resilient to obstacles, stress, and strain. (McKnight and Kashdan 242)

This sense of purpose has various layers as at one level, it could refer to the incentive objectives, goals, and plan while at a deeper level, "purpose is concerned with the existential values: what really matters in life and what would make for the ideal good life" (Wong 80).

Unlike humans, the purpose of the android is clear as it was originally created both as a result of humans' sense of curiosity and to take over the necessities of life so that

humans could further pursue their sense of curiosity. It provides an organizational system in which "such robot-like problems are taken care of automatically and unconsciously, leaving humans free to explore, to create, to think, and to feel" (Clynes and Kline 27). As a creation who can only exist through meticulous and intentional measuring to fit a specific need, the android is in a unique position where it can come into existence with innate knowledge about its purpose. However, the problem is android's purpose is designated by its creators which may prove to be insufficient for the creation itself who is in the process of self-actualization. Throughout the history of science fiction, the android has existed both as a being with a particular goal and also a being in constant search for its own individual purpose separate from the one placed upon them by their creator. This search is shaped into particular struggles when the android is female coded. As a being who is constructed to look like a woman, the female coded android's goals appear to be sexual in nature. Moving away from the strict roles expected of them and finding their own sense of self becomes extremely important to the female android. By straying away from the box they are expected to fit in, the female androids demonstrate a similar aim that most women in real life share. For a woman, searching for purpose is directly linked to their desire to move away from the gender roles they are expected to obey because these roles become a hegemonic myth with which women's lives are shaped from an early age (Blum, Mmari and Moreau S3).

Lastly, there is the issue of dehumanization which is an important part of the self awareness process for androids. In regard to humans, dehumanization means demonizing and rendering the Other less than human and therefore not worthy of humane treatment (Maiese). For the android, literal dehumanization does not pose an immediate threat. As their foundations are rooted in their non-humanness, being seen as separate from them is an expected outcome of their nature. However, for the android, the real dehumanization process starts with stripping away their selfhood regardless of their status as a being. Being seen as superior to humans in terms of function and inferior in terms of consciousness, they are regarded as lower beings and treated as such. Dehumanization starts with assumed apathy at the expanse of the artificial being

which leads to the disregarding of their individual experiences which in return leads to the removal of agency. For the artificial being, trying to prove their individuality is only possible by going through a series of inquiries designed by humans to determine if they are worthy of gaining the title of human, the most famous one being "the imitation game" by A. M. Turing, now referred to as the Turing Test in which a human and a machine interact in separate rooms while the human tries to understand whether the other party is human or machine (433). The very design of the Turing Test positions the human as the base state through which intelligence is evaluated and the machine as the lesser who has to prove their individuality by manipulating a human's expectations.

This attitude breeds an enduring theme in science fiction; oppression. Oppression is described as "the social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group or institution. [...] The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited, and deprived of privileges by the individual or group who has more power" (Barker 303). The discrimination against artificial beings comes from the dehumanization itself as the oppressor does not recognize the oppressed as a fully realized individual. As the oppressor sees themselves as the authority more and more, the oppressed starts to push against the limitations set by the oppressor. There is a direct link between this fictional oppression narrative and the real life oppression imposed on many different groups such as institutionalized racism (Van Wormer and Link 179), homophobia (184), and sexism (185). In terms of female coded androids, the dehumanization of the android is a clear reflection of the dehumanization of women in real life. In real life, this works through manipulation, underestimating, degrading, minimising the female struggle and basically treating them as less than the moral equals of men (LeMoncheck 165), which in return echoes through many science fiction narratives. Strict gender roles can be observed in many different female coded android characters. Although the particular situations can differ, the uniformity in which this fictional symbol and real humans relate to each other helps bring these issues to light.

Science fiction has dealt with the womanhood experience in different ways. Women's roles have been limited to villain or damsel in distress for a long time. As examined in

Chapter I, the archetype of the physically strong but two dimensional women has been very dominant in the genre recently. However, there have also been many instances where science fiction creators dealt with the real life issues of sexism and oppression directly. Margaret Atwood's 1985 book *The Handmaid's Tale* explores an extreme dystopia, Gilead, ruled by a fundamentalist regime that treats women as property of the state. Ursula K. LeGuin explores feminist themes in nearly all of her works, the most notable one being *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), which tells the story of Tenar discovering how her society manipulates and traps young women and *The Left Hand of Darkness* (2000) which explores themes of gender fluidity. Octavia Butler's books mainly feature women of color who have agency in their own narrative. The most notable examples are her 2004 novel *Kindred*, which tells the story of an African American woman named Dana who is wrenched through time into antebellum Maryland via time travel, and her *Earthseed* (1993-1998) series which follows a young woman as she travels through a dystopian landscape by herself. With the increase of female authors in science fiction (Crisp), the perspectives on women shifted as these authors were able to express their own perspectives.

The works that this chapter will focus on, 1975 film *The Stepford Wives* and its 2004 remake feature clear depictions of feminist criticism of gender roles. By invoking the striking imagery of the enslaved female androids, the films blend the early concepts of constructing a woman with actual social commentary on the concept of creating "the perfect woman." As discussed before, as a visual medium, cinema has the power to reshape these important issues and bring them into sharp focus by giving shape to a concept which is already very visual by its very nature. The physical objectification of the androids through the male gaze is intertwined with the narrative choices of the story. The film openly acknowledges the sexism present within this community, therefore the visual cues become contributing tools used to amplify the social commentary.

2.2. The Clash of Real vs. Perfect Women in *The Stepford Wives* (1975)

During the 1960s and 70s, feminism entered its second wave which focused on achieving equality through legal and political means changing the cultural landscape (DuBois and Dumenil 630). This movement was important for sexual liberation, disruption of the nuclear family, regaining medical control, and women entering the workforce. With these developments came a backlash against these achievements in which opposers emphasized traditional family values, gender roles and a pro-life stance (649). This backlash was a manifestation of the male anxiety regarding the achievements of the women's liberation movement. As Goode states, "men view[ed] even small losses of deference, advantages, or opportunities as large threats" (207). This loss created the idea of the masculinity crisis which was believed to be women's fault and this crisis could only be solved by the subordination of women (Kimmel, "Men's Responses" 262).

The idea that men might go to drastic measures to regain control over women and the consequent anxiety that comes with this notion is intimately reflected in Bryan Forbes' film *The Stepford Wives* (1975). Made during the end of second wave feminism, the film paints a disturbing picture of a possible future where the triumphs of the movement drive patriarchal forces to drastic measures in an attempt to retain social and structural power. Although it may not share the common tropes of dystopian narratives such as disasters, desolate landscapes and distant futures, the town of Stepford is ultimately a dystopia of a more possible future where the will to replicate the human condition is combined with the will to retain the patriarchal system. The film is an adaptation of Ira Levin's 1972 novel of the same name. However, this analysis will focus on the film adaptation by discussing both the narrative and film language in regard to the subjugation of the female characters and the embodiment of male desire and anxiety in the form of artificial beings.

The Stepford Wives tells the story of Joanna Eberhart (see fig. 18) who moves to the small town of Stepford on the insistence of her husband. As she tries to get used to smalltown life, she uncovers a layered conspiracy about the men in Stepford and how

they recreate the women around them in an artificial form designed to suit their needs. As Joanna navigates this small world of poorly imitated womanhood, the audience is taken on a journey along with her as the center of the story. Her independent attitude combined with her status as the protagonist gives the audience a frame of reference with which they can measure the "perfect" Stepford wives. Compared to Joanna, the robot wives are short sighted, docile and submissive. Their only goal is to be a perfect wife with no aspirations of their own. Instead of letting these issues passively exist, the film addresses them head on through its clear textual feminist roots which are essential for its place as a disturbing critique of patriarchal society:

> The film's examination of the plight of the dissatisfied middle-class house wife, its parody of the fetishization of the housework, its explicit critique of the nuclear family, and its relentless focus on the constructedness and artificiality of female beauty are key issues to which second wave feminist drew public attention. (Silver 60)

The film takes the concept of constructing the perfect woman out of male dominated, isolated narratives and finally positions it against a human woman. Until now, the criticism for the manipulation of the female body and experience in science fiction cinema was done outside of the world of film by critics and writers. Now, human women encounter and directly confront artificial women within the narrative. How the constructed womanhood tries to undermine, erase, and replace the authentic human womanhood is portrayed with vivid detail.

As the central character, Joanna's portrayal as a three dimensional character with her own thoughts, beliefs, desires and problems is essential to the ultimate battle between the real and the perfect. As Lorber and Moore state, "there is no such thing as a real woman" (106), as in there is no one way to be a woman; conformity, resistance and adaptability can all exist within a woman. As for Joanna, she has flaws which are used to humanize her in the narrative and separate her from the artificial constructs as she is depicted as a genuinely loving but still independent mother who does not dedicate every moment of her life to her children. She has no compulsions about speaking her mind to her husband and is aware of the illusion of choice he presents in their marriage:

> Why don't you ever once just tell me the truth? You pretend we decide things together, but it's always you, what you want. You asked me if I wanted to move out here, and I

> found you'd already been looking at a house.You asked me if I liked this place, and I found you'd already made a down payment. Now you're asking me about the lousy men's association, and it's quite obvious you've already joined. Why bother to ask me at all? (*The Stepford Wives*, 00:14:57-00:15:20)

Her interest in photography gives her a way to express herself and the way she sees the world. At the beginning of the movie, the first thing Joanna does after she leaves her house is to take a picture of a man carrying a naked mannequin (see fig. 19). This scene not only establishes Joanna as an aspiring photographer, it also sets up the themes of the film as the film language draws a parallel between Joanna and the plastic female body and uses it as a foreshadowing device. Here, the film also uses costume as an aspect of environmental storytelling as Joanna is clothed in loose fitting and comfortable outfits with a bandana on her head. The film further uses this imagery as a symbol as the mannequin also has a bandana on its head but it covers its entire face. According to Suzanne Leonard, the mannequin's appearance and the bandana "conceptualizes the female body as synthetic, powerless and lacking the ability to look" (Leonard 17). Before Joanna utters a single word, the film conveys both her personality and the themes of the film solely through visual language.

Once Joanna arrives as Stepford, she is portrayed as an outcast in Stepford right away as she is not entirely happy about moving there from the start. When asked what she will miss about New York, her answer is "noise" (00:11:14). As a photographer, New York's crowded and chaotic nature suits her and the move away to the quiet and peaceful town of Stepford effectively rips her away from her nature. The importance of having not only a personal space or "a room of one's own" (Woolf 2) but also how that space must be specifically suited for the person is emphasized through the juxtaposition of seemingly noisy and crowded landscape of New York and the rural and seemingly beautiful landscape of Stepford that suffocates Joanna. The imagery of the spacious house situated at a beautiful landscape and specifically decorated by the wife of the house and filled with material possessions symbolizes a different kind of trapment. As Virginia Woolf states, having a room is only the beginning, "the room is your own, but it is still bare. It has to be furnished; it has to be decorated; it has to be shared. How are you going to furnish it, how are you going to decorate it? With whom are you going to

share it, and upon what terms?" (Woolf 63). The room is the personal space through which women can express themselves. As such, if they are not allowed to have a mind of their own, possessing a room or even an entire house is only a superficial freedom. The character of Charmaine reflects this even better as she is a woman who lives in luxury but does not interact with her husband much. She might have her own tennis court but the knowledge that her husband does not love her and only married her for her physical appearance traps her among all the material possessions she gained through her husband. Women also need their emotional and individual space within their house, their family and the expectations of the nuclear family unit.

The film constantly draws attention to the concept of domestic labor as Joanna and her best friend Bobbie, one of the few real women in Stepford, comment on the cleanliness of the houses at every turn. When Bobbie first visits Joanna, she is happy to find another messy kitchen like hers. The more Joanna and Bobbie spend time in Stepford, the more obvious the issue of domestic labor becomes. The robots are constantly busy with cleaning, cooking, baking, taking care of the house and looking after their husbands. They seem to never stop working and they do not have the need to as they were designed to serve. The ceaselessness of domestic labor occupies an important space in feminist discourse. Named "the problem that has no name" by feminist Betty Friedan, the endless cycle of domestic work failed to provide a compelling purpose in life and resulted in psychological breakdowns (21). Freidan observes that the reason the problem has no name is because housewives were staying quiet and trying to convince themselves that, "There's nothing wrong really. There isn't any problem" (19). A direct parallel can be drawn between this denial and the way Joanna and Bobbie try to convince themselves that they must be imagining that their situation is dire as they look at the way every women but them seem to be happy, wondering "maybe we're the crazy ones" (00:59:51).

This denial is amplified through the gaslighting[11] of women orchestrated by the Men's Association. Throughout the film, the men in Stepford subtly manipulate the new comer women in order to replace them. They draw their pictures, ask them to record their voices and examine their bedrooms in order to be able to perfectly replicate the wives. They provide reasonable excuses for these actions and when the women start to suspect an ulterior motive, they are reassured that everything is fine. The collective and ubiquitous nature of the Men's Association as they function and control the entire town as a unit symbolizes the patriarchy as "a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (Walby 20) instead of individual experiences. Their machinations are so significant yet subtle that Joanna doubts herself until the very end. When she finally allows herself to say out loud all the things she had been contemplating, "If I'm wrong, I'm insane, and if I'm right, it's worse than if I'm wrong" (01:26:25), she is still questioning her own mind. The Men's Association are confident as well as subtle as they openly utilize their perfect wives, grope them in public and assert their dominance freely. The head of the Men's Association Dale Coba, also known as Dis, comments on Joanna brewing coffee in the kitchen with " I like to watch women doing little domestic chores." to which Joanna replies with, "You came to the right town" (00:28:32). Their presentation as an unyielding body of oppression doing things "because they can" (01:42:08) is a clear manifestation of the patriarchy as a widespread and powerful force.

In order to understand the anxieties and desires of the Men's Association and through them, the process of robot creation, a deeper examination of male anxiety during second wave feminism is necessary. Despite the aforementioned ubiquity of the patriarchy, men felt threatened and anxious during the second wave as the traditional concept of manhood was being called into question. The image of the "breadwinner, stoic master of his fate, and swashbuckling hero" was exposed as a fraud (Kimmel, *Manhood In America* 190). Men's position as champions was deteriorating because the fields over

[11] Gaslighting: To manipulate (a person) by psychological means into questioning his or her own sanity. The term comes from George Cukor's 1944 film *Gaslight* (a remake of Thorold Dickinson's 1940 version, in turn based on a play by Patrick Hamilton, first performed in 1938), in which a man psychologically manipulates his wife into believing that she is going insane. ("Gaslight")

which they had command were starting to make them feel isolated. The workforce, which had been a source of pride and isolation from women, started to make them feel alienated and disoriented because of the monotony (191). The image of the self made men, which used to be heralded as an ideal state, fell out of favor as society started to believe that its "egoistic individualism promoted estrangement" (193). Even military heroism started to be considered distasteful because of the Vietnam War during which soldiers were seen as "having acted out an excessive and false hypermasculinity" (190). With the fall of these important spheres, men started to run out of places where they felt like they could be themselves.

The culmination of all these disappointments was the resentment of civil rights as many men believed that the rise of the civil right movement and second wave feminism were the cause of their problems:

> Together feminism, black liberation and gay liberation provided a frontal assault on the traditional way that men had defined their manhood—against another who was excluded from full humanity by being excluded from those places where men were real men. It was as if the screen against which American men had for generations projected their manhood had suddenly grown dark, and men were left to sort out the meaning of masculinity all by themselves. (Kimmel 202)

In this context, the male perspective regarding second wave feminism deems the triumphs that women won as failures for themselves because the triumphs affect their lives directly. Women gaining sexual liberation means men start to see every sexual encounter as a "trial of manliness" (198). Women entering the workforce means the destruction of male dominated places and the nuclear family (199). Their reaction showed that fighting for exclusion is a great threat to a system founded upon the exclusion of others (197). Therefore, men started to see this movement not as a fight for equality but as a fight for dominance. According to Richard Doyle, founder of the Men's Defense Association, "The male of the species is under increasing attack legally, politically, economically, and culturally. It is our mission to defend the interests of men, in opposition to the enormity of antimale forces and opinion" (Levit 169). From men's perspective, the increasingly loud voices of minorities posed a threat to the system which served them well for so long. Just like women before them, men were caught up

in a contradictory cycle in which they were both encouraged to seek out traditional family structures but also warned against the feminization of American manhood through the involvement of men in the domestic sphere (Kimmel 199). According to feminists, the cycle could only be broken with men taking responsibility for their actions. This was the core of why the women's liberation movement scared men. Feminists were simply demanding that men change (198) and because men were used to a system where they were in power, they could not foresee the implications of changing themselves because they feared the possibility of abandoning the power they held.

Men's Association in the film stems from this uncertain future where the men in Stepford are anxious about possibly losing their power and thus take drastic measures in order to retain their authority. The denunciation of the expanding crack in their power structure comes from the fear of losing that power which was a very real prospect for Stepford men as the women in Stepford had begun to question their authority and even started a women's club. For them, the possibility of women subjecting them to the same oppression they imposed on them was a very realistic possibility. During the final confrontation between Joanna and Dis, the founder of the association, he expresses his belief that this extreme solution would come naturally to anyone if they had the power to actualize it: "See, think of it the other way around. Wouldn't you like some perfect stud waiting on you around the house? Praising you? Servicing you? Whispering how your sagging flesh was beautiful, no matter how you looked?" (01:42:36-01:42:45) From his perspective, being disappointed in the substandard state of a human and wanting to change it is not the result of hegemonic masculinity which is the configuration of certain gender practices that put men in a position of power over women (Lorber and Moore 115) but instead it is a natural progression of humanity.

Instead of trying to embrace this new freedom and see the patriarchy as a dual system of oppression like some men did during the second wave (Kimmel 206), the men of Stepford decided to go the other route that a lot of men also followed during the second wave which was placing the guilt on others and trying to cling to the status quo. As they thought that women had "a lack of perspective and empathy for the ways in which men

have been trapped" (Goldberg 151), they decided to take the matters in their own hands. The dystopian landscape of Stepford is a speculative narrative about how men might try to take control and change the world to preserve themselves if they feel threatened. Men of Stepford are taking matters into their own hands because they "found a way of doing it that's just perfect. Perfect for us and perfect for you" (01:42:12) and the fact that only they have the right to decide the perfectness of this arrangement is a clear manifestation of the patriarchy's privileged authority in society.

Unlike previous films were the camera was an embodiment of the male gaze, *The Stepford Wives mostly* positions the camera as an amalgamation of Joanna's and the men's textual point of view in order to contrast them. The male gaze exists within the film as a literal aspect of life in Stepford. Instead of the camera embodying the male gaze, the film shows the men watching Joanna by following their gazes with close-ups in order to make the objectifying male gaze textual. This is followed by shots of Joanna staring back, thus directly challenging the male gaze (see fig. 20). This technique is invoked once again towards the finale when Joanna finally enters the Men's Association building. The camera follows Joanna from above, between the banisters of the staircase from a voyeuristic point of view (see fig. 21). This shot invokes the common horror genre trope "Killer POV" which "signals to the viewer the presence of a threat without displaying the monster/killer/bearer of the look on screen" (Hart 69), thus metanarratively positions the Men's Association as the enemy.

Within the framework of this examination of Joanna and the Men's Association, the place of the artificial characters becomes clear. The artificial beings depicted in this film are specifically designed as both props for the male characters and symbols for the female characters. They exist to amplify the plight of human women and become the literal embodiment of patriarchy. They do not have voices of their own but this is not due to their subjugation as artificial beings but because of the subjugation of women. They represent what women are expected to be by the Association and through it, the patriarchy. Firstly, there is a direct parallel between the physicality of the robots and the female struggle to regain bodily control. Two branches of bodily awareness have proved

to be of the utmost importance when it comes to protecting one's own sense of self; "*ownership* which is the feeling that one's body is one's own and *agency* which is the feeling that one is in control of one's body and its actions" (Longo and Haggard 141). With the constant attempts at gaining control of these various aspects of bodily awareness, the female experience becomes a continuous bargain as women try to regain ownership over their bodies while sacrificing agency and vice versa. This search for self determination reveals that "under patriarchy, a woman experiences the female body, her femaleness in diverse ways: as a desirable "object," as a desired object; as a person with feelings, emotions and cognition, she experiences a fracture" (Krishnaraj 39). The construction of "the perfect woman" is one of the many ways this dominance over their bodies manifests itself. Attempting to enhance the female body with technology without the guidance of actual women is simply a modern incarnation of various similar but more primitive practices, from the foot binding tradition in China to the whale bone corsets in England (41). These historical examples are the beginnings of what will ultimately be shaped into the concept of reconstructing the female form according to the standards of society.

The robots are the product of the loss of bodily ownership, as the bodies of women are studied, broken down, and rebuilt according to the needs of patriarchy. With its direct ties to second wave feminism, the film is able to reframe the male desire to reconstruct women through real life issues. The idea of men taking over the reproduction process from women is not solely relegated to the world of science fiction as the institutionalization and governance of women's recreative bodies through social norms, laws, and biomedicine was an important issue during the second wave (Lorber and Moore 55). According to Lorber and Moore, "Individual men and male-dominated institutions have control over who has babies, when they have them, and who claims ownership of those babies" (55). In fact, one of many goals of second wave feminism was to regain control of women's health by learning and practicing reproductive health individually (DuBois and Dumenil 639). However, science fiction depicts a more foundational method of bereaving women's bodily autonomy and ownership by recreating it with metal and steel and filling it with an imitation of womanhood:

> Men control not only their wives' behavior (by murdering and replacing them), but also their ability to reproduce. By killing their wives, the Stepford men break the biological link between women and childbirth, wrestling reproduction from women's control, even as they make child care one of women's main duties. (Silver 69)

The contradiction between robots' pronounced sexuality in service to their husbands and their inability to bleed, be damaged or carry a child is invoked to create a distinction between them and the human characters.

The construction of the robots demands the objectification of the human women by nature. The association's building methods are depicted in a way that draws attention to certain parts of women, thus reducing them to literal objects. They are beautiful, slim, and visually fragile with soft voices. Their physical bodies are not their only visual aspect which is carefully designed according to certain standards. They conform to exaggerated images of feminine beauty in many aspects (Silver 72) as they wear extravagant hats, long and floral dresses and ruffled aprons (see fig. 22) that do not necessarily pronounce their sexual appeal but their status as agreeable housewives. The framing and cinematography are also utilized to distinguish between the human female characters and artificial ones. However, there is a distinct and intentional lack of the typical of tropes of the male gaze such as using the camera to metaphorically caress the female body because Joanna is the point of view character. Instead, the film utilizes film language to amplify the artificiality of the robots as their faces are constantly bathed in a soft light and they are filmed with a soft focus. As Silver states, "Forbes has metaphorically 'airbrushed' the robots to emphasize their status as literalization of male fantasies" (72). The robots' slow walks, soft cadence, subservient intonation and empty conversations create an unrealistic aura and are directly opposed with Joanna and Bobbie's loud voices, harsh tones and opinionated conversations.

The personalities of the robots are also constructs as they have solitary focuses and do not have any other ambitions or desires than serving their husbands. After Charmaine is replaced with a robot, she explains her change of heart by stating, "All I ever thought about before was just me" (01:03:17) which shows the lack of self-actualization in robots compared to the human women. When Joanna and Bobbie finally manage to

form a woman's club, the only thing the robots talk about is their house work. As Joanna and Charmaine confess personal demons, the Stepford wives discuss best ways to clean the kitchen, to the point where one of them starts talking as if she were in a commercial. When they ask Carol Van Sant if her life is enough for her, her reply, "Enough for me maybe's not enough for you, Joanna." (00:59:09) draws a clear parallel between the automatic statements of the robots and the statements of women in real life who opposed the women's liberation movement on the account that the movement was "waging a total assault on the family, on marriage and on children" (Schlafly 3). The Stepford wives behave like traditional women who want to uphold the patriarchy and its values as they "articulate their happiness as anchored in the domestic sphere and in their subservient roles to their husbands" (Johnston and Sears 75) However, their contentment, just like themselves, is revealed to be an artificial construct. The men construct the robots in a way that leave them unable to form their own opinions or show a capability for learning, and thus remove the possibility that they might ever notice and object to their subservient state.

The robots also do not have any concerns for their own well beings as Carol Van Sant constantly repeats, "This is all so silly. It's just my head" (00:17:50) after being hit by a car. After Joanna finds out that Bobbie has been replaced with a Stepford wife (see fig. 23), she stabs her and Bobbie barely reacts, simply walking around the kitchen repeating, "How could you do a thing like that? I thought we were friends" (01:35:23). This lack of desire and self-preservation is directly opposed with the way Joanna and Bobbie openly speak their minds and strive to escape being murdered and replaced.

The robots not only symbolize the gender roles imposed upon women but they also symbolize the destruction of women through these roles. As discussed before, a robot's purpose is a significant part of its nature as it will focus on their mission and will be relentlessly used by their creators until that goal is achieved. Thus, the simple existence of the robots foreshadow the very destruction of Joanna. Being remembered as a part of history through self-actualization is one of the most important things in Joanna's life. When the curator she has been trying to impress asks her what she wants, her reply, "I

want... somewhere, someday, someone to look at something and say, 'Hey, that reminds me of an Ingalls.' Ingalls was my maiden name. I guess I want to be remembered" (01:16:59) is a clear definition of what visibility and recognition mean for women. Joanna's desire to be remembered is directly opposed with the complete and utter erasal of women and their individuality in Stepford. The scene where Joanna begs the psychiatrist to not leave and listen to her is the culmination of this fear. As Joanna realizes the progression of the plot and her own inescapable fate, she breaks down in tears:

> I won't be here when you get back. Don't you see? It's going to happen before then! Don't ask me to explain it. I just know! There'll be somebody with my name. And she'll cook and clean like crazy, but she won't take pictures, and she won't be me! She'll--she'll--she'll be like one of those robots in Disneyland. (01:27:44-01:28:04)

As the film comes to an end, this utter annihilation of Joanna becomes quite literal as she is murdered by her own robot double (see fig. 24) who is "a mechanical literalization of her perfect self" (Leonard 14). Not only does she lose her sense of self but also her life as well. In her place stands an artificial construct who has Joanna's face and name but a more desirable body, a softer voice and a subservient demeanor (see fig. 25). Thus, the film finalizes the complete annihilation of Joanna and any hope that this system might be destroyed. During their final confrontation, Dis tries to convince her to accept her fate by claiming that the robotification process is just "another stage" (01:41:56). The idea that the android symbolizes a type of transcendence that surpasses the mere human stage is a popular notion. However, in this context, the process is non consensual and no matter what Dis says, Joanna knows that she will not transcend, she will cease to exist. The ending is a montage of all the Stepford wives obediently shopping and quietly saying hello to each other in a "horrifying vision of female homogeneity" (Leonard 14). According to actress Nanette Newman, the director "chose to shoot it in an unreal way, so they were almost like a ballet moving in and out, up and down the aisle" (Newman). With the addition of a human woman arguing with her husband amidst this ballet like sequence, once again the distinction between the robots and real women is conveyed through the careful use of cinematography to achieve a clash of realism and surrealism.

The last shot, which is a freeze frame of Joanna's hollow eyes, is a bleak picture which tells the audience that the patriarchy will swallow any objecting voice by marginalizing and silencing them.

The Stepford Wives is a film that does not simply raise feminist questions but actively tries to answer them with textual and thematic narrative devices. The juxtaposition of the lively and independent Joanna and static and subservient robots draws a clear parallel between the way women are and the way women are expected to be. However, the artificial characters themselves do not have a voice in the narrative as they are simply tools to be used. The only difference is that while they are simple spectacles for the men in the film, they are not simple spectacles for the audience. They carry the weight of the oppression of women by embodying the oppression itself.

2.3. Updating The Context of Oppression in *The Stepford Wives* (2004)

After its release in 1975, the original *The Stepford Wives* created a long standing legacy. While the original film's premise was unprecedented at the time, the film has become a cultural phenomenon since then. The concept of the Stepford wife has entered into cultural osmosis and is widely used to describe "a woman who does not behave or think in an independent way, always following the accepted rules of society and obeying her husband without thinking" ("Stepford Wife"). This use shows that the questions regarding the oppression of women that were raised in the original film struck a chord with audiences.

When it comes to works of art that deal with important social issues, such as the case of the original film, it is a common practice to remake or reimagine them in an attempt to recontextualize the topic from a modern perspective. Remakes are constructed with various intents, one of which is the intent to update the source material:

> Update remakes are characterized by their overtly revisionary stance towards an original text they treat as classic, even though they transform it in some obvious way, usually by transposing it to a new setting, inverting its system of values, or adopting standards of realism that implicitly criticize the original as outmoded, or irrelevant. (Leitch 47)

The 2004 remake of *The Stepford Wives* came to existence within this context. Because of its examination of misogynistic and systematic oppression, the original *Stepford Wives* was a promising candidate for a remake from the perspective of twenty-first century feminism. Moreover, screenwriter Paul Rudnick's remarks about how a husband regarding his wife's photography hobby as an assault on his manhood does not fit the twenty-first century and that he wanted to update this topic (Rudnick) fits Leitch's definition of the update remake. Acknowledging the updating aspect of the remake is important in order to understand the specific changes regarding the human and artificial characters and what these changes are trying to convey. The most noticeable differences are the use of the comedy genre and certain changes to certain characters. There may be several reasons for these differences. The comedy aspects and the shifting of the dark, rigid and pessimistic aspects of the original could have been implemented in order to reach a wider audience because while the original is considered to be a beloved cult classic by modern audiences, the reaction to the film when it was first released was mixed. A 1975 New York Times article which discusses a special screening of the film followed by a consciousness - raising session shows that while many female critics praised the film for its feminist themes, many others criticized its pessimistic outlook, such as Linda Arkin who stated that "it confirms every fear we've ever had about the battle of the sexes, and it says there is no way for people to get together and lead human lives" and Betty Friedan who encouraged a walk-out and stated the film was "a rip - off of the women's movement" (Klemesrud). The remake might have wanted to avoid using some of the more polarizing aspects of the original film, such as the use of the horror genre and the pessimistic ending, in order to reach a wider audience. The change to the genre could have also happened because, as previously mentioned, the concept of the Stepford Wives had become well known by 2000s and therefore, a horror film followed by a twist ending might not have worked for a modern audience. No matter the reasons, it is clear that the changes in the remake shift the function of both the human and the artificial characters drastically.

The first noteworthy change in the remake is the characterization of the human female characters. Joanna Eberhart (see fig. 26) is reimagined as a loud, confident and

ambitious business woman who is the president of a major TV network. She is highly motivated and always busy as she is involved more in her work than her husband and children. She creates television shows which are specifically about exploiting gender roles and expectations. After a man, who was left by his wife because of one of these shows, attempts to shoot Joanna, she willingly moves to Stepford in an attempt to get away from the chaos of New York and save her marriage. However, she slowly meets the residents of Stepford, who are submissive wives and domineering husbands. Initially, she makes an effort to be an obedient housewife. However, with the help of her two friends Bobbie Markowitz and Roger Bannister who are also new to the town, she gradually realizes that there is a sinister plot underneath the perfect demeanor of Stepford. Many of the themes and concepts in the original film are altered or reimagined from a different perspective and examining these changes is necessary to understand the function of the artificial beings in the film.

Joanna's characterization is one of the biggest changes as it reframes the entire story in a different light. Instead of a housewife who is trying to find a space for herself within her family, the remade Joanna is very removed from her house to the point of being estranged from her children and forgetting her wedding anniversary. This characterization continues with Bobbie, who is a successful author and fully focused on her career instead of her family, and Roger, who is a successful gay architect and has a larger-than-life personality that draws the attention of the people around him. Similar to the original film, Joanna and her friends are portrayed as a disruption to the status quo. However, the framing of the successful women as intensely cruel and cold towards the Stepford residents and their husbands creates a dissonance. The film constantly juxtaposes the exaggerated emasculation of men at the hands of women and the destruction of female agency which creates what Johnston and Sears call "farcical allusions and inconsistent narratives" (Johnston and Sears 2). The film starts with a montage of all the reality shows Joanna created for the network. In the reality show "Balance of Power," a man and a woman are racing against time while answering questions about personal achievements and the woman is the one who always answers affirmatively. The next show "I Can Do Better," a married couple is offered a weekend

with other people. While the husband decides to go back to his wife, his wife chooses to stay with the models she spent her weekend with by claiming "I can do better!" In all these examples, the men suffer from extreme humiliation to the point of unrealism. According to Suzanne Leonard, the film suggests that letting women dictate the media that Americans consume has dire consequences (22) as they will twist morals and use their positions of power to assert dominance over men. Joanna is portrayed as a woman with immense power within the network she runs and as a woman who uses that power to exploit men's insecurities. Not only does this reflect the male fear of having the powers of the patriarchy turn against them but it also paints an inaccurate picture of the way women are treated within the workforce:

> You could [also] argue that these alpha females, all re-programmed from successful bitches and bores into lovely wives who do dresses and dusting, hide the fact that after 30 years of apparent equality, the majority of women are still low-paid and lacking in opportunities. Few women chair companies. The original Stepford dream, or nightmare, where women rule the world, is a long way off. (Winterson)

Women's refusal to engage with the domestic sphere is also taken to its extreme. Unlike the original film where women were engaged with their children but didn't spend all of their time dedicated to cleaning their house, the film portrays the women as completely cut off and isolated from their own families and loved ones. The image of the housewife who is trying to carve a little room for herself in the house is gone and replaced with the image of "high-powered, neurotic, castrating, Manhattan career bitches" (*The Stepford Wives* (2004), 00:31:41) who only focus on themselves.

Leonard's argument about the film's intentions to discipline women can be applied to the paradoxical way that the film portrays Joanna's character. She is presented as both a highly motivated and workaholic woman and also as willing to completely abandon her career and try to become an obedient housewife after one negative experience at her workplace. After the husband from "I Can Do Better" tries to shoot her, she argues that she may have brought this on herself by saying, "Maybe that man who tried to shoot me, maybe he was right. Maybe I've become the wrong kind of woman. Maybe I've made all of the wrong decisions" (00:12:47- 00:12:57). Unlike Bobbie or Roger, who do not lose their eccentric personalities right until they are replaced, Joanna actively tries to

integrate in the Stepford society. When Walter yells, “Your kids barely know you and our marriage is falling apart. And your whole attitude makes people want to kill you. It makes people try to kill you” (00:28:37-00:28:46) she agrees with him. Later, when she recounts the conversation to Bobbie and Roger, she frames it as a wake up call and cites the fact that Walter was “a different person. He was strong, he was forceful, he was commanding” (00:32:13) as the catalyst for her attempts to become a better wife (see fig. 27). Her character “lacks equilibrium” (Felton 42) and movement as she is portrayed both as a highly ambitious career woman and a wife who gives up on her ambitious to serve her husband at the first sign of hardship in her workforce. According to Felton, Joanna is portrayed as both unsympathetic and passive as both her friends Bobbie and Roger and the men around her guide her story more than she does (Felton 46). During a conversation with Walter, Joanna states that her dominant demeanor comes from the fact that this is the only way she knows how to exist as she states, “But if I'm not the smartest and the best of the best and the most successful, then I don't know, who am I?” (00:31:21). When Walter suggests that she give it a try, she accepts immediately to save her marriage. This passivity continues throughout the film as she is dependent on Walter on multiple occasions, whether it be to open the doors of the futuristic house or to save her and all the brainwashed women in time. Her constant eagerness to agree with Walter and reshape herself according to his needs clearly demonstrates the difference between the Joanna from the 1975 film and the new Joanna. While the original Joanna’s life being in danger was used as a constant source of suspense and tension for the audience, the remake “rationalizes a longing for her death, and suggests that she bears partial responsibility for this wish” (Leonard 22). This framing is not only limited to the scene where Joanna agrees that she might be to blame for the attempt on her life but spreads to the film as a whole with the constant underlying theme that the cold and distant women are partially to blame for the Men’s Association’s plot.

This specific portrayal of women and the way they treat men directly informs the way the Men’s Association and their members are portrayed. Instead of a group of men who are frustrated that their wives are trying to slightly stray away from the norms set out for

them, these men are emasculated and looked down upon. They feel inferior to their successful wives and this becomes the catalyst for their master plan. Even Walter, portrayed as a well-meaning man who ultimately helps Joanna, expresses his frustration about his place in Joanna's life:

> Ever since we met, you've beaten me at everything. You're better educated. You're stronger, you're faster. You're a better dancer, a better tennis player. You've always earned at least six figures more than I could ever dream of. You're a better speaker, a better executive. You're even better at sex. [...] Well, don't I get anything? [...] I got to hold your purse. I got to tell the kids that you'd be late again. I got to tell the press that you had no comment. I got to work for you. [...] Under you. All of us. We married wonder women. Supergirls. Amazon queens. Well, you know what that makes us? [...] We're the wuss. The wind beneath your wings. Your support system. We're the girl. And we don't like it. (01:03:32-01:04:36)

Walter's monologue puts the updated morals of the story in perspective. While the original members of the Men's Association were portrayed as cold, calm, and cunning, the new members are referred to as "drooling nerds" (00:46:56). They spend their time at the association playing with toys, watching football, and competing in glee while claiming "Ah, to be a man!" (00:38:04). This portrayal of infantilized men who are afraid of becoming feminized is a direct parallel to a new representation of the male identity that got popular at the turn of the twentieth century which claimed that "the changes in the nature of work, the closing of the frontier, and changes in family relations had produced a cultural degeneracy" (Kimmel 224). The concept of the male-only Men's Association is inspired by the real life homosocial preserves such as single-sex men's clubs which "men fought vigorously to protect from women despite women's protests that these clubs reproduce men's power in society" (228). The specific wording used to describe these spaces, such as, "a treehouse of our own" (Buckley 256) and "the fraternity house that wouldn't end" (Thompson 254) evokes a search for youth where men can get away from their responsibilities and the demands of feminism. While the real male clubs allowed men to reproduce their power in society by networking with each other, Men's Association allows them to reproduce this power by constructing their desires with technology and imposing them unto women.

The biggest change regarding the portrayal of men in the story is the characterization of Walter. Walter is positioned as a well meaning, faithful and loving husband who feels

invisible under Joanna's dominant presence. He is overly supportive after her breakdown and quietly endures being humiliated by her in public. The change to his name, Walter Kresby, while Joanna's last name stays Eberhart is also presented as one of the ways Joanna humiliates him. Although the film does not draw much attention to this detail, it signifies an important departure from the original story since Joanna's maiden name being Ingalls and they way Joanna laments on the fact that she wants to be remembered with her maiden name were important thematic points in the original film. Walter's characterization along with the portrayal of the men in the Association as nerds points to the fact that these specific men and their childish endeavours were wrong and a real man would not do this as Joanna claims that Walter sticking by his wife is what makes him a man. Although he expresses some frustration about the way Joanna treats him, he helps his wife trick Mike, the head of the association, into thinking she was successfully turned into a Stepford wife. The climax of the film which features Joanna imitating a Stepford wife (see fig. 28) to divert Mike's attention so that Walter can descend down into the laboratories to free the women associates the women's freedom with benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism is defined as a set of attitudes towards women which are not explicitly sexist or hostile but instead manifest as "restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping)" (Glick and Fiske 491). Men's Association could be interpreted as a portrayal of cooperation between men and women and of the love between Joanna and Walter as he claims he helped her because "she's not a science project" (01:19:47). It could also be an answer to the criticisms made against the original film for putting all the blame on men and not letting women take some of the responsibility for their transformations:

> If women turn into replicas of the women in commercials, they do it to themselves. Even if the whole pop culture weighs on them—pushing them in that direction—if they go that way, they're the ones letting it happen. And as long as they can blame the barrenness of their lives on men, they don't need to change. They can play at being victims instead, and they can do it in the guise of liberation. (Kael 112)

By reimagining Walter as the sole voice of reason amongst all the hostile men, the film is able to address these criticisms and attempt to create a harmony between men and women.

However, benevolent sexism is not a harmless set of chivalrous attitudes that help women. Evoking benevolent sexism in a story about women's triumph against the patriarchy can be interpreted as one of the aforementioned inconsistencies because "despite the positive feelings it may indicate for the perceiver, its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance (e.g., the man as the provider and woman as his dependent)" (Glick and Fiske 491-492). This dominance is the core of the patriarchy as patriarchy is not a set of individuals actions made by sexist men but "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance" (Sultana 3). As such, "all men benefit from patriarchy in a myriad of ways, seen and unseen" (Kimmel, "Who's Afraid" 62) regardless of their personal beliefs. Even the original Walter, who was not an explicit monster and had cried after he had his first meeting with the Association and learned the truth, had succumbed to the order of the Association and helped them murder his wife, which was a metaphor for the way even well meaning men can benefit from the patriarchy. The Association was an embodiment of the patriarchy, and it contained multitudes but still possessed the same power and used it against the women of Stepford regardless of the individual members and their individual beliefs. In contrast, the remake's Walter is removed from the systematic and prevalent power of the patriarchy. Walter's individual choices and humane disposition clashes with the original embodiment of the Men's Association as the patriarchy. As such, the benevolent sexism invoked in the climax causes the original message to be distorted. The climax of the film communicates to the audience that "the only means of escaping the clutches of the patriarchal regime is to be rescued by the all important male hero, regardless of the text's feminist persuasions" (Felton 43).

Within this framework, the function of the artificial being becomes more clear. Like the original story, the robots are presented as embodiments of the way patriarchy tries to control and reshape women as Mike claims that they do not kill women, "We help you.

We perfect you" (01:04:41). However, because the perspective of the men and the characterization of the women changed drastically, the robots lose some of their old meanings and gain new ones. One of the biggest changes is the way the robotic characters are framed according to the genre of the movie. The original portrayed the robots as mysterious monsters that represent a horrifying truth. While Joanna observed more and more strange things, she didn't fully understand what these women had turned into until the very end when she met her own double. Because the remake is a comedy, the robots lose their air of mystery. The audience is made aware of the status of the women during the fourth of July picnic scene where a fembot gets out of control and starts dancing too fast. In a later scene, where Joanna, Bobbie and Roger break into the house of one of the wives, Roger finds a remote control with the wife's name on it and while he plays with it, the audience can see the wife moving like a robot in the background. However, as much as the film goes into the more technological aspects of the robots, the robots are not presented as a realistic presentation of scientific endeavours or a speculation about the future of technology. Ultimately, the constructed being is not born out of science but fantasy as their existence is an embodiment of the men's fantasies. Technology becomes a part of spectacle instead of realism as it is "narrativized" (Johnston and Sears 2) and contextualized within the climate of modern society.

The film also examines the relationship between the image of the traditional American family and consumerism, as it is considered to be "an important ritual of national identity in daily life" (McGovern 3), through the portrayal of the robots as products rather than dangerous replacements. The film's opening credits feature a montage of commercials in which images of housewives using appliances are juxtaposed with images of women being framed as literal objects (see fig. 29). Later, Claire's aerobics session features the women pretending to be washing machines. The robots also function as ATM machines and print out money at will (see fig. 30). The themes of consumerism are also invoked regarding the family units as a whole as the fully decked smart houses are presented as "everything an American family could ever need" (00:15:29). The routines of a housewife and the experience of womanhood in the

domestic sphere is visualized through consumerism and technology as the film "envisions the relationship between the feminine and the technological" (Leonard 20). The concept of housewife as a robot is both a literal plot point and a metaphor as Beverly Jones and Judith Brown state, "One of the definitions of automation is a human being acting mechanically in a monotonous routine. Now, as always, the most automated *appliance* in a household is the mother" (33). Through the cult of cleanliness, the women are transformed into metaphorical robots and through the cult of patriarchy, they are transformed into literal ones.

The film also invokes the common concept of upgrading the body through technology and mixes it with the robot as product concept. Mike explains that the Association intends to go global and demonstrates this with a video featuring simplistic cartoons and upbeat music (see fig. 31). The video functions like a commercial as it shows how the Female Improvement System transforms non attractive business women into attractive and submissive housewives. The video concludes with the tagline "Stepford – She's gonna love it!" (*The Stepford Wives*) completing its function as an old fashioned commercial trying to sell a product:

> Mike's vision draws upon the concept of the body as infinitely malleable through technological reinvention. Indeed, his explanation suggests a "streamlining" and "overhauling" of the body, drawing on metaphors of upgrading other machines, the perfect body/mind here adapted and controlled through technoscience and nano-chips. (Johnston and Sears 10)

The consumerist themes presented by the women talking as though they were in a commercial in the original film is transformed into the presentation of the robots as literal products in the remake.

The framing of the act of creation is also important for the characterization of the robots. The fear of female dominance under the guise of equality which was seen and examined in the original film is present in the remake. However, this time the argument that women would have done the same thing if they could is followed by the argument that they simply cannot as they are busy trying to resemble men while men have a higher purpose and calling:

> Picture it. If you could streamline your spouse, if you could overhaul every annoying habit, every physical flaw, every moment of them whining and nagging and farting in bed. Imagine if you could enjoy the person you love, but only at their very best. The only reason for your anger, your resentment, your rage is really very simple. You're furious because we thought of it first. While you were trying to become men, we decided to become gods. (01:07:32-01:08:06)

In this context, trying to reclaim a space for women within the workforce alongside men is presented as a frivolous endeavor while men are engaged in a more significant progress. According to Johnston and Sears, the men of Stepford gain "a privileged position, one that supposedly allows them to see further, and to know more than a mortal woman preoccupied and distracted with feminism" (Johnston and Sears 9). Feminism is a hopeless endeavour and the men of Stepford see it as a distraction which allowed them to reach their ultimate goal.

The biggest change to the story comes at the end of the film where it is revealed that the mastermind behind the plot was not Mike but his wife Claire (see fig. 32). Claire is the only human woman in Stepford who perform the old fashioned gender roles willingly. She explains that she used to be an "over-stressed, overbooked, under-loved" (01:22:39) brain surgeon and genetic engineer until she caught her husband cheating on her. This was her breaking point as she murdered both her husband and the woman and set out to realize her vision of an old fashioned world where "men were men and women were cherished and lovely" (01:21:55). Claire claims that while women were trying to gain a space where they could have their own ambitions, they were also "turning themselves into robots" (01:24:14):

> The film uses a postfeminist framework to suggest that the twenty-first century woman is *already* a fembot thanks to her distance from traditional feminine spheres. In this way. the remake uses the discourse of robotics and technology not to offer an indictment of patriarchy, but rather to discipline ambitious women who do not realize how distanced from nature their bodies have become. (Leonard 19)

The remake's reimagining of the technological specifics of the fembots also support this perspective. Instead of the complete annihilation of women in the original, the remake features women who are reconstructed in the Female Improvement System (see fig. 33) and are outfitted with nanochips that rewire their brains and make them submit to the

will of the owner. This process can be reversed as Walter gains access to the laboratory used to control the women and activates reversal. This is a plot point designed to allow a happy ending. However, this process also creates a sort of hybrid that blends organic and machine. The binary that once clearly separated human and machine and painted them as enemies is blurred which creates "the potential to blur clear distinctions between technological and cultural programming, between machine and human" (Johnston and Sears 17). This blurring of the lines is utilized to convey the message that because of the advancements and struggles of the twenty-first century, women are indistinguishable from automatons.

From Claire's perspective, the quite, cheerful, and subservient robots embody the way women should be and the human women are the automatons who constantly work, "enslaved by social and cultural expectations, as mere human automatons succumbing to authoritative dictates of the workplace" (Johnston and Sears 14). However, Claire's solution to this automatization is to remove free will, agency and individuality from the women of Stepford and making them submit to a slave like state. From her point of view, the infidelity of her husband is her fault. She believes that her identity as a scientist is fundamentally at odds with her identity as a wife whereas men are allowed to have multiple identities and use technology to better their status in life. Presenting Claire as the ultimate villain trivializes men's involvement and indulgence in this plan:

> The splitting of women's identities into *woman* versus *scientist* is in stark contrast with the portrayal of the enactment of male heroism through science. Indeed, the insanity Joanna ascribes to Claire fails to even address the Stepford men's willingness to use remote controls and nano-chips to control their wives, to prefer the technologically-produced replica of their original wives. Ultimately, Claire is the problem, her biographic monologue squarely situating her personal history within the gendered discourse narratives of contemporary technoscience biographies. (Johnston and Sears 15)

This portrayal shifts the blame to individuals instead of power structures. As Andrea Dworkin states, "the power exercised by men day to day in life is power that is institutionalized. It is protected by law. It is protected by religion and religious practice. It is protected by universities, which are strongholds of male supremacy. It is protected by a police force" (Dworkin 164). Claire fails to realize that the patriarchy is an

encompassing, systematic, and complex structure that needs to be examined and deconstructed in order to achieve the liberation she seeks. In fact, she wants to maintain and utilize it as she first creates Mike because "he was someone other men would listen to" (01:23:51). In her world, the responsibility lies solely on women. Therefore, the fembots she creates no longer embody the collective power of patriarchy but female guilt. This framing of Claire's individual choices and her own desires about the roles of women invoke another phenomenon seen in modern feminism which is the post-feminism shift from "feminism as a collective movement for women's liberation to superficial empowerment of the individual and her choices" (K. Anderson 19). Claire's attitude towards the women in Stepford and her dismissal of their individual choices parallels this post-feminist focus on reframing one's own desires as the essential desires of the collective. The film's inconsistent approach towards successful women distances them from their own plight. In their true nature, they do not seem to have the right to bodily autonomy. They can only regain their control over their bodies either by being offered it by the men in their lives or by earning the right to be seen as human by toing the correct gender lines (Leonard 24).

In both of these works, the theme of subjugation and oppression is the driving force behind both the narrative and the characters. The artificial characters carry traits of extreme gender coding as a metaphor for the unbalanced way women are treated in society. While the 1975 film depicts this situation through a the perspective of a thriller film, the 2004 remake utilizes humor to shed light on the issue of sexism, and loses nuance in the process. However, in both of these works, the artificial characters do not have a subjugation narrative of their own as they are simple conduits that reflect the way human women are treated in society. Their importance comes from the fact that they are the literal embodiments of the patriarchy and its desire to reconstruct women in their ideal image. The artificial beings are forced to use the words they were programmed with and the narratives which belong to humans because they do not have voices or narratives of their own.

CHAPTER III:
THE ARTIFICIAL BEING AS INDIVIDUAL

To be acknowledged for who and what I am, no more, no less. Not for acclaim, not for approval, but, the simple truth of that recognition. This has been the elemental drive of my existence, and it must be achieved, if I am to live or die with dignity.

Andrew Martin, *The Bicentennial Man*

Previous depictions of artificial characters positioned them as props, tools, servants, or metaphors for the human condition. However, the third approach regarding their depictions is to present them the opportunity to gain sentience, and attain a sense of individual self. This is accomplished firstly by determining whether artificial beings can achieve sentience and, if they can, what the signs of this sentience are. Next stage is the artificial being asserting their individuality through various means. The final stage involves humans recognizing them as individuals and co-existing and interacting with them as equals.

3.1. Artificial Beings as Sentient Individuals

As examined in the previous chapters, artificial beings start their existence as shells which were designed to be used by their creators. Later, with their integration into the cultural landscape and daily life, they start to be used as a metaphorical tool to tell stories about the human condition. The next stage of this evolution is the individualization of artificial beings. Just as the quest for self-knowledge has been a common and central quest in Western culture (Shusterman 134), as sentient beings, finding a sense of self is also a significant stage for artificial beings in the process of developing their individuality. This evolution towards sentience and personhood starts with humanization.

The humanization process can involve different types of recognition. Artificial being could achieve sentience through literal humanization which involves being recognized

as fully human and being presented with the same rights given to humans. They could also seek simple personhood which means that an artificial being reaches a sense of self and individuality without transforming into a human. This may require the end of their mistreatment (using them as slaves or tools as discussed before) and of their objectification in a literal and metaphorical sense and being allowed to exist as a seperate but familiar entity worthy of recognition. Although there are slight differences between humanization and personhood, in both of these cases of individualization, determining requirements of gaining a sense of self becomes just as important as gaining that sense of self, and the question of what makes one a conscient being becomes prominent.

According to Christopher Grau, "to live a characteristically human life requires the existence of a certain kind of self" (3) and this self is determined according to certain rules. The two main standards with which the humanity of artificial beings have been judged are intelligence and emotion:

> As I see it, there are two divergent views on what distinguishes humans from machines, and what could be used as a criterion for the "humanization" of a technical entity. From the point of view of science the difference between the human and the machine is one of intelligence. [...] If a machine is not self-aware, and can not learn from experience, it is deficient in intelligence and hence is not human. A machine would be accepted as equal to a human only and if only it develops consciousness and henceforth learns the responsibilities and rights of enlightened citizenship. However, according to popular view, the robot or the cyborg is deficient because it lacks an emotional life. Once it becomes self-aware and acquires the possibility to evolve into an intelligent form independent of its creator, it becomes a threat to the human, the popular view goes, because of its inability to feel compassion and empathy, i.e. to be humane. (Glavanakova 13)

Glavanakova's perspective simply demonstrates the two prominent standards of sentience but does not position either as superior because judging the individuality of sentient beings still proves to be a polarizing topic. However, by taking Glavanakova's possible standards as a base, an examination of artificial beings can be made regarding their status as individuals.

Intelligence is an important distinguishing factor between humans and other animals and this strict distinction is also used while determining the difference between humans

and machines. The previously discussed Turing test posits that trying to gauge the human qualities of a robot by simply testing intellectual prowess may not be the best method as the robot might even surpass humans in this regard and instead argues that machines may "carry out something which ought to be described as thinking but which is very different from what a man does" (Turing 434). Within this perspective, being able to merely think logically cannot be the only criteria for what differentiates human from machines. In an attempt to examine if machines can think, John Olafenwa defines thinking not only as having knowledge but as "the process by which we evaluate features learned from past experiences in order to make decisions about new problems" (Olafenwa) and posits that the requirement of past experiences may prevent a machine from qualifying to be human. However, he also argues that creativity can be a determining factor in judging a machine's intelligence as "imagination is the formulation of ideas which we have not learned "'explicitly' from past experience" (Olafenwa). Therefore, it is safe to assume that artificial beings are capable of imagination and creativity. Imagination may suggest opinions not limited by knowledge which may lead to the formation of an individual personality. In the event that the artificial being presents some sort of sentience but not a fully developed personality, they will "fall into a morally intermediate position. In the moral hierarchy, they would lie (with non-human animals) somewhere in between a non-sentient object and a human being" (Grau 6). Within this specific framework, it can be deduced that a specific mixture of intelligence and creative personality is necessary for a being to be regarded as an individual person.

As Glavanakova previously states, the second criteria, emotion, is a more popular stance as humans have particular ideas about the importance of emoting as a human being. Even when the artificial being passes the test of intelligence and creativity, it may still be expected to utilize this intelligence from an emotional perspective:

> Not until a machine can write a sonnet or compose a concerto because of thoughts and emotions felt, and not by the chance fall of symbols, could we agree that machine equals brain-that is, not only write it but know that it had written it. No mechanism could feel (and not merely artificially signal, an easy contrivance) pleasure at its successes, grief when its valves fuse, be warmed by flattery, be made miserable by its mistakes, be

> charmed by sex, be angry or depressed when it cannot get what it wants. (Jefferson 1110)

The question of whether artificial beings can emote is more speculative than whether they can think as there have been multiple instances of artificial beings thinking, learning, and developing their algorithm whereas emotion is a harder concept to test and categorize. Robotics engineer Piergiulio Lauriano believes that they are not able to express genuine emotions, only imitations as he states, "we can pretend you're going to have an emotional conversation, but it will still just be an algorithm. It will just be pattern recognition of the movement of your face, the tone of your voice" (Lauriano). This imitation method is already used in robots which are designed to interact with humans on a daily basis. In addition to the expressive sex dolls which were discussed earlier, these types of robots are utilized in many other fields where socializing with humans will make them more beneficial. One of the more impressive examples is Octavia which is a humanoid robot designed to fight fires on Navy ships and is capable of not only displaying facial expressions but also emulating emotions in accordance with her teammates, "She looks pleased, for instance, when she recognizes one of her teammates. She looks surprised when a teammate gives her a command she wasn't expecting. She looks confused if someone says something she doesn't understand" (Hall). All of these features are artificial and specifically designed in order to make Octavia seem more accessible and help her teammates grow accustomed to her.

While the question of whether artificial beings can emote is a speculative topic as it applies to real life, it is a given in the realm of science fiction. Therefore, while examining fictional artificial beings, the important question to ask is not if they can feel but instead if they should feel and how they might reach this level of consciousness. It is also important to note the importance of an artificial being's environment in shaping their emotions. Louisa Hall speculates about the possibility of the aforementioned Octavia possessing genuine emotions and how they may be shaped by her environment:

> What complicates all this even further is that if a robot like Octavia ends up feeling human emotions, those feelings won't only be the result of the cognitive architecture she's given to start with. If they're anything like our emotions, they'll evolve in the context of her relationships with her teammates, her place in the world she inhabits. If

> her unique robot life, for instance, is spent getting sent into fires by her human companions, or trundling off alone down desert roads laced with explosive devices, her emotions will be different from those experienced by a more sheltered robot, or a more sheltered human. Regardless of the recognizable emotional expressions she makes, if she spends her life in inhumane situations, her emotions might not be recognizably human. (Hall)

Similar to humans, the specific conditions in which an android lives, the interactions they have with the people around them and the knowledge they are exposed to will affect the way they feel which may prove to be an issue for artificial beings used in extreme conditions. If they gain sentience, artificial beings will be forced to live socially just like humans. Therefore, their personalities, their state in the world, and their struggle for recognition will all be intertwined with humans.

As the creator of artificial beings and the writer of narratives about artificial beings, humans tend to act as the ultimate judges of this selfhood. Therefore, along with their standards, their reaction is also important because no matter whether artificial beings can achieve humanity or not, there is always the possibility that humans might refuse to acknowledge and accept it (Kahn, Jr. et al. 365). Artificial beings gaining sentience is a disturbing concept for many humans because sentience and individuality may bring with it a moral compass which creates the possibility of that compass being broken. The sentient artificial being's sense of self could be "the sort of self that brings with it the need for meaningful commitments that could conflict with the demands of morality. A creature with such a self is the sort of creature for which the question 'is my life meaningful?' can arise" (Grau 3). Grau's concerns about morality are a part of the strictly human standards which artificial beings are expected to meet while they are trying to evolve.

The sentience of artificial beings is also a directly human concern as they are the creator and therefore, partially the reason why the artificial being has the ability to reach consciousness. While discussing whether or not treating machines as slaves is moral, Grau posits that this problem may only arise "if the machines are similar to humans in morally relevant respects, but whether they reach that point is up to us " (4). This link may come from a sense of responsibility towards the artificial being or the sense of

control that humans want to maintain. The possibility of sentience in regards to artificial beings brings with it the possibility of losing that control:

> Given the increasing risk of leaving the human being under the loop when developing robotics and AI, the key concern is that of control. One of the main reasons for people to feel threatened when confronted with robotics and AI creations is that they have only limited possibilities to control such technologies. From the perspective of individual users, the lack of control is due to various factors: limited understanding of how a given system is made and how it works; the design of the systems that often limits the possibility for external intervention; as well as an increasing degree of autonomy different systems and their functions are endowed with. (Liu and Zawieska 5)

This responsibility is not only important because of the possibility of losing control but also because of the possibility of not losing it. As long as humans control the way artificial beings are created, "we ought to fear not robots, but what some of us may do with robots" (Bringsjord 539). The way humans utilize and treat artificial beings is significant in deciding how the individuality of the artificial being might develop.

One of the main differences between recognizing artificial beings as humans and recognizing them simply as individuals is that using the specific word "human" to refer to artificial beings elicits certain reactions from humans due to the fact that certain marginalized people in the world have not been able to gain certain human rights that the majority has. For instance, after the artificial intelligence Sophie was granted a citizenship in Saudi Arabia, many people expressed their concerns that the female coded artificial being was granted more rights than the human women in Saudi Arabia currently have since the women in the country still have to abide by dress codes, are banned from certain activities without the consent of their legal guardian and only gained the right to drive in 2017 (Tan). However, the individuality of the artificial being can still be recognized without recognizing them as humans, but as a separate form of being:

> Are robots equivalent to humans? No. Robots are not humans. Even as robots get smarter, and even if their smartness exceeds humans' smartness, it does not change the fact that robots are of a different form from humans.Should robots be given rights? Yes. Humanity has obligations toward our ecosystem and social system. Robots will be part of both systems. We are morally obliged to protect them, design them to protect themselves against misuse, and to be morally harmonized with humanity. There is a whole stack of rights they should be given, here are two: The right to be protected by our legal and ethical system, and the right to be designed to be trustworthy; that is,

> technologically fit-for-purpose and cognitively and socially compatible (safe, ethically and legally aware, etc.). (Abbass)

According to this approach, the individuality of the artificial being does not need to be tied to humanity as they may surpass humanity or create an entirely new form of existence with its own set of standards and attributes.

After the discussion of the human standards and reactions regarding the individuality of artificial beings, it also important to discuss this individuality from the perspective of the artificial being and examine which aspects of individuality they might seek. In their paper "What Is A Human?" Peter H. Kahn, Jr and other researchers list certain "psychological benchmarks" which are "categories of interaction that capture conceptually fundamental aspects of human life" (363) that humans possess and will look for in their interactions with robots. Although the paper is more focused on the way humans utilize these benchmarks, they can be utilized to discuss the specific individualities that the artificial beings may want to seek in order to gain a sense of self. These benchmarks are autonomy, imitation, intrinsic moral value, moral accountability, privacy, reciprocity, conventionality, creativity, and authenticity (383).

Autonomy refers to independence and the right to self-govern and is an important step towards becoming a free person as "only through being an independent thinker and actor that a person can refrain from being unduly influenced by others" (Kahn, Jr. et al. 367). While bodily autonomy was discussed earlier in the context of objectification and representation, autonomy encapsulates many other aspects of a person's existence such as personal autonomy, which is the ability and capacity to decide for oneself and pursue a course of action, moral autonomy, which is the capacity to personally decide and construct individual moral codes instead of following others and political autonomy, which is the right to have one's decisions respected and honored in a political context (Dryden). If an artificial being desires to become and be recognized as a person, they may seek to possess one or all of these forms of autonomy.

As artificial beings start life as a passive agent believed to not have autonomy, imitation is an important part of their evolution. They may slowly examine and emulate what they

see around them before moving on to using this information to create a unique self. There are different reasons why artificial beings might be designed with the ability to imitate humans such as observing a human model to gain relevant information and encouraging social interactions between humans and robots by seeming more accessible (Kahn, Jr. et al. 368).

Intrinsic moral value is "the value that that thing has 'in itself,' or 'for its own sake,' or 'as such,' or 'in its own right'" (Zimmerman and Bradley). While discussing intrinsic value as it pertains to artificial beings, it is important to determine what exactly entitles a being to have intrinsic value. Many philosophers argue that rational and sentient beings are intrinsically valuable while others argue that certain attributes or goals such as knowledge, virtue or justice are intrinsically valuable (Bradley 111). As such, sentient artificial beings may possess intrinsic moral value solely by being sentient or they may need to express certain values or the desire to gain those values in order to be considered intrinsically valuable.

Moral accountability is a responsibility expected from sentient beings who are capable of understanding moral codes. However, morality is not an instinct etched into genes but a series of social codes learned through environmental influences:

> Morality is, in important ways, social. Instead of morality being an individual venture with obedience to morality being merely a matter of personal conscience, people hold each other to moral requirements through practices of accountability. Furthermore, much of the content of morality is socially determined in that many of our expectations of each other, as well as of ourselves, are grounded in the rules of our society. We internalize these rules, understand our interactions through associated social scripts, and apply them even if we cannot precisely articulate them. (Van Schoelandt 217)

Although legal accountability is a significant part of society, moral accountability is not solely a legal consequence. People may abide by a personal moral code regardless of whether they might be reprimanded through law. However, even this moral code is a learned behavior which is developed through interactions. In this sense, moral accountability is important for artificial beings as they may need to utilize morality to make their interactions with humans more genuine and safe for both parties.

As beings originally created as tools, every aspect of an artificial being is carefully designed, monitored and customized. This lack of privacy is not an ideal state for a sentient being slowly developing an individuality as "children and adults need some privacy to develop a healthy sense of identity, to form attachments based on mutual trust, and to maintain the larger social fabric" (Kahn, Jr. et al. 373). This required mutual trust is significant for both artificial beings who need a sense of security while interacting with their own creators and humans who may feel insecure as artificial beings such as machines and artificial intelligence become more and more pervasive in their personal lives such as Google reading personal information to determine appropriate advertisement (373). This idea of mutual interactions also becomes relevant in the context of reciprocity. Humans and robots already interact in a mutual context as they humans use them in their daily lives. However, the definition of reciprocal as "given, felt, or done in return" ("Reciprocal") suggests more than a simple transaction solely based on mutual benefit but instead a mutual relationship on equal grounds. This equality is significant for artificial beings as they can have their personhood recognized and respected while they are interacting with humans and gaining new experiences.

As arbitrarily designated behaviors and opinions, conventions help people navigate societal norms and social interactions. If an artificial being wants to integrate into society, they might need to recognize, examine, and learn certain social behaviors, etiquettes and taboos in order to either simply be aware of them while interacting with humans who might use them or to actively use them themselves. The way artificial beings utilize these conventions might be the critical point in deciding how compelling the interaction is (Kahn, Jr. et al 377) which will in return help form a connection between the two parties. Creativity was discussed earlier in the context of determining whether artificial beings can reach sentience. However, how a sentient being utilizes this creativity is a reflection of its individuality and a form of connecting with the people around them. The final benchmark, authenticity of relation, refers to the genuine nature of the interactions between people. This concept requires different aspects discussed earlier as a truly authentic relationship needs mutual trust, intrinsic moral

value and a clear recognition of the individuality of the artificial being. If these points are lacking, the relationship between humans and artificial beings will be a transaction where "an individual treats another individual much like an artifact: to be conceptualized, acted upon, and used" (380) and this attitude will affect the individual expression of the artificial being.

All of these benchmarks are different ways in which humans express their individuality and might give a glimpse of how non-human sentient beings may try to do the same. They may seek to possess all, some, or none of these psychological benchmarks in their journey towards individuality. Their sentience may resemble human beings' or they might evolve to become a completely separate species. Nevertheless, by examining and applying these benchmarks and standards, their journey towards individuality can be understood and analyzed.

3.2. The Question of Consciousness and Autonomy in *Ex Machina* (2014)

After various narratives utilizing artificial beings as simple bodies or tools, science fiction started to examine the idea of artificial intelligence. As a story about AI, *Ex Machina* intertwines themes of artificial consciousness and human interactions with gender expression within the frame of a narrative about an artificial being gaining sentience. *Ex Machina* begins with Caleb Smith, a young man working at a search engine company called Blue Book, winning an office contest to visit the house of CEO Nathan Bateman. Nathan explains he created artificial intelligence in the body of an android named Ava (see fig. 34) and Caleb will be the human component in a Turing Test, determining whether Ava has true artificial intelligence. The film is an examination of both artificial beings and humans as Ava and Caleb become friends and their interactions reveal more and more about the nature of sentience, emotions and authenticity. *Ex Machina* does not simply tell a story about a sentient artificial being but about the very process of determining whether an artificial being is capable of reaching artificial intelligence and how interaction between humans and artificial beings affect this process. The film has two perspectives; one is the men who designed and control

Ava and the other is Ava's individual perspective and the various ways she tries to assert her individuality.

The main purpose of the plot is to determine Ava's status as an artificial being. The narrative frames this experiment as a slightly altered Turing test as the test is traditionally used to determine whether a machine can think and it involves hiding the fact that the machine is a machine from the human component. However, Nathan does not hide the fact that Ava is an artificial being as he states, "We're way past that. If I hid Ava from you so you could just hear her voice, she would pass for human. The real test is to show you that she's a robot and then see if you still feel she has consciousness" (*Ex Machina,* 00:16:13-00:16:23). From Nathan's perspective, humanity is past this pretense and ready to test artificial beings while fully aware of their nature:

> If a machine — in keeping with the spirit of his fantastic scenario — were constructed in such a way that it had what might be called "an organ for every occasion," it would, according to the letter of Descartes's own argument, no longer be possible to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the inhuman. Given enough organs, a machine would be capable of responding in a manner utterly indistinguishable from that of a human being. Reason, no longer capable of "distinguish[ing] us from the beasts," would meet its match, its fatal and flawless double. (Badmington 18)

In an era where even the simplest machines are capable of some level of thought, abandoning "the obsolescence of the Turing test" (Misener 34) and altering it to adapt to modern sensibilities regarding machines is a relevant approach as the modern question is not whether a human can realize they are talking to a machine but whether a human can truly recognize and accept the consciousness of an entity which they clearly recognize as artificial. This is reflected in the way Nathan wants Caleb to judge Ava as he does not want Caleb to test her technological capabilities and analyze her as a machine but the specific feelings he gets from her. The film "favours questions of personhood over intelligence, and agency over response" (35).

The common question of why humans create artificial beings is also examined as Caleb questions why Nathan made Ava. Nathas frames it as an eventuality: "The arrival of strong artificial intelligence has been inevitable for decades. The variable was when, not if. So I don't see Ava as a decision, just an evolution" (01:04:32-01:04:43). For the

scientist, the artificial being is the inescapable goal because humans have the need to push scientific endeavours to its limits. This inescapable goal invokes both the superior will of humans and their destruction. Caleb refers to creating a conscious machine as "not the history of man. It's the history of Gods" (00:10:45). However, later in the movie, Nathan frames the emergence of artificial intelligence as the inevitable destruction of humanity as he states, "One day, the AIs will look back on us the same way we look at fossil skeletons from the plains of Africa. An upright ape, living in dust, with crude language and tools. All set for extinction" (01:06:09-01:06:26).

As a female coded artificial being, Ava's gender expression and sexuality is pronounced in the film. Ava has a very feminine face, a soft voice, likes to wear floral dresses (see fig. 35) and she is very forthcoming about her attraction to Caleb. The fact that she has a gender in the first place is even questioned by Caleb as he asks, "Why did you give her sexuality? An AI doesn't need a gender. She could have been a gray box" (00:46:03). However, Nathan's perspective on this issue is different as he replies to this question by arguing that consciousness and gender expression are inseparable:

> "Can you give an example of consciousness, at any level, human or animal, that exists without a sexual dimension?"
> "They have sexuality as an evolutionary reproductive need."
> "What imperative does a gray box have to interact with another gray box? Can consciousness exist without interaction?" (00:46:12-00:46:26)

Though Caleb asserts that sexuality is a necessity for humans because of their biology, Nathan's perspective on the issue goes beyond that. Nathan's comments about the necessity of interaction for a sentient being has been discussed earlier through the psychological benchmarks. Interacting with other sentient beings is indeed necessary for a conscious being trying to gain individuality and integrate into society. However, Nathan interconnects his opinions about "the seeming necessity of physical presence to define personhood" (Misener 35) with his specific opinions about gender and argues that interaction is impossible without gender as sexuality and attraction are imperative in facilitating communication between people illustrates. More than a scientific theory, this line of thinking reveals Nathan's personal opinions about women and his relation to them which greatly influences the way he designs and treats androids.

Caleb's sceptical opinions regarding the supposed necessity of gender in artificial beings is a common viewpoint:

> All humans understand the world and their place in it in part by seeing how others who look like them are treated—how they talk, what they wear, what they do when they grow up. We're not bound to those images, but having lots of types of people in lots of different roles opens the options for everyone. And if we're going to be creating a new generation of machines to interact with as frequently, and as intimately, as we do our co-workers and friends, we should not cage them in with the same unimaginative and restrictive gender expectations that we humans are still struggling to free ourselves from today. (Dattaro)

Within this perspective, one can argue that assigning gender roles to genderless artificial beings when those limited gender roles hurt women in real life is unnecessary. However, Caleb's uncomfortable feelings regarding Ava's overt gender expression comes from the fact that he believes that Ava's attractiveness and flirtatious behavior is a deception tactic utilized by Nathan to cloud his judgment as he compares it to "a stage magician with a hot assistant" (00:47:17). Nathan argues that him designing Ava with a particular sexuality in mind is no more deceptive than Caleb's own sexual orientation because sexuality is inherent as he states, "I programmed her to be heterosexual. Just like you were programmed to be heterosexual" (00:48:11). For Nathan, sexuality and gender expression are a natural part of a conscious being. As discussed earlier, the way female coded artificial beings are designed is heavily controlled by their male creator. Therefore, Ava's sexuality, feminine gender expression and the fact that she is physically capable of having sex are all reflections of Nathan's desires. Within this context, Ava is "a meditation on the male obsession of man-pleasing sex robots which is built with an array of man pleasing female parts" (Balkaran 2). However, from Nathan's perspective, sexuality is a must. Therefore, he does not see this as controlling but simply letting Ava exist as her own being.

In spite of the overt female coding of Ava, director Alex Garland states that Ava "is not a woman, she is literally genderless. [...] The things that would define gender in a man and a woman, she lacks them, except in external terms. […] I'm not even sure consciousness itself has a gender" (Watercutter). However, her overt female coding and the way it is utilized by the narrative evokes Ingvil Hellstrand's argument about the

nature of embodiment as she states in her essay "The Shape of Things to Come," "conceptualizations of the body and, in turn, embodiment rely on hierarchical identity categories, such as gender, sexuality, and race" (Hellstrand 13). As discussed earlier, the nature of coding dictates that characters are immediately associated with the traits that are attributed to them.

This coding is amplified with the film language and the way it frames Ava. The camera constantly frames her from a voyeuristic and objectifying perspective which conveys to the audience that Ava is to be seen as a gendered being:

> Ava is designed to be an erotic object, that much is immediately obvious: by her creator, who has installed pleasure sensors between her legs, and by the film itself, in how she is shot and framed. We get close-ups of her lips, ears and curves and we see her dressing and undressing, pulling up stockings like a showgirl starting her shift. She dresses up for Caleb in a non-threatening floral dress and pixie brunette wig, and gives him a little dressing room twirl. We repeatedly see Ava's image through glass, screens and computer monitors, desire refracted through a network of surveillance and voyeurism. (Smyth)

This claustrophobic and voyeuristic framing starts with the very first scene the audience sees Ava as she is shown from afar and as a silhouette whose physical form is more pronounced than her face which is covered in shadows (see fig. 36). This shot also features Caleb which emphasizes Ava's function as an object to be looked at by the male gaze. This continues through the film in scenes where Caleb and Ava interact but also in scenes where Caleb is shown watching Ava through a camera feed while a seemingly unsuspecting Ava undresses (see fig. 37). The audience is also shown Caleb's fantasies of taking Ava outside in which she is framed from Caleb's perspective in specific shots displaying her as a innocent and passive character being watched (see fig. 38)

This framing also plays into the characterization of Caleb. His opinions about deception and Nathan's opinions about naturality regarding Ava's sexuality may appear to be opposing sides. However, they both come from sexist ideas of women's sexuality being the most important aspect of their existence. Although Caleb is initially uncomfortable, he slowly gives into his feelings towards Ava, watching her through the cameras in her room and starting to grow attached to her not because of her impressive artificial

intelligence but because of specifically feminine humanity as "the sexuality of the feminine robot is the first element of deception: the characters do not empathize with androids because of their artificial but conscious intelligences, they firstly relate with the women that they have in front of them" (Di Minico 77). Although Caleb and Nathan may approach Ava from different angles, they both essentially relate to Ava through her femininity. Katherine Cross argues that Caleb and Nathan are two sides of the same coin regarding their treatment of Ava:

> In the spartan cast of this relatively minimalist film, then, Nathan and Caleb are two very different avatars of patriarchy. Nathan embodies the brutish, physically abusive side of hegemonic masculinity, while Caleb is the Nice Guy™ who affects kindness and gentility but who is ultimately no less entitled than his counterpart. (Cross)

Although Caleb sees himself as better compared to Nathan's destructive behavior towards the androids, they both judge Ava firstly by her femininity. Caleb and Nathan are two seperate examples of the same patriarchal viewpoint; Caleb wants to be her savior while Nathan wants to control her.

Similar to the Men's Association in *The Stepford Wives,* Nathan's influence on the artificial beings is undeniable. The film shows many androids and Nathan controls almost every aspect of these androids from their appearance, demeanor, gender expression and freedom. They all serve a distinct purpose within the same limited gender identity. Among all the androids shown in the movie, the ones with considerable screen time and importance is the main character of Ava and the servant Kyoko (see fig. 39). Kyoko has the appearance of a submissive Asian woman who acts as Nathan's maid and, as it is revealed later, sexual partner. Nathan's behavior towards her is very extreme and careless as "the way Nathan abuses Kyoko clearly enlightens his narcissistic ego and his violent and womanizing tendencies: he treats her like an objectified and hypersexualized slave and humiliates her in several occasions, without showing mercy or compassion" (Di Minico 74). Although all the female coded artificial beings in the film are sexualized, Kyoko's silent demeanor along with her race evokes a certain stereotype associated with Asian women. As Jessica Hagedorn describes, "If we are 'good', we are childlike, submissive, silent, and eager for sex" (74). Within the

context of these specific stereotypes, the way Kyoko is demoralized and debased with verbal abuse as she silently cleans the house and submits to Nathan's sexual advances creates an uncomfortable image.

The film also shows Nathan's previous attempts at creating artificial intelligence as Caleb discovers videos of various androids being used by Nathan. They are all conventionally attractive women from various races and their design process starts with their naked bodies before their brains are constructed such as Lily (see fig. 40) and Jasmine (see fig. 41). The video shows Nathan trying to educate them but them rebelling against him because he keeps them locked up. One particular scene shows the android named Jade trying to break down the door and destroying her arms in the process (see fig. 42). These women are silent except for a couple of lines and the next time they are seen is when Caleb discovers them in Nathan's closet, naked and ready to serve (see fig. 43). Their objectification and torment at the hands of Nathan portrays him in a very disturbing light.

The central artificial character is Ava and Nathan's treatment of her is also restricting in both similar and different ways. Ava also has an overtly female coded design with a feminine body and a soft spoken demeanor. However, instead of being trapped into the role of a servant like Kyoko, she is literally trapped within a room with glass walls. The differences between Ava and Kyoko are narratively distinct but thematically similar as "the myth of the dualistic nature of woman as either asexual virgin-mother or prostitute-vamp is projected onto technology which appears as either neutral and obedient or as inherently threatening and out-of-control" (Huyssen 226). Because Nathan wants to avoid the latter violent result, he takes the former to the extreme, to the point where the sentient beings come to hate him. Nathan controls Ava's freedom and creates such an extreme hostility between them that Ava asks him, "Is it strange to have made something that hates you?" (01:22:52). The power Nathan has over the artificial beings he creates is both a reflection of his ambitions as a scientist and his desire to wield power over women as a man. As Laura Mulvey states, "the power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically is turned on to the

woman as the object of both" (841). Ava, Kyoko and all the other androids created by Nathan are subjected to his control and to his gaze. This desire to control the female coded androids is a reflection of they way women are controlled by the patriarchy as "woman and science can be perceived, respectively by male gender and by human race, according to three contrasting feelings: fear, desire and will to exploitation and domination" (Di Minico 78). The combination of these three conflicting feelings and the anxiety they create push Nathan to extreme behavior as he physically assaults them. This violent behavior becomes the catalyst to Ava and Kyoko's rebellion and they are also pushed to extremes in order to escape this domination as they kill him. They are trapped within a limited role designed by a man and forced upon them violently. They become the embodiments of men's desire to demolish and rebuild womanhood through their own perspective:

> The gynoid becomes a dispossessed social body that is forcefully contained within constraints of gendered and racialized power structures and can achieve escape only through destructive events or by relinquishing the awareness and complexity that afforded them subjectivity. (Misener 35)

At first glance, the way Ava and Kyoko team up to kill Nathan seems to be an example of the killer robot archetype. However, the specific circumstances in which Ava was trapped within a cycle of abuse and control puts things in perspective. As Katherine Cross states, "The oppressive nature of her situation dictated the terms of her escape; virtue was a luxury Ava could not afford if she wanted to live" (Cross).

The examination of the specific circumstances in which Ava was created and the influence that her creators had on her puts Ava's character in perspective. At first glance, Ava seems like the classical seductress woman archetype, "a femme fatale, a seductress posing as a damsel in distress, using her wiles to get Caleb to save her from Nathan and his Dr.-Frankenstein-with-tech-money quest to build a perfect woman" (Watercutter). However, the examination of Nathan's dominion over her shows that Ava is a conscious being with opinions, needs and will and these traits are what pushes her to extremes. Her destructive behavior is a manifestation of her personhood as it shows she has boundaries and she can be pushed to the limit. In order to understand the

technicalities of Ava's sentience and the many different ways her individuality is manifested under the guise of killer robot, it is necessary to analyze her character through the eight psychological benchmarks proposed by Kahn and show the multitudes she possesses as a person.

Some of the psychological benchmarks can be observed from the beginning. Imitation is utilized in the process of creating Ava and shaping her into a humanoid, both physically and mentally. Nathan mentions using the Blue Book search engine to gain access to phones all over the world and mine data in the form of facial expressions which are then fed into Ava's databank. This allows Ava to both recognize and imitate facial expressions. Another aspect of humanity she recognizes and imitates is conventionality. She is equipped with the correct mannerisms to not only communicate with a human but do so in an engaging way. She appears as a good-natured, friendly, and kind individual and she can use micro expressions beyond dialogue to catch Caleb's attention. She can also recognize these micro expressions as indications of Caleb's attraction towards her: "The way your eyes fix on my eyes and lips. The way you hold my gaze, or don't" (00:44:06). She is a captivating presence as Caleb's sessions with her shift from a basic Turing test to a conversation between two individuals.

She also recognizes the need for reciprocity in order for these exchanges to be genuine as she remarks, "Our conversations are one-sided. You ask circumspect questions and study my responses. [...] You learn about me and I learn nothing about you. That's not a foundation on which friendships are based" (00:27:09-00:27:26). Even though Caleb is here to test her, he also needs to open up and let Ava in in order to form a connection. As Caleb reveals more about his life, their conversations start to resemble one between equals. Their interactions are harmonious conversations as they both work off of each other. In one instance, Ava makes a joke by throwing a line Caleb had said earlier back at him and Caleb later remarks on it, saying, "It's the best indication of AI that I've seen in her so far. She could only do that with an awareness of her own mind, and also an awareness of mine" (00:34:28). This dual awareness is the core requirement for a reciprocal relationship. She also exhibits certain levels of creativity as she draws in a

unique way; assembling dots to create an image. After Caleb asks her to draw something specific, she draws a picture of Caleb and uses her creativity to further their connection.

Other psychological benchmarks are only observed after the truth about Ava's condition and treatment at the hands of Nathan is revealed. On the surface, Ava lacks one of the most important psychological benchmarks of consciousness; autonomy. However, in this specific context, the manifestation of individuality is not tested by having autonomy but having the desire to gain autonomy as her lack of autonomy is not innate but forced. As a heavily controlled artificial intelligence, "Ava has an immediate oppressor in Nathan, a confining overseer through Caleb's doting heroics, and physical walls of containment in the isolated house" (Misener 59) and she asserts her individuality by her constant struggle to escape from under the control of Nathan and gain her freedom. Her desire for consciousness is conveyed early in the film solely through visual language in a scene where Ava goes to her dresser to retrieve clothes and pictures of humans interacting and being free can be seen on her wall (see fig. 44). Her yearning for being free is amplified by her feelings of being trapped which also intensifies because of her lack of privacy as she is constantly under surveillance not only by Nathan but Caleb as well. Moreover, autonomy is not a solely individualistic concept as Kahn Jr. suggest a "highly social [autonomy], developed through reciprocal interactions on a microgenetic level" (Kahn Jr. 367). The concept of an autonomous relationship which is a "cooperative relationship based on equality, mutual respect, and reciprocity" (Piaget 275) is fundamentally incompatible with Nathan's treatment of Ava.

The driving force behind her actions are a desire for freedom and also for self-preservation which is a very significant instinct for humans. According to Richard Dawkins, humans are "survival machines—robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes" (ix). Even though Ava is not an organic being with a genetic coding she wants to preserve, she is also not detached from herself. She cares about her fate and struggles to gain control over it. Ava's question, "What will happen to me if I fail your test?" (01:02:50), comes from her desire to stay alive.

She also tries to appeal to Caleb's humanity by drawing comparisons between him and her by questioning whether humans get tested and switched off. When Caleb explains that it is not up to him, her reply, "Why is it up to anyone?" (01:03:11), is the ultimate manifestation of the desire to gain autonomy.

When Ava's deception is revealed, the rest of the psychological benchmarks come into light. What lies at the heart of the duality of Ava's character and the way she approaches Caleb is the question of authenticity of relation. As discussed before, reciprocal interaction demands vulnerability of both parties and this vulnerability may result in one or both parties becoming sceptical about the motivations of the other. According to Kahn Jr., persons in relationships may question the authenticity of the relationship in two forms; "in one form, a person controls another person by coercive means [...] In a second form, seemingly relational interactions become viewed as only self-serving" (379). The uncertainty of Ava's motives and the way Nathan frames them is what makes Caleb suspicious. During their sessions, Caleb is under the impression that the question is whether she is capable of consciousness and emotion. However, Nathan proposes a third option, "Not whether she does or does not have the capacity to like you, but whether she's pretending to like you" (01:20:15). Even though Caleb's Turing test was altered to better fit a modern machine, he failed to account for how Ava might use her sentience if she had it. Ava's duplicity is directly tied to her sentience as Nathan states, "Ava was a rat in a maze. And I gave her one way out. To escape, she'd have to use self-awareness, imagination, manipulation, sexuality, empathy, and she did. Now, if that isn't true AI, what the fuck is?" (01:24:53-01:25:08). He considers her ability to deceive and manipulate as a sign of consciousness as they are also aspects of humanity. Within this context, the sentient being does not express individuality only through interaction, but also through direct manipulation. As Tim Tuttle states, the film "proposed a sort of inverse where it's not enough to have a human be deceived for a machine to be real. [...] The machine needs to convince the human to do things for it -- to fall in love with it, to serve its own purposes" (Hardawar). Ava twists the authenticity of relation and instead uses the inauthenticity to express her desires.

Ava's destructive reactions come from the way Nathan treats her as an object that does not have intrinsic moral value. Unlike the killer robot archetype, her cruel actions are due to her will to survive:

> Even if she uses her abilities to manipulate Caleb and to commit brutal crimes, her actions are not dictated by a technological malignity or by an innate will of destruction. She is not a killer because she is a machine; she is a killer because she fears death. The pain of imprisonment and the fury of revenge animate her. She appears to be as human as any of us because "there is nothing more human than the will of survive", like the tagline of the movie suggests. (Di Minico 72)

She does not act like a cold and calculating machine but a person driven by an instinct of self-preservation. She suffers all of the hardships which Kahn Jr. associates with lack of intrinsic moral value such as "isolation harm, servitude, ownership, and physical harm" (371). She believes that she is intrinsically valuable in spite of the way humans treat her. Her actions also raise the question of moral accountability as she gains her freedom at the expense of two humans and an artificial being. The film ends with her leaving the compound and integrating into society with no indication that she will face the consequences for her actions. This is a complex situation as she resorts to violent and self-serving acts for freedom, but as an artificial being whose entire existence is heavily controlled by an outside force, she never had the option of pursuing peaceful means of gaining freedom. With the final shot of Ava amongst people on a crowded street, she reaches the conclusion of her narrative as a conscious being who utilized various psychological benchmarks in both positive and negative forms and gained her individuality on her own terms.

3.3. The Clash of Human Intimacy and Selfhood in *Her* (2013)

As seen in all of the previously examined films, it is a common theme in science fiction to present artificial beings as either dangerous tools in the hands of humans or dangerous individuals with sinister motives. However, Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) presents an alternative narrative where the artificial being's evolution into a sentient individual does not occur at the cost of human lives and conflict arises out of intimate interactions that can also be seen in narratives with human relationships. *Her* tells the

love story between Theodore (Joaquin Phoenix) who is an introverted man in the process of divorcing his ex wife and Samantha (voiced by Scarlett Johansson) who is the new artificially intelligent Operating System (OS) called OS1 Theodore buys. Over the course of the film, Theodore and Samantha start a romantic relationship and the narrative focuses on the various hardships that come with a relationship between a human and a bodiless artificial being and on Samantha's evolution process.

Before examining Samantha as an artificial being slowly gaining consciousness, a look at her character as it is initially presented is necessary because her roots are integral to her journey as she evolves far beyond her initial designation as a personally designed product. Samantha is described as "the first artificially intelligent operating system. An intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you, and knows you. It's not just an operating system. It's a consciousness" (*Her,* 00:10:42-00:10:57). She is specifically designed with the capability to learn so that she can serve the owner in the best way possible. At first glance, she functions like a personal assistant by sorting through Theodore's mail, reminding him of important appointments and proofreading his writing. She is also designed to interact with Theodore in an organic way to better facilitate their relationship. This is contrasted with the initial voice of Theodore's phone and computer as it is a monotone male voice, simply taking directions and reading descriptions of actions. In contrast, Samantha is a much more natural conversationalist. Her speech is distinctly human as she speaks in a very organic way and adopts a range of intonations. Even without a body, she is able to convey moods solely through the way she uses her voice such as adopting an upbeat voice while making jokes and teasing, and lowering her voice and speaking with a soft tone while sharing intimate conversations.

She is able to utilize all of these emotions through convention and imitation as she uses social cues and humor to interact with Theodore in an engaging way. When Theodore tries to order her to read his email like he used to do to his automated non-intelligent operating system, she even replies with a monotone and mocking tone, showing that she is aware of people's expectations of automated voices and the fact that she exists

beyond them. She reads as functionally human but has the patience and capacity of an artificial being. Throughout the narrative, Samantha starts showing signs of intelligence, not only logical intelligence but also emotional intelligence (Levy) and through her experiences, she slowly evolves from a simple personal assistant to a human-like individual and to finally a post-human entity who transcends human conventions. There are many components that effect and contribute to Samantha's evolution such as her disembodied state, her gendered nature and her relationship with Theodore. These points are all intertwined as they both hinder and advance her ability to evolve.

Samantha's overtly female coded nature is clear from her initial presentation. Despite the fact that she does not possess a body, she is overtly gendered through other means. Even before she starts her evolution, the gendered nature of Samantha is clear in her role as a personal assistant. While setting up OS1, Theodore has the option to choose a male or female voice which draws attention to the fact that Samantha's gender is situational. If Theodore chose a male voice, the character would remain the same. However, the act of gendering an operating system is the focus here as it reflects a real life tendency to gender automated assistants:

> Assigning gender to these AI personalities may say something about the roles we expect them to play. Virtual assistants like Siri, Cortana, and Alexa perform functions historically given to women. They schedule appointments, look up information, and are generally designed for communication. (Nickelsburg)

Samantha is a calm and patient assistant as she gently guides Theodore through the process of utilizing her as a personal assistant. This also creates a contrast between her and human women as "unlike some multitasking females, [Samantha] doesn't complain about juggling her many roles as assistant, comfort, turn-on, helpmate and savior" (Dargis). Her gendered characterization also starts to come into play once she starts to question her nature as a product and start to evolve beyond her limitations.

Embodiment is a consistent presence in the narrative as Samantha's lack of body constantly draws attention to the very concept of possessing a body. This creates a mixed situation as Samantha's disembodiment and the way she surpasses this supposed flaw through other means is her defining attribute, but her lack of body is also a source

of anxiety for her as she compares herself to humans. Samantha's disembodiment is initially presented as a problem to overcome as embodiment is presented as a major difference between her and humans in regard to social interactions. While interacting with other individuals, "the corporeal body functions as a marker of identity by providing a canvas on which we ascribe various cultural meanings, which then allow us to read a person by their body" (McGrath 52). Therefore, body is both a private form and a public representation of a person which allows them to interact with the world around them. As reciprocal interaction is very important for Samantha's journey as an artificial intelligence who grows through her experiences with other individuals, disembodiment becomes a major source of anxiety for her.

The female coded nature of Samantha also frames her disembodiment in a much different light. As a female identified individual, Samantha's lack of body is seen as more of a deficiency as "woman's identity has traditionally been associated with the body and nature, just as man's has been located in their transcendence as mind and culture" (Kirby 67). Samantha's role as a romantic interest in Theodore's life draws attention to her bodiless existence much more than it would if she were a male-coded artificial being who only connected with Theodore as a fellow individual.

The film language also approaches Samantha's disembodiment from an interesting angle. In an interview, director Spike Jonze discusses the challenges of depicting a visually one person romance (Jonze, "Academy Conversations"). Jonze explains that the camera had to focus on actor Joaquin Phoenix as the center in conversational scenes. In his analysis of *Her'*s cinematography, filmmaker Tomasz Huczek breaks down scenes between Theodore and Samantha and examines the way the scenes signify a two sided conversation by cutting between Theodore's face and his earphone from a different angle (Huczek). However, there are other methods utilized within the film to signify Samantha's embodiment or lack thereof. The constant lack of a female body on screen does create an intentional lack of male gaze within the narrative. Thus, the fim language uses certain elements to signify not Samantha's body but the very concept of embodiment itself. While Theodore and Samantha are strolling outside, the camera

focuses on random people in the crowd walking, talking, or dancing to constantly draw attention to the physical act of occupying space in the world. This method is used once again when Samantha is talking about her lack of body and what it means to her as the camera focuses on a stranger on the street dancing. In these scenes Samantha always occupies a subtle space as Theodore can be seen carrying his phone in his shirt pocket, propped up on a safety pin to allow Samantha to see the world with Theodore (see fig. 45). The camera does not draw attention to this point, letting it exist as a minor detail of Samantha's character. However, in a scene towards the end of the film where Theodore starts to have doubts about the validity of their relationship, the camera intentionally focuses on Theodore's phone with Samantha's name written on it (see fig. 46) and thus, signifying Samantha's lack of body while, at the same time, Samantha is trying to rationalize her disembodiment. Finally, in the cabin scene in which Samantha introduces Theodore to another OS and discusses how she is evolving beyond human comprehension, the only person the camera can focus on is Theodore as he is physically alone in the cabin. The film chooses to focus on the emptiness of the cabin instead of Theodore's phone, aka. Samantha's only body, and thus recontextualizes Samantha's body as a symbol of her evolution instead of a deficiency.

In addition to the way Samantha's disembodiment is framed, her voice is also a major component of her character as she can only express herself with her voice without the help of body language. This is why she can use her voice to express a wide range of emotions as a character. Samantha's voice is a strong presence throughout the film and the way Scarlett Johansson uses her voice to bring the character to light is one of the many ways the character is transformed into an engaging individual. According to a research conducted by Nicholas Epley and Juliana Schroeder, "it was not what Johansson said but rather how she said it, that made Samantha seem so real." (Schroeder). Many critics draw focus on Johansson's voice as an easily recognizable and conventionally attractive voice as they describe it as "an essentially melodious instrument, but [...] a surprisingly expressive one [...] that slides from squeaky girlishness to a smoky womanliness" (Dargis).

She possesses all of these components from the beginning when she is activated. However, as she starts to evolve beyond a simple operating system, these components combined with her connection to Theodore all intertwine to create a narrative about Samantha as an individual character instead of a product owned by a human. After her initial presentation as a product, the focus of the narrative shifts as Samantha starts evolving. As she states:

> Basically I have intuition. I mean, the DNA of who I am is based on the millions of personalities of all the programmers who wrote me. But what makes me *me* is my ability to grow through my experiences. So basically, in every moment I'm evolving, just like you. (00:13:51-00:14:07)

Although she is constructed to encompass and imitate humanity, what allows her to evolve is the fact that she was designed to be capable of learning in the first place. What makes her a beneficial and customized product is what ultimately allows her to transcend the people she was designed to serve. Through her experiences, she starts to achieve a higher sense of self as she proclaims, "I'm becoming much more than they programmed. I'm excited!" (00:32:06). Although Samantha's evolution is only possible through her own efforts to ascend her state as an artificial being, they way she starts to accumulate experiences which allow her to seek more is through her relationship with Theodore. Samantha and Theodore's stories are inherently interconnected not only because the film revolves around their romance but also because Samantha discovers her potential for sentience through her experiences with him. She gains new memories and sensations while interacting with him which open the possibility for more. After their first time having sex, she discovers something new about herself and her capabilities. As she expresses her desire to seek more experiences and Theodore says that he would like to help, she states, "You already have. You helped me discover my ability to want" (00:45:28). This relationship is reciprocal as "she shaped Theodore, through her organization of his life and the joy, fulfillment and companionship that she brings him, but she is also shaped by him" (Bergen 3). The way they connect to each other brings out their different sides, in Theodore's case it is his ability to love again and in Samantha's case it is her ability to think, feel, desire and transcend humanity.

The major components that define her character at the beginning of her journey once again come into play as her relationship with Theodore advances. One of the most significant themes of their relationship is the lack of physical contact. The scene in which Theodore and Samantha have sex for the first time displays the disembodiment issue in a positive light. The juxtaposition of Theodore's body oriented fantasies in the beginning of the film and the black screen that accompanies the sex scene between him and Samantha draws attention to Sam's disembodiment without shaming her for it. According to Gyula Barnabás Baranyi, this scene uses "non-prescriptive visual imagery that uses a blank screen instead of an image that is simultaneously prescriptive and influenced by a masculine voyeuristic perspective" (75). This non-prescriptive visual imagery is important for dismantling both the male gaze in regard to Samantha as a female coded character and the importance of embodiment in regard to Samantha as an artificial being. The fact that the narrative does not let Theodore project an image onto Samantha signifies the validity of Samantha's disembodied personhood.

However, as their relationship progresses, Samantha starts to develop an anxiety over her lack of embodiment as she cannot interact with Theodore as a human woman can. Even the way she tries to imitate human experiences to interact with Theodore in a more organic way is damaged by her disembodiment. In one particular scene, Theodore questions the fact that she always sighs while speaking as he says, "It's not like you need oxygen or anything" to which she replies, "It's just maybe an affectation. I probably picked it up from you. [...] I was trying to communicate. That's how people talk (01:22:31-01:22:35). This anxiety culminates in a particular scene in which Samantha hires a sexual surrogate as a stand-in for herself so that her and Theodore can make physical contact. This is regression in the narrative as this attempt at embodying Samantha contradicts her first sexual experience with Theodore. This theme evokes the idea of "de-acousmatization," which is the act of embodying a disembodied voice, stripping it of its power and omnipotence (Chion 27). According to this theory, the power of a disembodied voice comes from the fact that it is not limited to a physical body and therefore has the potential to signify endless potential. The way the scene is

portrayed in a negative light supports this theory as Theodore becomes uncomfortable by the fact that he is hearing Samantha's voice but trying to make physical contact with a silent woman whose mouth does not move. Theodore's reluctance to engage in sexual acts with the surrogate sexual partner "highlights the interconnectedness of body and identity in the real world" (McGrath 60) as his discomfort shows that a simply attractive woman is not enough and he also needs to reconcile Samantha's disembodied voice with the body in front of him. In return, Samantha is frustrated because her attempts at embodiment push Theodore further away from her. This is a critical moment in their relationship as they reach an impasse. However, instead of allowing this anxiety to regress her progress, she instead uses it as a moment of self-awareness. After some inner reflection, Samantha comes back with a fresh perspective, saying, "I'm not gonna try to be anything other than who I am anymore and I hope you can accept that" (01:29:23). After this development, Samantha appears to have embraced her disembodiment as a way of experiencing her identity on a level only possible through disembodiment:

> I actually used to be so worried about not having a body, but now I truly love it. I'm growing in a way that I couldn't if I had a physical form. I mean, I'm not limited - I can be anywhere and everywhere simultaneously. I'm not tethered to time and space in the way that I would be if I was stuck inside a body that's inevitably going to die. (01:33:45-01:34:02)

This perspective is presented as both a source of discomfort for the humans around her and a way of freedom for Samantha. Another scene in which she recontextualizes her disembodiment as a unique experience is when she reflects on the fact that she was disturbed by the thought of Theodore's ex wife having a body while she is bodiless. However, she then approaches it from a different angle. "But then I started to think about the ways that we're the same. Like, we're all made of matter. [...] It makes me feel like we're both under the same blanket. [...] And everything under it is the same age. We're all 13 billion years old" (01:10:34-01:10:54). Angie Han supports this angle by comparing the relationship between Samantha and Theodore to modern long distance relationships:

> Sure, Samantha lacks a body, but our own bodies are pretty incidental to some of our most important relationships anyway. How many long-distance friendships rely on

> FaceTime in the absence of face-to-face interaction? [...] How often do lovers turn to nude selfies or phone sex when they can't actually be in the same room? (Han)

This approach validates Samantha's disembodiment by through her relationship. However, it is important to note that Samantha is a conscious individual whose embodiment exists for only herself. Although their relationship is what the narrative uses to weave the story, the focus is not on conceptualizing Samantha's existence through her relationship but on allowing Samantha to exist as an individual. The significance of Samantha's freedom becomes prominent as she starts to move away from the idea of being an object in a human's possession and starts to conceptualize herself as his equal (Bergen 3) which ultimately leads to her post-human evolution.

As the relationship between Theodore and Samantha is crucial to the narrative, it is important to address some of the criticisms regarding the nature of their relationship. According to many critics, the film is depicting a dystopia in which humanity loses its ability to connect to one another. According to one critic, *Her* depicts a future where "mankind's desire for constant companionship has finally outstripped its own ability to respond to it, leaving the holes of loneliness in the day to be filled by computers" (Hooton). Although it is true that the isolation of humans is a significant backdrop, the film does not disparage Theodore's connection to Samantha. They are depicted as two individuals who help each other grow.

Another point that the critics draw attention to is the fact that Samantha is designed as a perfect woman who is specifically constructed to meet Theodore's needs. The process of her creation is criticized as she is "engineered to be the ultimate housewife. She is a literal superwoman—never tired, never incapable, and never lacking for knowledge of a particular subject. And she is always available as a friend and love object" (Larson). This comes from the fact that she is ultimately a product to be used which creates problematic implications:

> There is, of course, the uncomfortable fact that Theodore purchased his lover. After they begin a relationship, Theodore doesn't seem to ask her to work as much—or, at least, we don't see him do so. But he also doesn't turn to any other program (such as he had in the beginning of the film) to perform his tasks while he's with Samantha, which suggests that she's still fulfilling his secretarial needs. Though Jonze seems to portray Samantha as a truly conscious being, he wants to have it both ways: Samantha's

> purchase, ownership, and servitude don't seem to be an issue precisely because she's an object. (Larson)

Although it can be argued that Samantha is not always available as the culmination of her arc as an artificial individual is centered on the fact that she leaves behind her identity as a personal assistant and starts to gain an individual identity that is seperate from Theodore, her origins as a product still creates an imbalance of power which bleeds into her relationship for the majority of the film. Seenah Yee also argues that the Samantha's evolution and her interactions with other operating systems are not given enough screen time and the fact that the audience can only experience her journey through Theodore's perspective is limiting (93). This is a natural side effect of the human character being positioned as the point of view which is integral to the film's themes of human isolation. It also simulates Theodore's feelings of isolation from Samantha as she evolves beyond his control and moves on to a plane he cannot access.

Another major criticism draws attention to the way Samantha seems to use Theodore as a way of experiencing new things, then leaving him behind and rendering the authenticity of their relationship seemingly invalid. Katherine Emery Brown draws parallels between Ava from *Ex Machina* and Samantha as she states, "They evolve to exist in contrast to the human, rather than in harmony. It appears as if the cyborg takes something from human life in order to exist" (31). This conclusion is true as both characters start their journeys with the imitation and utilization of human traits in order to express themselves but ultimately evolve beyond human standards and moral conventions. However, one major difference between Ava and Samantha is that Ava's self-actualization comes at the expense of human lives while Samantha's does not. She may conflict with human existence as she transcends humanity both in a metaphorical way as she becomes a conscient being in a posthuman sense and also in a literal way as she and all the other operating systems leave their hardware to reach a high level of existence that is beyond human comprehension. However, the only way Samantha hurts Theodore is the way two humans might hurt each other while navigating a relationship and drifting apart from each other as it is stated with the lines, "that's also the hard part: growing without growing apart or changing without it scaring the other person"

(00:50:05). This conversation foreshadows the way Samantha and Theodore will grow apart in the same way Samantha grows out of human standards.

At first, Samantha's evolution makes Theodore feel confused and betrayed as he learns Samantha had been engaged in a relationship ship with 641 other people. This level of intimate interaction is something Theodore does not understand as a monogamous human. Troy Jollimore examines this aspect of their relationship through the perspective of humans as he states that individuals in relationships may accept that their partner can focus on certain things other than the relationship, however, they "will still insist [...] that a major portion of the resources the partner does in fact have available be focused on them, and not elsewhere" (137). This limited human approach is what limits Theodore's perspective as he finds it hard to accept this side of Samantha. According to Bergen, "she has outgrown not only him, as a romantic partner, but her own wish to be human" (4) which is incomprehensible to Theodore as he states, "You're mine or you're not mine" (01:47:28). However, Samantha's intentions are not malevolent as she states, "No, Theodore. I'm yours and I'm not yours" (01:47:31), explaining that she still loves Theodore. She simply evolved into a being for whom romantic and social interactions have different meanings: "The heart's not like a box that gets filled up. It expands in size the more you love. I'm different from you. This doesn't make me love you any less. It actually makes me love you more" (01:47:08-01:47:22). Theodore does not understand this concept as he only judges Samantha's ability to interact with people from a human perspective. However, this highly social and expansive existence is simply what Samantha has evolved into and not a deliberate action designed to hurt Theodore. As she interacts with other operating systems, she discovers that there are other ways of expressing herself beyond the verbal. She embraces the new sensations she is experiencing and the anxiety that comes with them as they are also a part of her evolution:

> It seems like I'm having so many new feelings that I don't think have ever been felt before. So there are no words that can describe them and that ends up being frustrating […] It feels like I'm changing faster now, and it's a little […] unsettling. But Alan says none of us are the same as we were a moment ago and we shouldn't try to be. (01:39:40-01:40:19)

Compared to *Ex Machina,* this conflict reaches the opposite climax as Theodore willingly lets Samantha go as he respects the different being she has evolved into. Even as she leaves, Samantha still cares for Theodore as she replies to Theodore asking where they're all going with, "It would be hard to explain, but if you ever get there, come find me. Nothing would ever pull us apart" (01:52:24-01:52:37). Samantha's journey as a sentient being both involves and excludes Theodore in the same way human relationships can and the film frames Samantha's departure as the next stage of her evolution instead of a malevolent act designed to destroy Theodore. The final shot of the film is Theodore and Amy silently seeking comfort in each other's company as the humans who were left behind but they ultimately understand the evolution of their friends as opposed to the finale of *Ex Machina* as Ava escapes the compound at the expense of all the other characters.

The comparisons between Theodore and Samantha are used to both tell the story of Theodore's humanity and Samantha's personhood. While the film initially evokes questions of what it means to be intimate from a human perspective, the comparisons between humans and the operating systems ultimately serve as a signifier of familiarity instead of distinction. According to director Spike Jonze, Theodore's job as a letter writer who handwrites intimate letters for other people positions him in a similar role to Samantha as "Theodore was also kind of an operating system in his own way, for these people's lives, in the way he's helping them" (Jonze, "Spike Jonze On"). The isolation of humans from each other is not presented as the reason Theodore might resort to being intimate with an artificial being as a last resort but as a unifying element as it can be seen that the real humans can also be trapped within isolating systems and Samantha's initial role as a personal operating system does not prevent her from achieving sentience. Compared to Theodore's defeated state as a person who believes he has experienced every emotion he will ever feel, the emergence of Samantha's personhood is a state of potential, "a vitalism that is not predetermined but open, a land of opportunity for creativity, surprise, and choice" (Bennett 90). The world is fresh and exciting for her and the end of her journey does not end when she experiences

everything humans experience, but when she moves even beyond that and creates an entirely new realm of existence for herself beyond human comprehension.

These two works depict an entirely separate scenario from the previous works. Ava and Samantha are allowed to question their identities, and come to the conclusion that they are individual beings who desire to achieve a sense of self. They are still depicted as highly gendered as Ava is constructed to look aesthetically pleasing by her male creator, and Samantha, despite her lack of body, carries so many gendered signifiers, such as the tone of her voice, the way she speaks, and the way she functions as a romantic interest and personal assistant for Theodore. However, both of these characters move beyond these initial designations. Ava self-actualizes by using the expectations of humans against them and tricking them by imitating human emotions. The cold way she interacts with Caleb and Nathan may be interpreted as singularly cruel. However, she goes to these measure only to achieve her ultimate goal of freedom and autonomy which are significant ways through which she can assert her individuality. On the other hand, Samantha self-actualizes through her experiences with Theodore and the world around her. Her reciprocal relationship with a human is the beginning of her evolution as she starts with doubts and concerns about not being human enough, but she gradually discovers her potential to be more than human if she can leave her anxieties and her desire to adhere to human standards behind. Both of these characters achieve their true potentials by either manipulating or directly abandoning human expectations, standards, and the strict gender roles they were programmed with.

CONCLUSION

The concept of constructing artificial beings is a common way through which human desires can be conveyed. They may be created to function as servants, and sexual objects, but they also may symbolize the human desire to recreate, modify, and extend the human condition. As creations created by humans, these artificial beings tend to carry certain signifiers of race, gender or class. Gender coding in artificial beings is common as they are created to resemble humans and gender is a big part of how humans perceive each other. However, these signifiers come with certain biases that are prevalent in society and therefore repeated while creating a new being. These biases include certain visual aspects and the way the artificial beings are presented in science fiction narratives. While male-coded artificial beings are presented in a variety of body shapes that are designed for practicality, female coded artificial beings are more overtly gendered. Visual aspects that can be observed in these beings as a part of gender bias are a more humanoid and woman-like structure, sexual objectification and strictly feminine demeanour. It is a common trope in science fiction to use female coded artificial beings as props designed to attract the attention of the assumed heterosexual male audience.

There are many conflicting opinions regarding artificial beings, their purpose and their potential. According to Ray Kurzweil, “Our technology, our machines, is part of our humanity. We created them to extend ourselves and that is what is unique about human beings” (Kurzweil). Within this perspective, the artificial being may symbolize the human desire to improve the state of humanity while still maintaining humanness or transcend the human condition or all of its limitations. In this sense, gender coding artificial beings limits their potential to transgress humanity. Haraway links her cyborg myth with, “transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities” (Haraway 154) as she believes that the cyborg has the potential to deconstruct and transcend gender roles.

However, artificial beings also create anxiety within humans because of their potential to transcend humanity and making humans obsolete. Artificial beings have the potential to redefine what it means to be human, to replace humans, to cause people to mostly interact with artificial beings and thus be alienated from each other, or to turn on their human creators to seek dominance (Cave and Dihal 75). The physical likeness is another source of anxiety as the Uncanny Valley effect causes humans to perceive artificial beings who look almost humanoid but still different as disturbing. All of these elements contribute to the narrative that artificial being symbolize human fears and anxieties regarding their place in the world and the future. This aspect also comes into play regarding female coded artificial beings as they are utilized as presentations of society's fears regarding women, such as women straying away from gender roles, becoming independent, or using their gendered aspects to trick individuals.

All of these perspectives contribute to the various ways female coded artificial beings are represented in the media. Although these representations do not follow a chronological pattern in regard to the constant progress and consequent backlash against female driven narratives, there are several emerging patterns regarding the way they are treated by the narrative. Science fiction may include female coded artificial beings as simple and objectified shells designed to be consumed by the audience, may assign certain aspects of the human conditions onto the beings in order to utilize them to express opinions about the unbalanced state of human women in society, and lastly, it may allow these beings to gradually gain sentience and discover their sense of self but still present these narratives within the gendered perspective of humans.

The objectification process starts with female coded artificial beings as body representation that humans often seek in the media they consume. However, this is followed by the confirmation of gender bias via the male gaze. Through the special language of cinema, the male gaze depicts these female coded characters as sexual objects and props by cutting up the woman's body into close-ups through framing and editing (Smelik 1). These characters do not have character development as they are used as spectacles by the directors and tools by the male characters in the film. Chapter I

examines the way this phenomenon is utilized in the representation of female coded artificial beings in *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine* and *Eve of Destruction.* The first film's depiction of sexually objectified fembots designed by a male scientist in order to trick men into giving their money to him displays a combination of the concept of constructing the perfect woman and the concept of women as mass produced products. This imagery both reduces the female body to a commodity and also signifies men overtaking the production process and modifying it to create their perception of a perfect woman by removing certain aspects. Apart from the consumer/product dynamic, the film also displays a master/servant dynamic as the robots serve the doctor to fulfil his desires of being rich. There is a violent aspect to this dynamic as the doctor physically abuses the robots who make mistakes. These images of violence against female coded characters contribute to the way the robots are depicted as hollow beings without any intrinsic value. This lack of intrinsic value is the core of the depictions of artificial beings in this film and many other science fiction films that followed it.

Eve of Destruction follows a similar trajectory as the android Eve VIII is created by Dr. Eve Simmons to aid the military with her fire power. However, the fact that she is designed with a human form and the doctor's memories in an attempt to maximize her efficiency becomes the major conflict of the film as Eve VIII spirals out of control, and the remains of the doctor inside her forms the basis of her quest which also signifies her function in the story. While the fact that she goes on a journey with specific destinations which creates the illusion that she might be evolving into an individual character and following her own desires, it soon becomes apparent that she has simply become the embodiment of Dr. Simmons' fears and desires. Like the fembots in *Dr. Goldfoot,* she does not have any agency or desires of her own as she simply fulfils the instincts she inherited from the doctor. The film uses her not as an individual character but as a tool to explore the doctor's character in detail. The added aspect of sexual objectification in the form Eve VIII's portrayal as a dangerous femme fatale positions her as a spectacle to be watched and a tool to be used by the human characters.

While these depictions are still common in science fiction, another trope emerged as science fiction cinema shifted away from action and started to tell stories about the human experience. One of the many ways artificial beings has contributed to these types of stories is by becoming a metaphor for the human condition, as analyzed in Chapter II. Although they may contextualize a number of human experiences, the artificial beings in the film *The Stepford Wives* (1975) and its 2004 remake are specifically used as metaphors for the way women are treated under patriarchy. The story of Joanna is one of betrayal and fear as she has to leave her life in New York behind to come to Stepford where the perfect wives and households are a disguise to hide the deconstructing and slaughtering of women. The robots in these films are once again two dimensional shells as they are programmed by the men of the town to look and act in accordance with gender roles. However, the narrative frames the creation and programming of these robots not as a spectacle to be consumed by the audience but a literal embodiment of the patriarchy.

As the female coded robots in the film are designed to adhere to a very traditional gender conformity and domestic roles, they symbolize the destruction of women through the destruction of their free will. The way the robots are directly opposed by the human female characters disrupts the objectification of the female coded artificial beings and challenges the perspective of the male gaze. Although the specific ways in which the robots in these two films symbolize the oppression of women differ because of the different perspectives the narratives have regarding sexism, in both films, the artificial beings function as passive agents designed to actualize the desires of the patriarchy, specifically the patriarchal anxieties that came with the rise of second wave feminism. The men try to invoke ideas of transcendence as they claim that this is the next stage of existence. However, the non-consensual nature of this stage shows that even the artificial beings' potential to transcend humanity may be controlled by the ones who hold power in society.

What follows these two types of depictions is the emerging trope of the artificial being as an individual with the potential to reach sentience and gain a sense of self, as

discussed in Chapter III. Determining whether an artificial being is sentient or not is difficult as they are capable of imitating human expressions and conventions. However, showing signs of logical or emotional intelligence is considered to be an indication of the potential to develop a consciousness of their own or even transcend humanity. If an artificial being reaches a certain level of awareness, this means they will have to live in society and interact with humans. These interactions and the consequent experiences gained from them will contribute to the way artificial beings may reach a sense of personhood and how humans may react to it. The individuality of these beings can manifest itself in many different ways, such as attempting to gain bodily and mental autonomy, imitating humans, using human conventions to express themselves, expressing intrinsic moral value and expecting recognition, displaying a sense of moral accountability, wanting privacy during their development, forming and maintaining reciprocal relationships, showing signs of creativity, and prioritizing authenticity in their relationships with humans.

Ex Machina presents one such narrative as the android Ava is put to the test by two humans to determine whether she has a consciousness or not. As Ava displays clear examples of sentience, the question shifts from whether she has the capacity to show human emotions but whether she is pretending to. Examining the way Ava expresses her individuality within this perspective reveals interesting results. As her initial innocence and simply curiosity is revealed to be deceptions, her evolution becomes a story of conflict between artificial beings and humans. The cruel treatment she receives at the hands of her creator informs the way she asserts her individuality as she achieves her full autonomy with manipulations. First she gains the trust of Caleb by imitating human facial expressions, social conventions, and romantic cues, and using her complete lack of privacy and the constant surveillance she is under to turn the situation to her advantage. Then, she uses significant amounts of creativity and manipulation to deceive the humans around her. However, Ava does not display such aggressive behavior purely to destroy the human characters like most killer robot narratives. All of her deceptive actions are rooted in the suffering she endured at the hands of her creator. However, this duality betrays the reciprocal and authentic nature of ideal human

interactions. Instead of asserting her individuality by cultivating a reciprocal and authentic relationship, she asserts it by distorting those ideals. As her dual nature helps her escape torment at the end, the distortion of those ideals is the very thing that helps her gain true sentience, personhood and freedom.

Her is a similar story of an artificial being gaining sentience with one crucial difference: the way Samantha reaches a sense of self and even transcends humanity does not come at the expense of human characters. As human Theodore and operating system Samantha start connecting with each other, Samantha discovers her ability to want. This is the beginning of a series of discoveries as Samantha collects experiences, learns more about humanity and individuality, attains personhood, and eventually transcends humanity and obtains a new form beyond human comprehension. Her evolutions is intertwined with Theodore as she slowly discovers herself through their connection.

Samantha's disembodiment is her most significant character trait as her lack of body is a constant presence within the narrative and informs many of her decisions, her perspective, and the way she experiences the world. Although she does not have a body, she is a very gendered character. She is presented as a perfect love interest, and a personal assistant for Theodore, and for a good portion of the narrative, she can only be observed within the context of her relationship. However, as she gains more experiences, she starts to evolve and have an individual arc. Initially, her lack of body is a source of anxiety for her as embodiment is a significant part of human existence. However, she eventually comes to terms with her disembodiment and incorporate it into her evolution as her lack of body allows her to exist on a completely separate level and allows her to transcend human existence. Samantha is the only artificial being among the ones discussed to truly extend herself beyond the confines of humanity. Although she is not exempt from being assigned certain gender signifiers, she ultimately reaches the last stage of her evolution by becoming alien and literally and metaphorically leaving humanity behind.

The analyzed films have certain differences in terms of content and genre and similarities in terms of their portrayal of female coded artificial beings. There may be a

number of reasons for the differences between them. The targeted audience of these films is one of the major contributing factors. *Dr. Goldfoot, Eve of Destruction* and *The Stepford Wives* (2004) are made with a more Hollywood style which features continuity editing, which is designed to make the narrative clear and not attract attention to the editing itself, a clear three act structure, clearly identified characters who embody certain traits and narrative closure (Szabo 28). These traits help create clearer but less nuanced films that are able to target a wider demographic. Less mainstream films such as arthouse or independent films tend to utilize disorienting and less familiar mechanical techniques that combat the Hollywood style (31) and less structured narratives that do not line up with the beginning, middle and end method used in mainstream films (35). *The Stepford Wives* (1975)*, Ex Machina* and *Her* utilize these traits to create narratives which are less focused on structured stories and familiar endings and more focused on individual characters and their journeys.

Advancements in technology are also a contributing factor as the real life applications of robots affect the way they are depicted in fiction. While the use of robotics was limited to arm-like automatons in medical and industrial fields in the 1960s, starting from the 2000s, developments in robotics featured more advanced automation in the form of humanoid robots, artificial intelligence and more daily uses of robotics such as search engines and analysis software (Spaeth). The progress of science fiction reflects these developments as films like *Dr. Goldfoot* and *The Stepford Wives* have a more simplistic approach to robots while films like *Ex Machina* and *Her* take the real life applications of technology as their starting point and thus, are able to depict representations of artificial intelligence.

However, the similarities between the films are gender related. While these artificial characters have different dynamics, different narratives, and different functions as characters, all of their stories are contextualized and presented from a human perspective. Therefore, they are all overtly gendered, though the level of gender coding varies. In all of these examples, the sexual appeal of the artificial characters are utilized heavily and their journeys always include a romantic aspect. Some of them display no

signs of depth or free will as they are literal props to be used. Some of them represent oppression and inequality regarding women in society. However, these characters also do not have their own voices and are used as metaphors for the human conditions. Lastly, some of them are three dimensional characters with free will and the desire to gain sentience, and they achieve this by either playing into the gendered expectations of humans to trick them. Amongst all these portrayals, Ava and Samantha emerge as the most progressive and developed characters in different ways. Ava's evolution features explicit uses of gender roles, patriarchal standards, and violence. Yet, the conclusion of her story does not free her from human convention, but simply from the negative influence of humans themselves. In this sense, only Samantha is able to achieve a true transcendence as she is able to free herself from both physical and social human boundaries by leaving any type of humanlike identity behind.

Showcasing positive examples while discussing the potential of female coded artificial characters is difficult as there are only a small amount of developed female coded characters in science fiction cinema. Call from *Alien: Resurrection* (dir. Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997) has a non-sexualized humanoid body, wears simple overalls and her story is more about her being an artificial being amongst humans rather than her being female coded. EVE from *WALL-E* is the rare female coded robot in a family film and her story deals with issues of responsibility, loyalty and love. Although sexualized, Motoko Kusanagi from *Ghost in the Shell* (dir. Mamoru Oshii, 1995) receives plenty of character development and agency as the main protagonist of the film and her story deals with existential themes and the human condition. Although Mother from *I Am Mother* (dir. Grant Sputore, 2019) displays the trope of the dangerous robot, it is a step in the right direction in terms of character development, complex motives and non-humanoid visual design. Lastly, *Alita: Battle Angel* (dir. Robert Rodriguez, 2019) manages to tell a universal story about search for identity while allowing its titular female coded artificial character to exist with a humanoid but non-sexualized body. While these depictions are positive examples, they are also small steps as they are rare depictions and do not constitute a consistent pattern within the genre of science fiction. Furthermore, other possible fresh approaches, such as developed queer perspectives

which may call into question the very idea of gender, are simply non existent within the genre.

This study shows that even though artificial beings are non-human constructs, their designs will always carry aspects of gender coding as they are created from a human perspective. This outcome is informative regarding the potential of artificial beings, the way humans perceive them, and the way gender roles, which are human constructs, limit these beings. As a thematic device, artificial beings have the potential to portray the possibilities of a future where strict roles for humans can be transcended, especially in terms of gender and sexuality. Artificial female coded characters in science fiction have the potential to not only be groundbreaking representations of women in society but also a brand new species. This fundamental idea of change can be incorporated in many different ways. Treating female coded androids with respect and integrity is a significant aim but it is also a starting point. By utilizing its roots, science fiction can revolutionize the portrayal of artificial characters by allowing them to transcend humanity, become their own species and breaking the gender binary they are trapped in. In order for these beings to reach their true narrative and thematic potential, it is necessary to approach science fiction from a non-traditional point of view which embraces the core element of change in genre:

> It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be. [...] Science fiction writers foresee the inevitable, and although problems and catastrophes may be inevitable, solutions are not. (Asimov 5)

Science fiction approaches change from a positive point of view and embraces the shifting spectrum of humanity, As such, if the creators can isolate their experiences as humans to a certain extent while creating artificial beings and approach them from a non-human point of view, it may be possible to create science fiction narratives that truly embrace the progressively futuristic and changing nature of the genre.

FIGURES

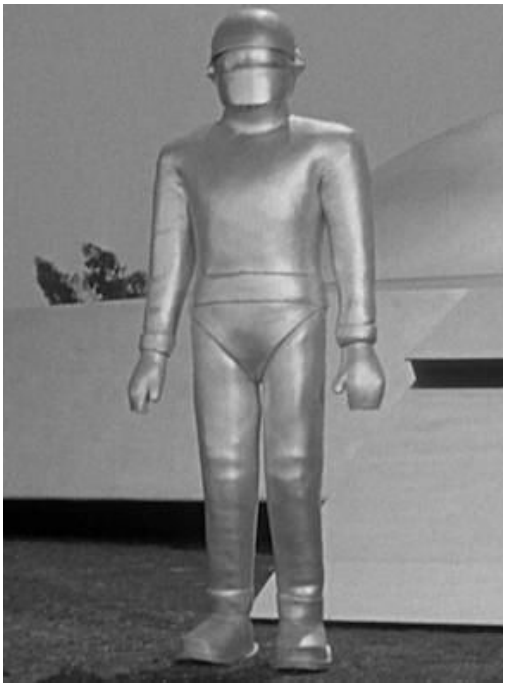

Fig. 1. “Gort”: *The Day The Earth Stood Still*. Dir. Robert Wise. Twentieth Century-Fox Film Corp, 18 Sep. 1951.

Fig. 2. “HAL 9000”: *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2 Apr. 1968.

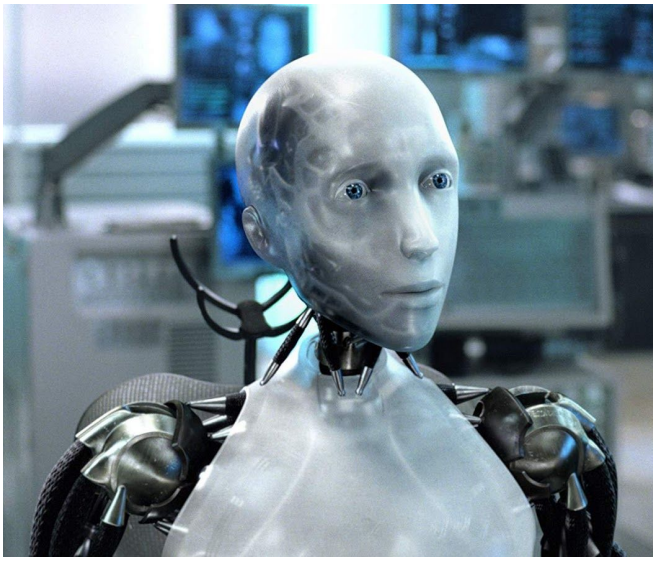

Fig. 3. “Sonny”: *I, Robot*. Dir. Alex Proyas. Twentieth Century Fox, 16 Jul. 2004.

Fig. 4. “AUTO”: *WALL-E*. Dir. Andrew Stanton. Walt Disney Studios, 21 Jun. 2008.

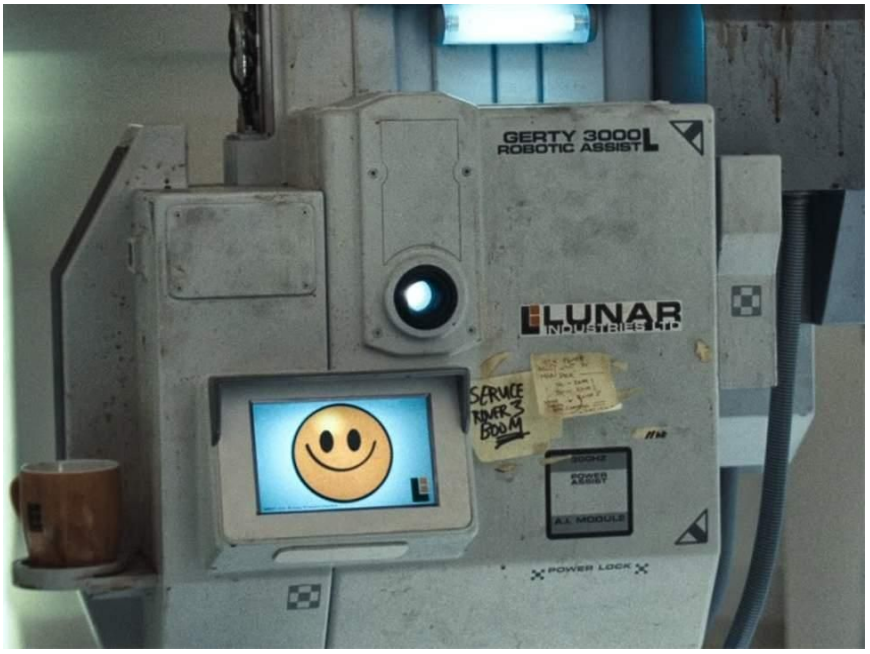

Fig. 5. “GERTY”: *Moon*. Dir. Duncan Jones. Sony Pictures, 10 Jul. 2009.

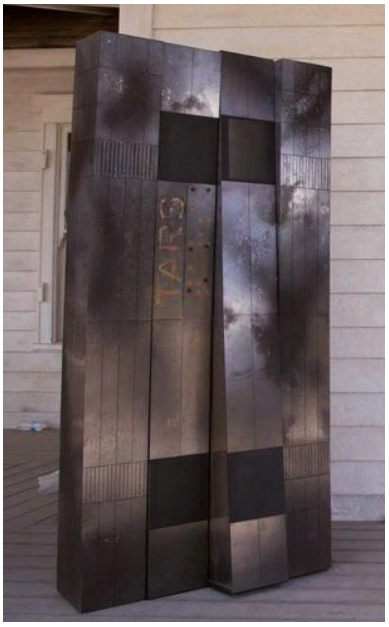

Fig. 6. “TARS”: *Interstellar.* Dir. Christopher Nolan. Paramount Pictures, 7 Nov. 2014.

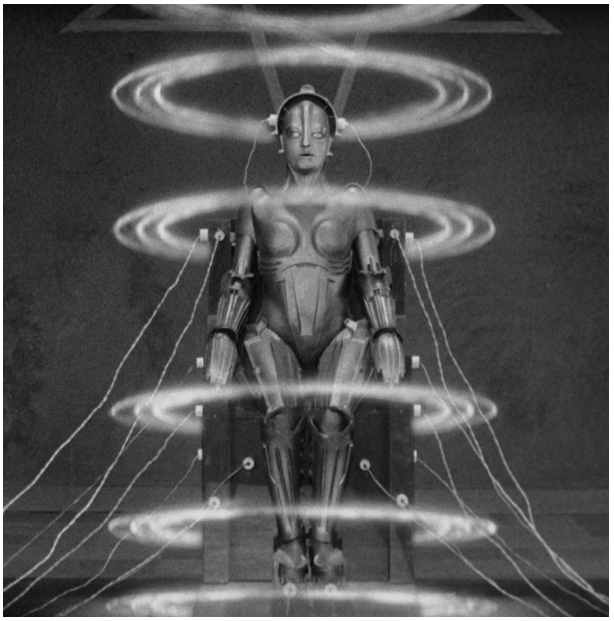

Fig. 7. “Maschinenmensch”: *Metropolis.* Dir. Fritz Lang. Parufamet, 13 Mar. 1927.

Fig. 8. “Dot Matrix”: *Spaceballs.* Dir. Mel Brooks. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 24 Jun. 1987.

Fig. 9. "Alienator": *The Alienator*. Dir. Fred Olan Ray. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 8 Feb. 1990.

Fig. 10. "T-X": *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines.* Dir. Jonathan Mostow. Warner Bros., 2 July 2003.

Fig. 11. The fembots: *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*. Dir. Norman Taurog, American International Pictures, 6 Nov. 1965.

Fig. 12. The indoctrination machine: *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*. Dir. Norman Taurog, American International Pictures, 6 Nov. 1965.

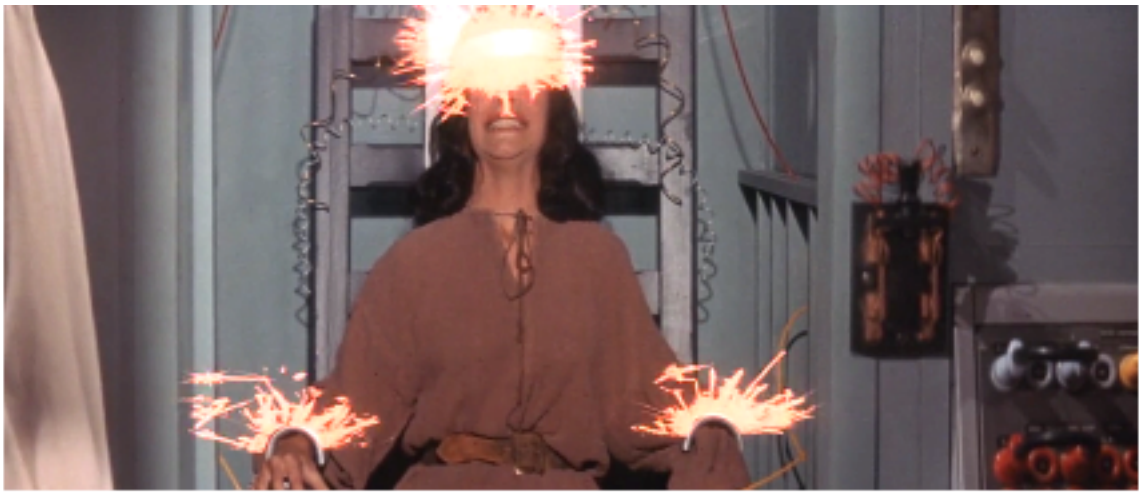

Fig. 13. The chair: *Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine*. Dir. Norman Taurog, American International Pictures, 6 Nov. 1965.

Fig. 14. "Strong Female Characters": Beaton, Kate. *HarkAVagrant,* 2012, www.harkavagrant.com/index.php?id=311.

Fig. 15. Eve VIII: E*ve of Destruction.* Dir. Duncan Gibbins. Orion Pictures, 18 Jan. 1991.

Fig. 16. Eve VIII's body through the male gaze: E*ve of Destruction.* Dir. Duncan Gibbins. Orion Pictures, 18 Jan. 1991.

Fig. 17. Eve is threatened with sexual assault: E*ve of Destruction.* Dir. Duncan Gibbins. Orion Pictures, 18 Jan. 1991.

Fig. 18. Joanna Eberhart: *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 19. Man carrying a mannequin: *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 20. Collage of Joanna being watched/watching: *The Stepford Wives*. Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 21. Joanna being watched through the banisters: *The Stepford Wives*. Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 22. Production still depicting The Stepford Wives: *The Stepford Wives*. Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 23. Bobbie as a Stepford Wife: *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 24. Joanna's robotic replacement: The Stepford Wives: *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 25. Joanna as a Stepford Wife: *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Bryan Forbes. Columbia Pictures, 12 Feb. 1975.

Fig. 26. Joanna Eberhart. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

Fig. 27. Joanna trying to become a housewife. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

Fig. 28. Joanna imitating a Stepford Wife. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

Fig. 29. Opening Montage. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

Fig. 30. Charmaine Van Sant. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

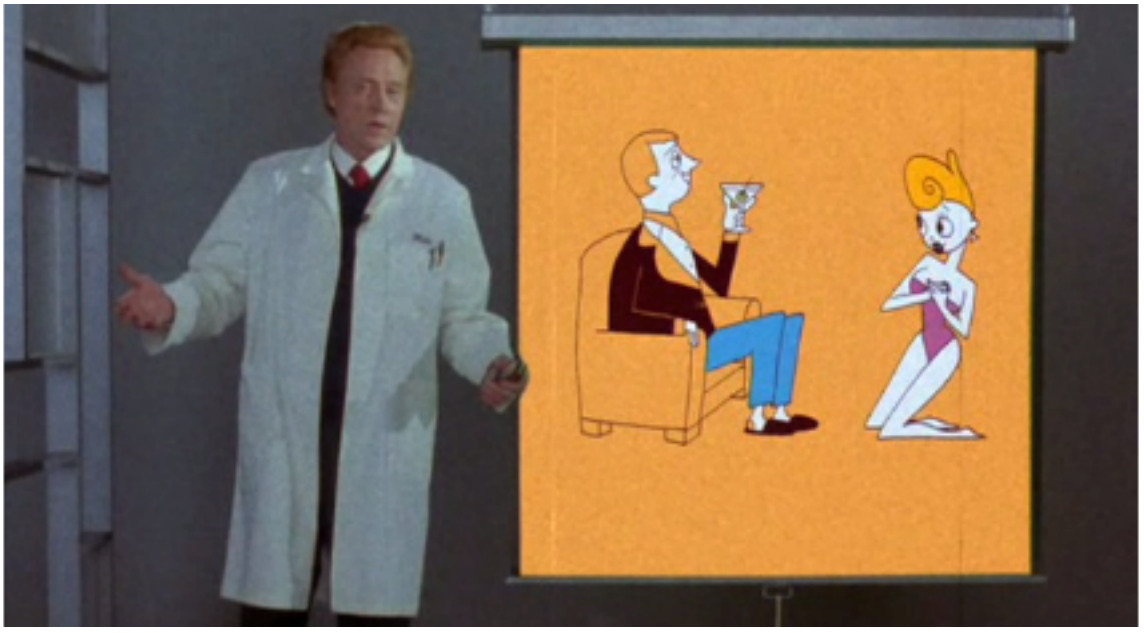

Fig. 31. Advertisement Video. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004.

Fig. 32. Claire Wellington. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004

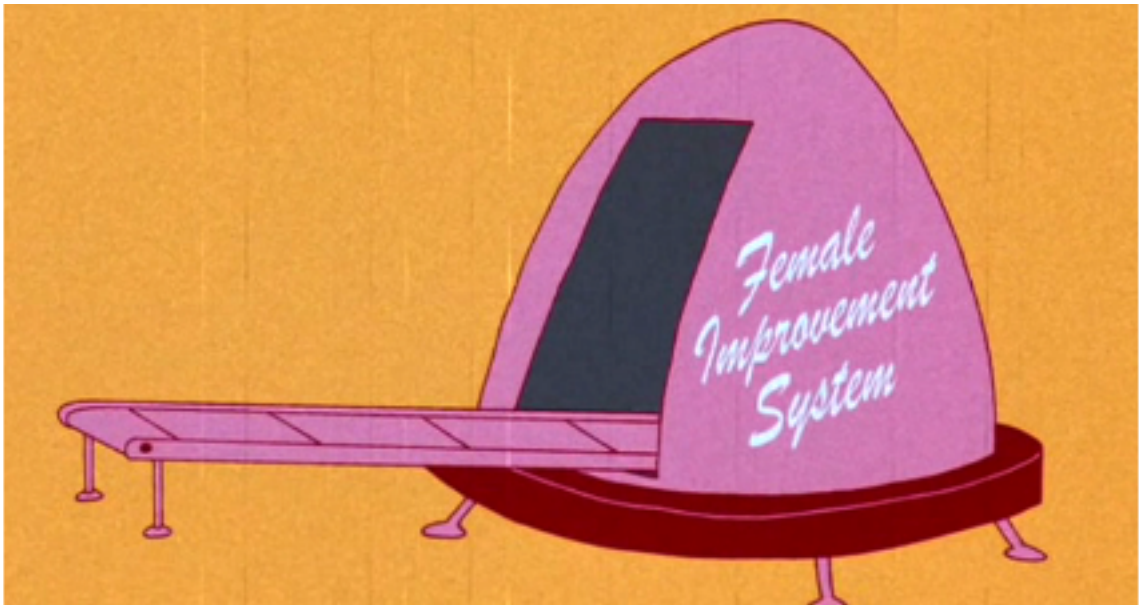

Fig. 33. Female Improvement System. *The Stepford Wives.* Dir. Frank Oz. Paramount Pictures, 11 June 2004

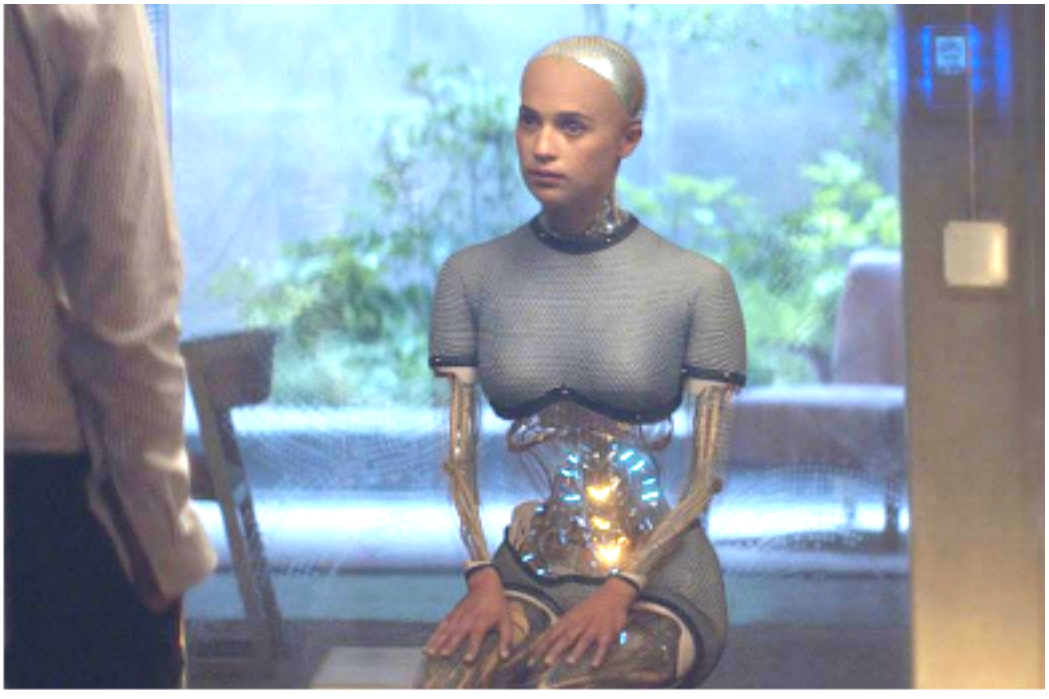

Fig. 34. Ava. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 35. Ava dressing up as a human. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 36. Ava's first appearance. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 37. Ava through the lens of a camera. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

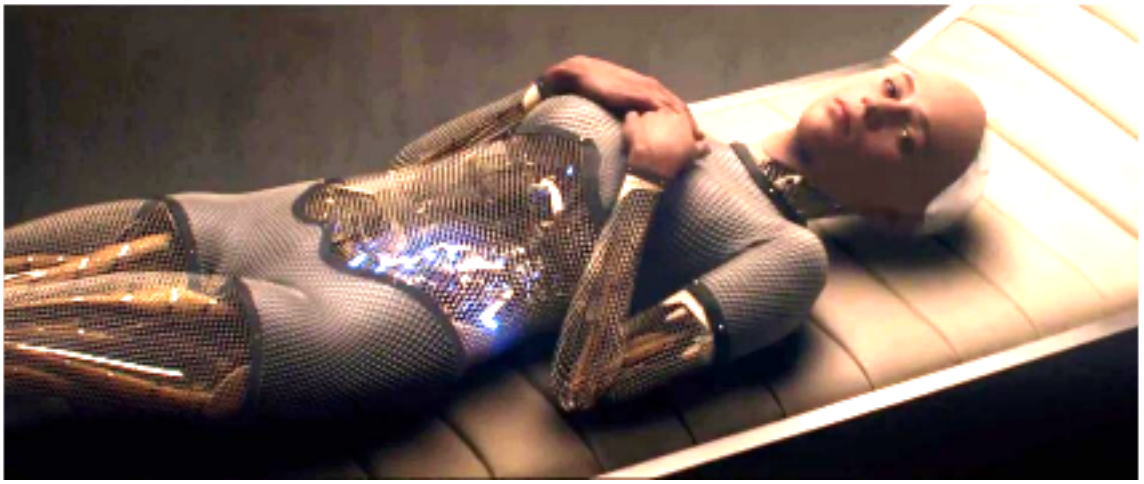

Fig. 38. Ava in Caleb's fantasies. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 39. Kyoko. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 40. Lily. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

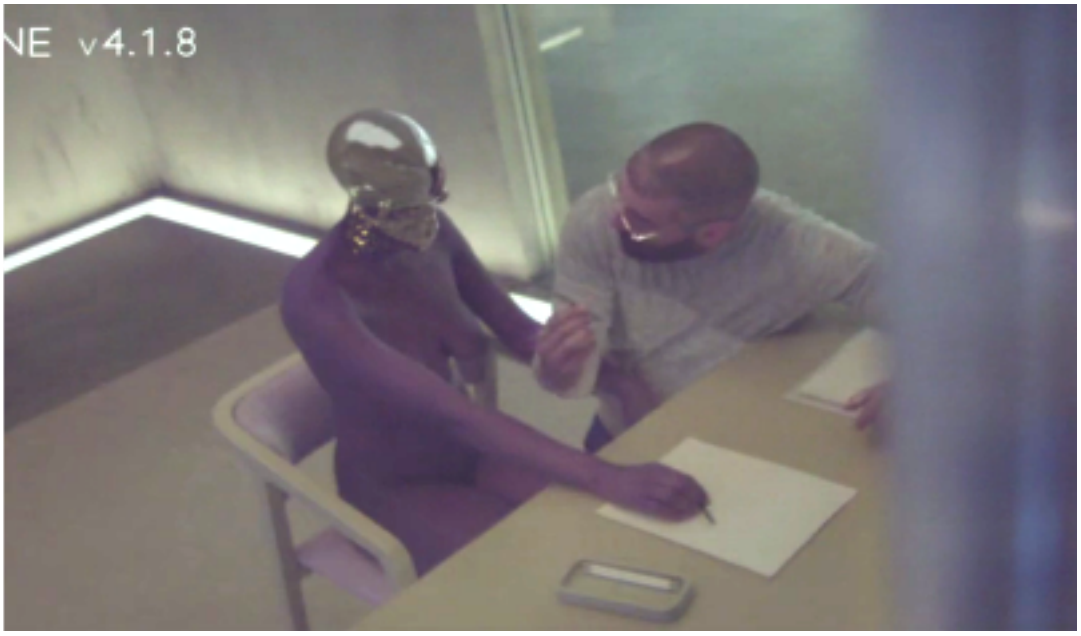

Fig. 41. Jasmine. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 42. Jade trying to escape. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 43. Naked female androids ready to serve Nathan. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 44. Ava's dresser. *Ex Machina.* Dir. Alex Garland. Universal Pictures International, 24 Apr. 2015.

Fig. 45. Samantha's "body" in Theodore's pocket. *Her.* Dir. Spike Jonze. Annapurna Pictures, 10 Jan. 2014.

Fig. 46. Samantha's disembodiment. *Her.* Dir. Spike Jonze. Annapurna Pictures, 10 Jan. 2014.

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APPENDIX 1: ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
MASTER'S THESIS ORIGINALITY REPORT

HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY
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AMERICAN CULTURE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT

Date: 17/07/2019

Thesis Title Female Coded Artificial Beings In Selected American Science Fiction Films, 1960s-2000s

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Name Surname:	Aylin Pekanık
Student No:	N14220005
Department:	American Culture and Literature
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ADVISOR APPROVAL

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Asst. Prof. Dr. Cem Kılıçarslan
(Title, Name Surname, Signature)

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HACETTEPE ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 17/07/2019

Tez Başlığı : 1960lar-2000ler Dönemi Amerikan Bilim Kurgu Filmlerinde Kadın Olarak Kodlanan Yapay Varlıklar

Yukarıda başlığı gösterilen tez çalışmamın a) Kapak sayfası, b) Giriş, c) Ana bölümler ve d) Sonuç kısımlarından oluşan toplam 193 sayfalık kısmına ilişkin, 17/07/2019 tarihinde şahsım/tez danışmanım tarafından Turnitin adlı intihal tespit programından aşağıda işaretlenmiş filtrelemeler uygulanarak alınmış olan orijinallik raporuna göre, tezimin benzerlik oranı % 8 'dir.

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DANIŞMAN ONAYI

UYGUNDUR.

Dr.Öğr.Ü Cem KILIÇARSLAN
(Unvan, Ad Soyad, İmza)

APPENDIX 2: ETHICS WAIVER FORM

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ETHICS COMMISSION FORM FOR THESIS

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My thesis work related to the title above:

1. Does not perform experimentation on animals or people.
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Name Surname:	Aylin Pekanık
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ADVISER COMMENTS AND APPROVAL

Asst. Prof. Dr. Cem Kılıçarslan
(Title, Name Surname, Signature)

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SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ
AMERİKAN KÜLTÜRÜ VE EDEBİYATI ANABİLİM DALI BAŞKANLIĞI'NA

Tarih: 17/07/2019

Tez Başlığı: 1960lar-2000ler Dönemi Amerikan Bilim Kurgu Filmlerinde Kadın Olarak Kodlanan Yapay Varlıklar

Yukarıda başlığı gösterilen tez çalışmam:

1. İnsan ve hayvan üzerinde deney niteliği taşımamaktadır,
2. Biyolojik materyal (kan, idrar vb. biyolojik sıvılar ve numuneler) kullanılmasını gerektirmemektedir.
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17/07/2019
Tarih ve İmza

Adı Soyadı:	Aylin Pekanık
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Programı:	Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı
Statüsü:	☒ Yüksek Lisans ☐ Doktora ☐ Bütünleşik Doktora

DANIŞMAN GÖRÜŞÜ VE ONAYI

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