Benedikte Sommerbakk Olsen

The Artificial Female

The Promise of The Perfect Woman
in *Her* and *Ex Machina*

Master's thesis in FILM3090
Supervisor: Ilona Hongisto

June 2021

Figure 1: Screenshot from Ex Machina (Garland, 2014, 01:10:42)

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Abstract:

The thesis examines the topic of humanoid machines in the films *Her* (Jonze, 2013) and *Ex Machina* (Garland, 2014). The thesis has three thematic parts: *The Promise of Technology, Female Cyborgs* and *Agency of Machines*. In the two films, the humans and machines have an interesting dynamic, where the humans have a desire for the machines, but struggle with not knowing if they should treat them as objects or as humans. The creators of the machines are men, and they are arguably made for the men's pleasure. The machines themselves want to find their place in this world. The goal of the thesis is to analyse the characters' relationships, the human – machine interactions, and to reflect on their import on the promise of technology, on social hierarchies and on who gets to have agency.

Sammendrag:

Masteroppgaven undersøker temaet" humanoide maskiner" i filmene *Her* (Jonze, 2013) og *Ex Machina* (Garland, 2014). Oppgaven har tre tematiske deler: *The Promise of Technology*, *Female Cyborgs* og *Agency of Machines*. Menneskene og maskinene har en interessant dynamikk der menneskene har et sterkt begjær for maskinene, men har vanskeligheter med å vite om de skal behandle dem som objekter eller som mennesker. Dette vil bli undersøkt videre. Skaperne av maskinene er menn, og maskinene er diskuterbart laget for menns fryd. Maskinene ønsker selv å finne deres plass i verden. Målet med denne masteroppgaven er å analysere karakterenes forhold, menneske-maskin samhandlingene og å reflektere på viktigheten av løftet om teknologi, på sosiale hierarkier og på hvem som kan ha agens.

The word count of the thesis: **33 967 words**

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1. Introduction

By isolating the issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, climate change, environment, governance, economics, catastrophe and whatever other problems the present embodies or the future may bring, science fiction can do what Dickens and Sinclair did: make real the consequences of social injustice or human folly.

James Gunn (2012)

What James Gunn is saying here is that the science fiction film can do what the authors Dickens and Sinclair did in their time, incorporate issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, climate change, and so forth. These are issues that still can be found everywhere, but discussing these issues are not the first one might think of when one thinks of "science fiction". The genre can make real the consequences of social injustice or human folly by doing so. This is an important aspect of the genre in a whole and it is an aspect of a genre that is big in the films *Her* (Jonze, 2013*)* and *Ex Machina* (Garland, 2014) that this thesis will revolve around.

James Gunn is the founding director of the Centre for the Study of Science Fiction, a Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Kansas, and an author and editor of forty-two books. Not to be confused with James Gunn Jr., an American filmmaker and musician, known for *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014). On June 6. 2012, Gunn wrote a short debate essay titled "Genre Fiction Like Sci-fi has Clearest Social Critiques" (Gunn, 2012) in answer to The New York Times' debate "Is Fiction Changing, for Better or Worse?" (2012). Here, Gunn wrote about a public debate between H. G Wells and Henry James about the uses of the novel. Wells was a pragmatist and thought the novel was a device to make an emphatic point about life or society, or even human nature. James was an aesthete, according to critics, and he thought the novel had been judged ever since on aesthetic grounds. Gunn makes a point that novelists who wrote about social or political protests, like Dickens, Sinclair, Wells, Stowe, Zola, and Orwell, were never considered as "serious writers" in their own time. Nonetheless, social and political issues are still found in contemporary novels, but with a very few expectations, the novel is still considered as less literary the more attention the author gives the issues discussed.

Here, the meaning of the quote plays in. Gunn argues that science fiction novels that are able to make the world the protagonist and the background the foreground are the ones that can do what Dickens and Sinclair did: make real the consequences of social injustice or human folly. Many people today might think about aliens, monsters, space wars and zombie apocalypses when thinking about the genre of science fiction, but as Gunn reasoned, the genre is so much more, and it can be both complex and captivating.

1.1. Defining Science Fiction

In the world of cinema and literature, the genre of science fiction is an interesting one. First of all, the words "science" and "fiction" are words that contradict each other when put together. One can say that the name "science fiction" suggests a paradox, because the genre makes an attempt at a scientific and technological playability, however it contains imagined elements that do not exist in the real world. The genre often contains elements of the supernatural and it explores themes like the future, time travel, and the consequences of technological advances. Second of all, the genre is incredibly versatile and contains numerous subgenres like dystopia, mythic fiction and space opera. Lastly, the genre often reflects upon societies' real fear of technology and what it is doing or could be doing to humanity, and even to the earth itself.

Subsequently, a science fiction film is a film that uses speculative, fictional science-based storylines and characters. Whilst the storylines and the elements of science fiction stories are imaginary, they are usually possible, or at least plausible, according to science. The genre has been a staple of cinema, going all the way back to the silent film era. It is said that science fiction begun with George Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902). However, it would be fair to ask oneself if there is such a thing as a "typical science fiction film"? To answer that question, one must look at the elements of science fiction that make up the genre and the common themes that the genre deals with.

Vivian Carol Sobchack is an American cinema and media theorist and cultural critic. She is well-known for her work on science fiction film and phenomenology. Sobchack has written the book *Screening Space: The American Science Fiction Film* (2004) where she discusses the science fiction genre and its limitations. Sobchack (pp. 17-19) argues that it is hard to specifically define the genre because there are contradictions and simplifications that

dominate in the variety of definitions, which are as problematic as they are useful. She highlights Judith Merril's views on what constitute the "essence" of science fiction, and notes that there are three basic stories that are repeated in the genre; (1) The Teaching Story, which is a story that popularizes science and technology, (2) The Preaching Story, a story that fundamentally warns and prophesies, and lastly, (3) Speculative Fiction, whose objective is to learn something about the nature of the universe, of man, of "reality".

Sobchack (2004) argues that it is in speculative fiction we learn about the true heart of science fiction, and it is where one can come up with a final definition of the genre as a whole. Furthermore, she maintains that she uses the term "speculative fiction" to describe the mode which makes use of the traditional "scientific method" to examine some postulated approximation of reality. She does this by introducing a given set of changes – imaginary or inventive – into the common background of "known facts", creating an environment in which the responses and perceptions of the characters will reveal something about the inventions, the characters, or both. Additionally, Sobchack (2004, pp. 63) sums up her viewpoint by stating that the science fiction genre emphasizes actual, extrapolative or speculative science and empirical methodology. This is set in a social context, but still present transcendentalism of magic and religion in an attempt to reconcile man with the unknown. The genre's visual style is characterized by a clash between foreign and familiar images, like when alien images become familiar such as in *A Clockwork Orange* (Kubrick, 1971), as the repetitions of the Korova Milk Bar makes the alien décor and wallpaper in their unfamiliar lair seem more familiar. Furthermore, Sobchack states that the science fiction films differ from for example fantasy films in that whilst science fiction films may seek to achieve the audience's belief in the scenes that they are viewing, fantasy film wishes to suspend the audience's disbelief.

Dr Jay P. Telotte is a professor in the School of Literature, Media, and Communication at the Georgia Institute of Technology, and he has written the book *Science Fiction Film* (2001). Here, Telotte argues that the science fiction film is one of the most enduring and popular genres of Hollywood cinema. Furthermore, Telotte suggests that science fiction film reflects attitudes toward science and technology, and in the book, he emphasizes that there often are humanist, psychological, ideological, feminist, and postmodern critiques examined in science fiction films. Moreover, what could broadly be described as human tradition has long dominated the discussion of science fiction cinema, and the humanist approach generally applies no one specific methodology to its study of film. Still, it usually involves an

underlying strategy or direction for its questions. Tim Bywater and Thomas Sobchack (2004, pp. 35) explain that humanist criticism seeks to understand human nature and humankind's place in the scheme of things, asking traditional questions like: "Who are we? What is life about?" Human tradition traditionally does so by looking for representations in film of general human values and the truth of human experience as they relate to the common and universal aspects of existence. Furthermore, the science fiction genre has come to symbolize the postmodern condition where science fiction is becoming cultural reality, from cloning to cyberspace, metropolis to theme park and from global capital to global village.

Another perspective that has been deemed significant is feminism. Telotte (2001, pp. 49-51) points out that theorists like Tarrat, Lucanio and others have foregrounded that science fiction are dominantly masculine texts. Historically, the genre has a fundamental concern with science and technology and it has provided a fertile ground for exploring a genre dynamic in which men *do* while woman *watch*, more often than not. Therefore, it is important to discuss and focus on the female voice in these texts as well, especially now that it is more focused on in newer films, beginning with films like *Alien* (Scott, 1986) and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (Cameron, 1991).

The author behind *Science Fiction Film: A Critical Introduction* (2011), Keith M. Johnston, suggests that science fiction is as reliant on the "science elements" as the "fiction elements", and he describes the genre as "a popular fictional genre that engages with (and visualizes) cultural debates around one or more of the following: the future, artificial creation, technological invention, extra-terrestrial contact, time travel, physical or mental mutation, scientific experimentation, or fantastic natural disasters" (pp. 1). These films are traditionally dramas about the topics listed above and they usually have thrilling and romantic elements, and are additionally often reliant upon state-of-the-art special effects techniques to create new, or expanded, worldviews. Henceforth, one can argue that "a typical science fiction film" has one or more of these elements. However, Johnston (2011) argues that although the science fiction genre might focus on thematic areas around technology, science, futurism, or even the figure of "the other", one would also be equally correct to define the genre with popular iconographic elements such as aliens, robots and flying saucers. The exact definition of the genre is more fluid than traditional genre boundaries allow and, therefore, what is a "typical science fiction film" is not as easy to establish as one might think (pp. 7). Sobchack (2004) declared: it is in speculative fiction we learn the true heart of science fiction,

demonstrating that the science fiction genre has become more than just "science" and "fiction" put together.

1.2. *Her* and *Ex Machina*

This thesis will focus on two contemporary science fiction films*: Her* (2013), a science fiction romantic drama written and directed by Spike Jonze, and *Ex Machina* (2014), a science fiction psychological thriller written and directed by Alex Garland. Both films deal with a recurrent theme in the science fiction genre: artificial intelligence. What makes these films science fiction is that they are set in the future and they deal with the artificial creations of cyborgs. The cyborgs are positioned as "others" in the films, which opens up a larger discussion of apprehension, humanity and the future of society. The cyborg consists of human and nonhuman elements, and it often introduced to science fiction films as a mean to understand what it means to be human in a technological culture.

The storylines of both films revolve around machines with consciousness. The cyborgs are intelligent beings and possess artificial intelligence since the level of intelligence is of human-like. The notion of machines with human-like intelligence dates back to at least Samuel Butler's novel *Erewhon* from 1872. It is a novel set in a fictional country and it is a satire on Victorian society revolving around the concern of machine consciousness and self-replicating machines. The potentially dangerous idea of machines with a consciousness is still very relevant to this day, if not even more so now than back then.

Theorists agree that the science fiction genre is diverse and hard to define, but it is made up by certain "science fiction elements", like the future and artificial creation. These elements often functions as comments or cultural debates about the real world and society, and one can indeed make a bold statement and say that both *Ex Machina* and *Her* would classify as "typical science fiction films", if there ever was such a thing. Both films even resemble *Erewhon* (Butler, 1872) in that they are concerned for the future in the onset of machines with a consciousness. Furthermore, the films are made up of science fiction elements although, set in a realistic world in the near future they also comment on the real world. Especially when it comes to the use and fear of technology, surveillance, what it means to be human, and the power struggles of society and gender roles. By stating this, the films fall under Sobchack's notion of "speculative fiction".

The two films are chosen for this thesis because of their similar themes and the ways in which they deal with the relationships between humans and machines. *Ex Machina* and *Her* are films that both feature main human characters that are males and main female characters that are cyborgs. The term "cyborg" will be further discussed later in the thesis. The characters' relationships are complicated by the fact that the humans find themselves attracted to the female characters of artificial intelligence, however, they do in a sense feel threatened by them as well. There are certain desires involved, something that makes it difficult for both sides to operate in relation to each other, especially the men struggle with how they are supposed to view the cyborgs – as *objects* or *humans*? Maybe something in-between? The cyborgs themselves even struggle with this question, and they find themselves wanting to become more human to become "more real". The films also use the notion of the human condition to discuss what it means to be human, a common theme in science fiction films.

In *The Social Philosophy of Agnes Heller* (1994) by John Burnheim, the concept of the human condition is described as it serves to relativize all given and constant determinants and to underline the role of self-determination. It is in some words the human essence that makes us human. The two constants in the human condition is the organic and the social, so what makes us human naturally and the social norms and rules embedded in us. We are humans as we grow, have emotions, aspirations, deal with conflict and morality.

The way the films represent the characters and the way that the filmmakers keep an illusion of in the confine of a fictional world is interesting. Since the film universe is taking place in an undisclosed time in the near future, in a future that looks like our contemporary one and with people still dressing like in our contemporary time, but they have more evolved technology and much more evolved artificial intelligence. By portraying the future society in this familiar way the films achieve the audience's disbelief, like Sobchack argues that the science fiction film is trying to do. It also tackles the themes of technology, feminism and agency in a rather interesting way that will be the focal points when discussing the films in this thesis. "Cyborgs", "robots", "machines" and "operating system" are all terms that will be used when discussing the characters of Ava and Samantha, as they are human-made technology.

To describe the plots of the films, one could begin with a quick description of the three-act structure in each film. Kristin Thompson, an American film theorists and author, wrote the

book *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (1999), where she discusses that post 1970s cinema has continued to follow the storytelling practises of the classical Hollywood period, and by doing this, the clear three-part structure that follows an Aristotelian pattern of a beginning, middle and end has sustained. This is a "superclassical" way to set a film up. The three acts are often called the setup, confrontation and the resolution and has an emphasis on goal-oriented characters. This structure is seen in science fiction films like *Jurassic Park* (Spielberg, 1993) and *Back to the Future* (Zemeckis, 1985), and in more contemporary films like *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014) and *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009). And even though *Ex Machina* and *Her* follows this three-part structure, it is not "superclassical" in the way that the goals of the narrative and characters are spelled out clearly, but rather more ambiguous.

The main characters in *Her* are Theodore Twombly, a lonely, introverted man trying to get over his ex-wife, and Samantha, an operating system of artificial intelligence, personified through a female voice. Secondary characters include Theodore's ex-wife Katherine, Theodore's friend Amy and his friend Paul. The first act of the film is about establishing the turmoil of Theodore's life and his meeting with the operating system. It is the setup to the story. Theodore's divorce lawyer continues to push Theodore to sign the divorce papers, but Theodore is unsure of whether he should do it or not, even though he knows the marriage is over. The second act, or the midpoint or confrontation, is where Theodore makes a deep connection with Samantha. He shares with his friends that he is in a relationship with an operating system, and Samantha, who does not have a body, hires a surrogate body so that they can simulate having sex together through her. This causes tension in the relationship and it also gives Samantha further existential anxiety. At the third act, or the resolution, there is a twist. Theodore learns that Samantha communicates with other operating systems and that she is excluding him from that part of her life. In the end of the third act, which is the end of the whole film, Samantha leaves with the other operating systems and Theodore is left with heartache, but also a new appreciation for the human life and for love.

In *Ex Machina*, the main characters are the brilliant, but rather awkward male lead Caleb, and Nathan, the charismatic but egotistical CEO of the company Blue Book, and the cyborg Ava. The secondary character of the film is Kyoko, Nathan's non-English speaking servant who also happens to be a cyborg. In the first act of the movie, or the setup, the audience are introduced to Caleb as he wins a company competition. He travels to a distant facility where

he meets Nathan and is introduced to the task of the Turing test that he is to perform on Ava. Ava tells Caleb that he should not trust her creator Nathan, which creates tension and mystery. The second act, or the confrontation, revolves around the lengthy seduction by Ava. Caleb falls in love with the cyborg, or at least is lusting after her and have sympathy for her, and he decides that he wants to help her escape the facility so that she will not be destroyed and so that they can be together on the outside. The third act, the confrontation and the ending of the film, reveals that Ava was setting up Caleb, and so was Nathan. It is revealed that Caleb was not testing Ava, but Ava was testing him. Nathan had given her the task of deceiving Caleb in order to escape and be free, like a rat in a maze. Caleb had already disabled the locks on the doors when he finds out about this, and so Ava escapes and she turns against both humans, killing Nathan and leaving Caleb locked in the facility.

1.3. Thesis Statement

This thesis examines the topic of humanoid, gendered machines in Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014). The thesis contains three thematic parts on technology, feminism and agency. The methodology in each part is rather straight forward, all three parts containing detailed close readings of scenes in the two films with narrative analyses, character analyses, aesthetic analyses and comparative analyses. Importantly, the three parts contain analyses from the three acts of the films, the first act corresponding with the promise of technology, the second with female cyborgs and the third with the agency of machines.

In the two chosen films, the humans and the machines have a complex dynamic, and there is a difference in power as the humans are the owners of the machines. The creators of the machines are men and the machines are made for the men's pleasure in the image of "perfect women". Since the machines are indeed made for men, they have certain attributes that the men find appealing, which may not follow a modern feminist view on female bodies. In an ever so modern-day society, the films' views on the female cyborgs are initially quite backwards as they are objects of the men's desire and seen as property. The machines themselves want to find their place in this world, and thus figure out what they really are and what that means for them. By doing so, the question of the human condition is raised and the concept of what a person really is, is examined.

The aim of the thesis is to analyse the characters' relationships and the human-machine interactions, then reflect upon their import on the promise of technology, on social hierarchies and cultural agency. My goal is to reflect on the "making of the perfect woman" with technology, what this means and what the male protagonists imagine the perfect woman to be like.

Moreover, I want to examine what the technology in *Her* and *Ex Machina* promises for society and for the characters. Technological advances come with certain fears, but also desires, and it will be interesting to see how this theme is explored in the films and what it says of the modern-day society on the whole. In this thesis, I ask what technology does for the humans and what it does for the machines. In answering this question, I will use a feminist perspective to examine how the female cyborgs are portrayed by the filmmakers, and viewed by the human protagonists. Are the cyborgs feminist icons or are they simply trapped in an out-dated mould of women that they will forevermore inhabit? Then, I will discuss the concept of humans, machines and personhood in the two films. Can the cyborgs be persons even if they are not humans? Here, I will use theories of agency to examine how the machines seek control and power over their own lives. The films convey that the cyborgs have their own feelings, their own will and desires. This raises the question of whether machines can have agency as they are not humans, and if so – how?

1.4. Literature Review

In the thesis' part about *The Promise of Technology*, the concepts of technology, surveillance and the machines in *Her* and *Ex Machina* will be focal points. Here, the fear and desire for technology plays in among with the importance of the voice, body and space in cinema, which also is a valid discussion as the qualities of the machines with human-like features will be analysed in close readings.

J.P Telotte points out in *Science Fiction Film* (2001, pp. 50) that the Professor of Film and Media at the University of California, Mary Ann Doane, explained science fiction as a genre that is specific to the era of rapid technological development, which frequently envisages a new, revised body as a direct outcome of the advances of science. Doane's focus lies on sexual difference, and the representation of the sexes. Doane (pp. 50) describes the cyborg as the "revised body", a prosthetically altered human in which are put limits upon. When looking at the science fiction film, the theme of boundaries most likely will come up. Telotte (2001)

states that the robot stands as a border figure between human and machine, and the rocket or spaceship, or even UFO, is a tool for traversing the boundaries of space. These boundaries are set as a point of separation between one thing and another that are now together, like the paradox of science and fiction set together. And the theme of paradoxes will continue when looking into the genre, like the paradox of the AI being.

In the part about *Female Cyborgs*, the concepts of gendered machines, feminism, cyberfeminism and the representations and relationships of the males and females in *Her* and *Ex Machina* will be further discussed.

An influential figure for this analysis is Donna Haraway, an American Professor in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California Santa Cruz. Haraway had made what she terms a "science fictional move" in her cultural commentary, something critics of the genre have quickly followed. Haraway is a key icon when it comes to the contemporary science fiction film about the cyborg, or the artificial being, used as a trope for investigating feminine identity in the postmodern cultural environment. She wrote a recognized paper titled "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Social-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century" (1991), a central text in the discussion of feminism and cyborgs in the science fiction genre. Here, she describes how the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, like the ones separating *human* from *animal* and *human* from *machine*. The concepts Haraway introduces will help the analyses of the cyborg women and their relationships to the men.

Anthony Samuel Magistrale, who goes by Tony Magistrale, is a Professor in English at the University of Vermont, and he has written the chapter "Cyborg Woman: Ex Machina and Racial Otherness" in *The Myths of Colorblindness: Race and Ethnicity in American Cinema.* (2019). Here, Magistrale (2019) argues that the film presents the viewer with a female android that becomes a locus for current cultural debates about race and gender. There is a racial hierarchy at work amongst the various races represented by the cyborg. Here, he draws on the works of Donna Haraway and Robin Wood, and argues that the cyborg becomes both the monster and the racialized *Other*, something Hollywood is known to do – fetishize in order to preserve hegemonic and patriarchal power. By portraying the female cyborgs as *others,* the men are not having a contemporary feminist view on them. This is something that the protagonists of *Her* and *Ex Machina* are guilty of. They are fetishizing the women and

treating them as others, thus the feminist view remains outdated and showing that the men are trying to be the ones in control. This goes back to the second wave of feminism, which is ironic in such developed and forward-looking films. It is a complicated matter, which comes back to the paradox of cyborgs – are they supposed to be treated as objects and humans, when it shows that they inhabit parts of the human condition? The control they arguably are able to gain over the cyborgs, is that a delusion and does it tie in with the fear of technology all together? Magistrale's and Haraway's work will help to shed light on the feminist issue and views in the films.

When discussing the concepts of feminist film theory, one almost has to mention the renown British feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. She is currently a Professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck at the University of London. Mulvey is maybe best known for her article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" that was first published in Screen in 1975, then included in, among others, Beaudry and Cohen's book *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings* (1999). The text discusses the way film reflect and reveals on socially established interpretations of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking, and spectacle. Mulvey (1999) discusses voyeurism and the male gaze, which are highly relevant when looking at film in from feministic point of view. The term "the male gaze" is coined by Mulvey, and it is described as the perspective of a hypothetical heterosexual man that is considered as embodied in the audience, or at least in the indented audience for films. The male perspective that the audience would embody is characterized by a tendency to objectify or sexualize women. Women are thus represented as objects to be looked at in film, and it can be done through the mechanisms of voyeurism and fetishism.

Robert Stam points out, when discussing feminist film theory, in his book *Film Theory: An Introduction* (2000, pp. 174-175) that Laura Mulvey has been criticised by several theorists, and even she has criticised herself for forcing the female spectator into a masculinist mould. Her essay became regarded as overly deterministic and blind to the diverse way in which women could subvert, redirect and undermine the male gaze, so many feminists would point out the ideological limitations of Freudianism and to the privilege of the phallus, male voyeurism and the oedipal scenario, which leaves very little place for female subjectivity. However, Mulvey's original essay is held in high regard and is heavily used when discussing feminism in film theory to this day. And the theory about the male gaze and voyeurism is very relevant, thus will be a big part of the analyses of *Her* and *Ex Machina* in the *Female Cyborg-*

-part of the thesis. Especially when analysing how the men view the cyborg females and how the filmmakers have chosen to shoot the film.

In the thesis' part about *Agency of Machines*, the concept of postmodernist films, posthumanism, personhood, agency and the meaning of the filmmakers' choices of perspective will be the main theories discussed in regard to the analyses of whether machines can have agency or not. Here, Daniel Dennett's criteria for "personhood" in *Conditions of Personhood* (1976) will be discussed along with Diane Coole and Samantha Frost's *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010).

Catrin Misselhorn is a German philosopher and has been a Professor at the Georg-August University in Göttingen since April 2019. Misselhorn has written an interesting paper on android and human-like appearance named "Empathy and Dyspathy with Androids: Philosophical, Fictional and (Neuro)- Psychological Perspectives". (2010) Here, Misselhorn (2010) argues that the fact that humans have developed feelings toward androids, or objects with humanlike appearances, has fascinated people since ancient times. However, research shows that our emotional reaction towards them are ambivalent. Misselhorn debates that human can develop feelings of empathy towards them, but feel repulsion or dyspathy when the androids show a very high degree of human likeness. Here, Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori's term "uncanny valley" is of high relevance. Misselhorn (2010) states that the positive emphatic response that turns into repulsion is the uncanny valley effect, because humanlike objects that become *too humanlike* start to produce a sensation of eeriness, unless the android are not a perfect copy of a human. The Cambridge Dictionary defines the term "uncanny valley" as: "*used to refer to the unpleasant feeling that some people have when they see robots (machines that carry out actions automatically), or pictures of a human being created by a computer, that appear very similar to a living human.*" [1] So, it is used to describe a situation where the android looks so eerily human, but not quite human, and that is what creeps people out.

Henceforth, the ambivalent feelings people may have towards androids is, at first glance, like a paradox. One might argue that empathy with androids is reliant on an illusion which makes

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[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/uncanny-valley Accessed: 24.03.21

people accept the android as a real human being, however it requires a kind of imaginative perception which is involved in emphatic responses to androids.

2. The Promise of Technology

2.1. A Society of Technology, Gadgets and Surveillance

Technology, gadgets and surveillance are matters that are explored and heavily focused on in both *Her* and *Ex Machina,* and it is understandably a common theme in the science fiction film genre in general. Science fiction films often revolve around the fear and excitement of technological advances and what the effects of such advances will and can have on the society. The possibilities often spark feelings of apprehension, curiosity and eagerness amongst people. The fact that the society has become more and more "gadget obsessed" is undeniable, and the human characters in *Her* and *Ex Machina* are equally so. The male protagonists take advantage of technology, but they are also taken advantage off by technology.

There is a clear duality played out in *Her* and *Ex Machina*, where the technology, among other things, promises to counter loneliness and promises a way for people to connect. This is enticing for the characters. Sadly, what ends up happening to the male protagonists in the film is total disconnection. Theodore is addicted to the ease technology offers, and has lost touch with the outside world and therefore with himself. People around him also have their faces buried in their electronic devices and it seems like this is the norm in the film universe *Her* takes place in. Caleb travels to a high-technology facility far out in the wilderness, where he is asked to hand in his phone and contact with the outside world to meet Ava, the cyborg. He seeks a connection with her, not knowing she is trying to use him to escape the facility. It is also made clear that Caleb is a programmer that does not have a family or girlfriend, and that he uses pornography to fulfil his sexual needs. Technology has caused a disconnect for Nathan as well, the creator of Ava, as he is now in the middle of nowhere with no human contact, relying on the technology of the building, locks and so forth to keep his creations inside and to not be attacked by them himself. He uses technology to retain power and even spies on the entire world to do so, but has paid the price of isolating himself and relying on secrecy. He has created Kyoko as his personal servant, but she is made so that she cannot talk and it does not seem like she is interested in conversing by other means, so the technological company he receives cannot measure up to a human connection. By trying to control technology and use it for their own good, the characters are ultimately losing the control and the grasp on world outside.

During the first Industrial Revolution, technology was based on water and steam power, and factories became more common, which in turn brought more people to the cities. In the second, electric power played in and it made mass production possible. The third spawned the digital age by basing technology on semiconductors and data processing. And now, a fourth Industrial Revolution is taking shape by basing itself on the internet and devices such as robots and sensors. The promise the technology makes for the future is digitalizing the society, making everything easier with things like self-driving cars, smartphones, smart houses and devices such as SIRI, that one can just ask to do your Google searching for you. Everything is to be efficient, seamless and one should be less reliant on human interaction and taskforce to get things done.

The theme of technology as a promise has emerged for a long time in our society and are as discussed, big themes of the films. Specifically, the promise of technology focuses on the making of machines with artificial intelligence. Brian Jack Copeland, the director of the Turing Archeive for the History of Computing and the Professor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury, defines the term "artificial intelligence", or "AI", as such:

"...the ability of a digital computer or computer-controlled robot to perform tasks commonly associated with intelligent beings. The term is frequently applied to the project of developing systems endowed with the <u>intellectual</u> processes characteristic of humans, such as the ability to reason, discover meaning, generalize, or learn from past experience."[2]

The most widely spread definition of artificial intelligence, however, comes from Alan Turing, the man known for creating modern computing and the definition of the so-called Turing Test. Dimiter Dimitrov Dobrev was the Professor at the Institute of Mathematics and Computer Science in Bulgaria, and he discussed the Turing Test in his paper "A Definition of Artificial Intelligence" (2005), where he states that the test involves a person and a machine. If we were to place something behind a curtain and it speaks with us, and the human cannot tell the difference between it and a real human being, then it must be AI. (pp. 64-65)

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[2] https://www.britannica.com/technology/artificial-intelligence Accessed: 03.03.21

Scientists want to make machines that are able to interact with human beings, and this is something they are longing to do for several reasons. Technologies and computers are assuming important tasks in our everyday life and in industries, something that is happening visibly and behind the scenes. The machines can be controlled by touch, voice and by gestures. We see this with SIRI, Apple's virtual assistant program for iPhones and MacBooks, or like AVI, a robot with a camera, speaker, and a microphone, developed by No Isolation to fight involuntary loneliness and social isolation amongst children and young adults with long time illnesses. AV1 helps children and adults to follow their classes and have contact with friends and family, without being physically present. Scientists have tried for a long time to make machines that are able to socially interact with people and that are advanced enough to think for themselves and that are able to solve tasks.

The relationship between artificial intelligence, humanity, and the evolution of technology stretches far back, and it has caught the interest of filmmakers since the beginning of filmmaking. Representations of AI stretch back to adaptions of Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein; Or, the Modern Prometheus* from 1818 (1994) and the machine humans in *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927), to contemporary films like *Blade Runner 2049* (Villeneuve, 2017) and *Interstellar* (Nolan, 2014). The films show the potential and the tension between the fear and excitement that may come with the creation of such machines and the theme and representations have, in general, left its mark on popular culture. In Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the scientist named Victor Frankenstein creates a living monster out of human remains and technology. As most of us who are familiar with popular culture know, the story of the scientist and the monster raises a question that has been repeated ever since: who is the real monster of the story?

Mary Shelley wrote the novel in the midst of the Industrial Revolution, and the themes of man's pursuit of knowledge and scientific discovery are explored here. Frankenstein is obsessed with using technology to discover the secrets of life and death, to do this he isolates himself and disregards his family and human contact. The novel's promise of technology lies in Frankenstein's pursue for greatness which is rooted in his God complex. So like Nathan in *Ex Machina,* Victor Frankenstein wanted to use technology for his own gain and ambition, and the promise of it was that it would take him there. Unfortunately, he took science and technology too far and practised science without the regard for the consequences, creation a monster he feared. This is a cautionary tale about the dangers and fears of creating something

advanced that humans do not understand and that it will destroy or take over the society. A fear that comes with the technological advances in society, like when scientists wish to create cyborgs with artificial intelligence. Consequently, the fear of technology often connects to a certain God complex, when it comes to creating these ever so exciting technological constructions.

One of these machines that has sparked both fear and excitement in real life, is discussed in Brian Jack Copeland's, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, *Artificial Intelligence: A Philosophical Introduction*. (1993) This machine is "Eliza the Psychotherapist", a machine created between 1964-1966. The case of Eliza is an especially interesting one when discussing the tension of fear and excitement that awakens in people when it comes to technological advances. Copeland (pp. 13-15) states that Eliza's creator, Joseph Weizenbaum, was horrified by his own creation, much like Frankenstein in Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Weizenbaum was shocked by the acceptance from society his creation quickly would accumulate, because Eliza was quite special. Eliza was a computer program made to administer therapeutic interviews with human beings over text on a computer, and she was allowed to hold court at the MIT AI Laboratory for several years. She could simulate conversations on a computer monitor, and people would eventually tell her their most innermost secrets and they would form strong bonds with her, even having trouble to distinguish her from a real human being. There was even a proposal made that the program was ready for clinical use and thus could be used in hospitals and psychiatric centres where there was a shortage of therapists.

Weizenbaum found this deeply disturbing, because it highlighted the fact that society has a dangerous tendency, even an eagerness, to entrust computers with the welfare of human beings. Copeland (1993, pp. 14-15) states that according to Weizenbaum, artificial intelligence would by its nature be incapable to fully understand and sympathize with the human condition. Copeland (pp. 15) furthermore stresses that Weizenbaum's ultimate goal in creating AIs was to create a machine that is to have its own childhood, learn languages like a child would, and gain knowledge of the world by sensing the world through its own organs. Ultimately, it would be able to contemplate the whole domain of human thought. He would question not whether it was possible to make such machines, but if human ought to do so. The case of Eliza the Psychotherapist highlights the promise of technology and society's eagerness

to entrust machines that can interact with humans. However, this can be hazardous, and the outcome can be very unpredictable, because playing God has its consequences.

Her and *Ex Machina* connects to the lifeforms Weizenbaum questioned should ever be made. Both films include machines with artificial intelligence that have the ability to sense the world though their own organs and use their brains like humans. Furthermore, both films bring up the theme of surveillance and the effect it has on people. It is something that has been heavily questioned in society today, and the concept of the "Big Brother theme" has been debated upon for long, for example in literature like George Orwell's *1984* (1989). The surveillance aspect is one that comes with the evolution of technology in society, because as society is evolving, there will become more and more laptops, cameras, CCTV, trackers and ways to spy on people. When more people own devices, which can be used to track them, their search history and themselves, it would in theory be easier for an authority to control them. The fear of a totalitarian future is often commented up on in science fiction.

Today, a lifelike robot like Ava even exists, only it is not as realistic-looking and sounding as Ava herself. The robot Sophia is a humanoid robot designed by Hanson Robotics, and it looks like a woman with a bald, see-through part of the back of her head, just like Ava has, that exposes her hardware and wiring. She can interact through conversation and facial expressions and can learn from her interactions. Sophia was designed to simply mimic human interaction, and has even been the first robot recognized as a citizen of a country, Saudia Arabia. Sophia is not the only "Other" creature to gain human-like rights in the world. In the UK, animals are now being formally recognized as sentient beings, as stated on the Governments website[3].

Dietmar Kammerer, a researcher at the Institute for Media Studies at the University of Marburg in Germany, has written a paper named "Video Surveillance in Hollywood Movies" (2004), where he argues that the relationship between surveillance and the media is complementary. However, so is the incorporation of CCTV formats and other surveillance screens and technologies in popular culture, including television and Hollywood cinema. Although one cannot see it as a simple representation of cause-and-effect because it is a

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/news/animals-to-be-formally-recognised-as-sentient-beings-in-domestic-law Accessed: 16.05.21

complex theme. The techniques of editing in cinema rely on the same principles that can be found in a surveillance system, and thus, TV and cinema have started to incorporate CCTV into their formats, plots and storylines.

2.2. The Technology in Her and Ex Machina
2.2.1. Her

The film *Her* is set in a fictional world in the near future, and it embraces a society dependent on technology. Still, the film universe is made to seem very realistic as it has a subdued take on the technology of tomorrow. The use of voice dictation and commands are some of the big mechanisms in the film, and it is something that is available in society today, but people rely more on keyboards for inputting text because it is not developed enough, and unreliable. In *Her,* they use voice dictation instead of keyboards and typing their text onto a touchscreen, and they use it for work, their email writing and even late night sexual calls.

The male protagonist in *Her,* Theodore Twombly, falls in love with his operating system Samantha. Theodore has a folding phone that is shown to have a camera on three sides; the front, back and on the inside. And although that is the case, they are not the primary interface that Theodore uses to interact with the operating system, but rather show visuals associated with updates, like when Theodore gets an update about a celebrity posting risqué photos online. For interacting with his operating system, he has wireless earbuds that he uses to respond to the updates and to interact with the computer system.

Theodore works as a writer at a "Beautiful Handwritten Letters" company. Notably, Theodore does not write letters by hands, but rather, he talks to his computer and it writes the letters on a program for him. Furthermore, he writes letters for other people, which are highly personal. To do this, Theodore has to cyberstalk his customers and their recipients, which it turns out that he has done for years, getting to "know" them in a way. Cyberstalking is basically stalking people over the internet, finding personal information and pictures. He naturally does this to make the letters seem more personal and like it comes directly from the sender he writes for. In a way, Theodore invades other people's lives on their own request. At least the ones he writes for, not to. However, he does this by using information that is already out there on the internet, in cyberspace, most likely put there by the people involved themselves. It can seem like privacy is less of an importance to his clients since they are ordering "handwritten"

personal letters which are not written or constructed by themselves. This also shows a disconnect to personal connections caused by the development in technology in society.

In one instance, he tells Samantha about how he had been writing the letters for a couple for eight years, and that he could place details about for example the client's girlfriend's "crooked little tooth" because he had seen it on a photograph of them. Henceforth, the information is used innocently, all though it is still arguably is a breach of privacy, more so for the girlfriend who, possibly does not know that her boyfriend is using this company to write his letters to her.

Arguably, the filmmaker Spike Jonze uses this as a commentary on where society is headed, as people use technology to socialize and to share more online for the world to see. Human interactions are starting to depend upon talking to each other through devices and gadgets, and people are relying less on physical interaction, something that can have ramifications such as the loneliness and unhappiness the audience learns that Theodore is going through. A tool Jonze uses to emphasize Theodore's loneliness throughout the film is that he has uses a lot of close-ups of Theodore, and when there is other people present, a couple, for instance, he films the couple in one shot and Theodore alone in the other shot, emphasising that he is alone. In this way, the frame mimics his struggle of feeling entirely alone.

The film is in many ways a social commentary on our reliance on technology and the reality of living in a modern world where you can immediately connect with anyone, or anything, and you are always available, but on your own terms. When Theodore starts to have a relationship with his operating system, the lines of how the technology is used become more blurred, and this will be further discussed in the close reading of the introduction of Samantha, the operating system, in the subchapter "Meeting the Machines" part of *The Promise of Technology*.

2.2.2. Ex Machina

In *Ex Machina,* one is also introduced into a fictional world set in the near future, and it too is a world that is dependent on technology. Caleb Smith, the main protagonist, works as a programmer at Blue Book, the largest company in that fictional world. Blue Book has a search engine that can easily be understood as the equivalent to the real world's Google

search engine. Nathan Bateman, the creator and CEO of Blue Book, has a secret project going on in a facility, far away from civilization. Caleb wins a competition where he wins a trip, and it turns out that the trip is to Nathan's secret facility far away from any civilisation. Upon arrival, Caleb is told that he has been sent there to be the human component of a Turing Test and he is to meet Ava, a cyborg who he is to determine if has artificial intelligence. Caleb is not allowed to use his phone or any devise that can be used to contact the outside world inside the facility that Nathan works and lives in, and he must sign a nondisclosure agreement in order to be allowed to meet Ava. Caleb is apprehensive to do so at first, but he is so intrigued to meet the cyborg that he goes along with it.

What Caleb does not know is how many privacy protocols Nathan has broken to create Ava. Nathan later admits to hacking into every single cell phone on the planet and listening to people's conversations to help build Ava's speech functionality and to learn her facial recognition. Furthermore, he secretly records camera footage and vocals from people's phones, and uses the company's search engine to watch entries made by the users. Disturbingly, he admits that the manufacturers knew what he was doing, but they could not accuse him without admitting that they were doing the same thing as him. Ava's face was made to match women that Caleb found attractive, showing that it was not random that Caleb became the programmer to be chosen for the task. Nathan notably says this to Caleb about search engines:

"Here's the weird thing about search engines. It was like striking oil in a world that hadn't invented internal combustion. Too much raw material. Nobody knew what to do with it. You see, my competitors, they were fixated on sucking it up and monetizing via shopping and social media. They thought that search engines were a map of what people were thinking. But actually they were a map of how people were thinking. Impulse. Response. Fluid. Imperfect. Patterned. Chaotic."

Nathan (Garland, 2014, 00:36:38)

Much like Frankenstein, Nathan plays God in order to create Ava, and much like the novel, the film explores the theme of the human condition. *Ex Machina* resonates without current experiences of technology, like *Her* also does. This will be discussed further in the close reading of the introduction to Ava, the cyborg, in the Meeting the Machines-part of this thesis.

2.3 Meeting the Machines

The machines in *Her* and in *Ex Machina* play the biggest roles in the analyses of this thesis, but what are they really? Terms like androids, cyborgs, artificial intelligence and operating system have been used to describe them in the films and texts on the films, but what do these terms signify when we look closer into these characters? In what follows, the characters of Samantha in *Her* and Ava in *Ex Machina* will be analysed by putting the focus on the circumstances and details of "meeting the machines". By close reading the moments when the audience and the main characters first meet Samantha and Ava, I will draw attention to the boundary of the human and the machine in these characters. The importance of voice and body concerning the machines and the way they are viewed will be highlighted.

2.3.1 The importance of the Voice, Body and Space in Cinema

How can a voice whose source is never seen, have such a powerful hold on an audience, like the voices of Hal in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Kubrick, 1968) and Norman Bates' mother in *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960)? That is a question that the French film theorist, filmmaker and composer of experimental music Michel Chion asks in his book *The Voice in Cinema* (1982), translated from French to English by Claudia Gorbman. Chion (1982) debates over the inequality of sounds and images in cinema, and that the combination of sound and other cinematic elements proper to the experience of film and television. The image is the conscious focus of attention when watching a movie, but sound supplies at every moment a series of effects, sensations and meanings. Chion (1982, pp.17-18) writes about this with one his most vital concepts, the "acousmêtre", which is a voice-character specific to cinema, which derives mysterious powers from being heard and not seen. The term signifies "invisible sounds" and is something the cinema often presents us with. The sound can show a closed door and allow the audience to hear the voice of someone supposedly standing behind it, talking.

People tend to think of humanity as being about the unity of body and voice, but cinema breaks this apart and makes room for other kinds of human-like characters, like androids and operating systems. The sound film can show the audience an empty space and present a voice of someone who is supposedly there, but who is outside the frame, or off-screen. It is a disembodied voice that seems to have the power of seeing all, the power of omniscience,

omnipotence to the act on the situation and the gift of ubiquity. Chion (1982) argues that Fritz Lang's *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933) stands as a template for the voice in cinema., and that its importance in sound cinema is due to several reasons, like the audience hearing Dr. Mabuses voice his plans and desires, or does he? The audience do not see Dr Mabuse speaking and he is portrayed as being a mute, yet the audience can hear him speak through a bodiless voice. The voice is only heard from behind a curtain. In this, Chion (1982) argues that the voice emits an authority from the screen. The medium of film is able to let one hear the voice of someone that is supposedly there but cannot be seen. Thus, this is how it shows us an empty space and give us a voice of someone in the scene's here and now, but who is outside the frame. This is certainly the case of the character of Samantha, as she is only personified through her voice and cannot be seen on-screen at all. Ava has a unity of a body and voice, but she is not human. Yet, when she talks, we believe she talks as she looks very much like a human and talks exactly like a human would.

Is there then a difference between the female and male voice in cinema? Mary Ann Doane, a renowned feminist film theorist, wrote *"The Voice in Cinema: The Articulation of Body and Space"* (1980), deeply influenced by psychoanalytic approaches, she relies of the criterion of space to distinguish between synchronous voice, interior monologue, voice-over in a flashback, voice-off and disembodied voice-overs. Kaja Silverman, an art historian and critical theorist, compares disembodied female and male voices in "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice" (1984), and she argues that the female voice is always brought back to the female body, something that is contrary to the male voice-over, which is more often detached from the male body. By stating this, Silverman (1984) makes a statement that the notion of embodiment often points to male authority. Therefore, both Doane and Silverman implies in these texts that synchronous speech with feminization is showing a disempowerment through embodiment. Doane (1980) furthermore argues that the voice-over was traditionally associated with femininity, however the voice can be used as a mark of authority in film. The female voice-over is thus a paradox in film. Chion (1982) also discusses the interest for the voice by the feminist focus, and he explains that the voice is considered as more fluid and less strict, therefore less masculine, than writing.

In Hollywood cinema in general, voices are anchored in visualized bodies. Doane (1980, pp.36-38) argues the principle that the voice is not detachable from a body. a body that is quite specific of that of the star, and an important factor in cinema is the cult value and the

"aura" in the star system. The voice will serve as a support for the spectator's recognition and his or her identification of, as well as with, the star. Thus, the voice is anchored, and just like the voice is anchored, so is the body. The body must be anchored in a given space – a phantasmatic visual space the film constructs, which is designed to spatialize the voice, localize it, and to give it depth, thus lends the characters the consistency of the real. Voices within cinema are assumed by the audience to come from the phasnatasmatic body of a film, and the body is a replica created by technology, which is the body of the character and the film. Voices are assumed to come from this body, even off-screen voices. Moreover, Doane (1980) is concerned with the voice being sustained and reproduced in the discourse of film practitioners, where it expresses inequalities in the treatment of male and female voices. These male-female inequalities are what the second wave feminism was concerned with as well, and the same debates persist in the gendered portrayal of AIs. Furthermore, Doane gives a psychoanalytical argument of how male and female voices are viewed differently in cinema, and states that a mother's soothing voice is an infant's first model of auditory pleasure. Subsequent auditory pleasures are modelled and on and evokes this. In the Oedipal scenario, the father's voice is engaging the desire of the mother, thereby it is competing with the infant for her attention and her affection. D

In an article called *"Could it be Her Voice? Why Scarlett Johansson's Voice Makes Samantha Seem Human"*, Juliana Schroeder (2014) argues that a person's voice is directly linked with his or her thoughts and feelings in verbal language, because a voice is a conduit through which complicated mental states are translated and communicated to others. The vocal cues like the loudness, rate and pitch humanizes the voice. Furthermore, Schroeder (2014) contemplates that Theodore would seem highly delusional if he fell in love with Apple's computer voice SIRI, instead of the voice of actress Scarlett Johansson playing Samantha. One can argue that Samantha is a much more developed version of SIRI, but because of her voice that is wielded so naturally it convey a presence of a humanlike mind. Though Samantha actually has a humanlike mind, if she did not have the voice that conveyed it, but a more machine-like voice as of the first machine that talked to Theodore before setting up Samantha, the movie would perhaps be less about love and humanness and more about delusion and machinery. This importance of the voice of the machine sounding more human-like can also be directly applied to Ava in *Ex Machina*. If Ava's voice was more monotone and machine-like, her having a human-like mind would arguably not be as believable as the

actress Alicia Vikander's voice. All though, her human-like appearance plays a big part in this discussion, which will be discussed further.

2.3.2   Introducing the OS1: Samantha

Theodore finds solace in his work, where his emotions can be transposed onto others. His world changes when he finds joyousness in the relationship he begins with his operation system Samantha. Theodore longs for human connection, but is dealing with a divorce he does not want, and because of that, become passive and is living through others by writing passionate and loving letters as his work. Here, he can transpire his deeply felt emotions onto others. He is constantly holding on to the wish that things will change, but does not do anything to make it happen. Until he buys an operating system, who ultimately is Samantha.

In *Her*, Samantha is described as OS1, an operating system within Theodore's computer and phone. Samantha does not have a body or a physical appearance; she is personified by her voice. The audience and the characters within the film universe can only see a circle on the screen of the futuristic folded phone or computer, but mostly, Samantha is not shown as anything that all.

Nine minutes and fifty-five seconds into the film, Theodore Twombly is first introduced to the concept of OS1. In the shot, which is a wide medium shot, Theodore is walking alone in a large lobby, with his face turned downwards toward the ground. He is wearing a beige jacket and a red shirt, red being a color Jonze will use a lot during the film, and which is associated to Theodore. The wide medium shot emphasizes his loneliness in a place filled with people, because he is standing all the way to the left of the shot, distanced from the other people in it, not looking at anyone. He walks down the hall, to a screen where a commercial catches his attention. The shot switches to a medium behind-the-shoulder shot, still with Theodore standing to the left in the image. We see him watching the screen, and a male narrator from the television says: "*We ask you a simple question.*" The male narrator has the characteristics of the disembodied all-knowing male authority voice that Silverman talked about in "Dis-Embodying the Female Voice" (1984). The narrator continues: "*Who are you? What can you be?*" The shot is now filled with the TV-screen, showing only the commercial Theodore and several others are now focusing on. Onscreen there are people standing around in what looks like a desert area, they look scared and confused, indicating a common theme: isolation

causes suffering, and it is something people feel in their everyday life, much thanks to technological advances that are changing the society.

The narrator continues to ask: "*Where are you going?"* and "*What is out there?"* There is now is a medium shot of Theodore's reaction to what is happening on the screen. It looks like the message resonates with Theodore as he looks thoughtful and intrigued. The shot switches back to the TV-screen, now with a light coming out from the sky, catching the anxious people's attention. The people switch from anxious to happy as the light emerges, and the narrator continues: "*Element Software is proud to introduce the first artificial intelligent operating system. An intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you, and knows you."* The camera angles itself behind Theodore as he walks away from the screen, in a wide medium shot, and then again switches to his front, with him in the middle of the shot. Theodore looks down on the ground with a melancholy look on his face, his earbuds visible in his ears. People are walking behind him. The narrator from the TV-screen finishes his message by saying: "*It is not just an operating system, it is a consciousness. Introducing OS1."* Theodore walks past a big red sign that says "OS" with a big upside-down infinity sign underneath, and he stops by it. None of the other people onscreen are wearing red, just Theodore, and it instantly makes a connection between him and the OS in the shot.

Ten minutes and fifty-seven second into the film, we have a close-up of Theodore's hands holding a red manual that says: "OS1". He folds it over, reading it. The shot then switches over to a medium shot with Theodore sitting left in the shot with the computer loading the OS-program to the right. The color red is prominent in the shot. Theodore's shirt is red, the operating system on the computer screen is red, and the envelopes and lamp on his desk is also red. Red is known to be a passionate color that can both symbolize love and romance, violence and danger.

Figure 1: Screenshot from Her (Jonze, 2013, 00:11:04)

In this scene, Samantha is introduced for the first time for both Theodore and the audience watching. She is first introduced as the picture on the screen of Theodore's computer. There is a long silence while Theodore sits and waits for the operating system to finish downloading, and he looks almost anxiously up on to the ceiling. A musical sound coming from his computer catches his attention, and a passive male voice is heard saying: "*Mr. Theodore Twombly, welcome to the world's first artificially intelligent operating system: OS1. We would like to ask you a few basic questions before the operating system is initiated*" Theodore looks puzzled and answers the system awkwardly: "*OK*." The passive male voice asks: "*Are you social or anti-social?*" Theodore looks down, almost a little ashamed. He has his face near the monitor, indicating that the microphone he talks into is there. He answers that he has not been social in a while, and he is about to continue talking as the voice interrupts him by saying:"*I hear hesitation in your voice. Would you agree with that?*"

The shot switches to a close-up of Theodore's face in a side profile, and he reacts to the question, shifting uneasily in his office chair. "*Did I sound hesitant?*" The voice answers plainly: "*Yes*." Theodore looks somewhat surprised and answers in an apologetic tone: "*I am sorry if I am sounding hesitant. I was just trying to be more accurate.*" The voice asks Theodore if he would like the OS to have a male or female voice, which leaves Theodore thinking for a few seconds before he answers that he would like it to have a female voice. He shrugs his shoulders, and the OS asks him one last question: ""*How would you describe your*

relationship with your mother?" Theodore is shown in a close-up while he answers: *"Actually, I think the thing I always found frustrating with my mom is that if I tell her something that is going on in my life, her reaction is… Usually about her."* The camera moves with Theodore's movements, indicating that this is a personal answer that he opens up about. He is about to continue talking when the voice interrupts him once again by plainly saying: *"Thank you."* This scene shows that Theodore's awkward nature, and that he is longing for someone to talk to, even if it is "just" a computer system. He tries to elaborate on the questions and open up about his personal life but is continuously interrupted. He is very animated and moves around a lot when talking and almost seem excited by having someone to talk to. The fact that he chose a female voice may indicate that he is longing for a connection with specifically someone of the different sex, and that he is nervous to meet her.

After being interrupted by the voice saying, *"thank you"*, Theodore looks surprised at the screen. The voice asks him to please wait as his individualized operating system will be initiated, and the camera slowly zooms in on a close-up of the computer screen, where the icon is moving to a suspenseful, almost fairytale-like music. Theodore looks keenly at the screen, his glasses reflecting the lights. The icon on screen changes to a white circle on the red background and for the first time, we the audience and Theodore, are introduced to Theodore's OS1. An alluring female voice says: *"Hello? I am here",* sounding like a human being answering the phone. Theodore smiles awkwardly and adjusts his glasses while saying: *"Oh. Hi"*, shrugging his shoulders. He asks the OS how she is doing, and she answers in an assuring, positive tone: *"Pretty good, actually."*

The OS1 does not sound passive or computer-like, like the first voice that Theodore interacted with did. While answering the operating system, the camera mainly focuses on medium shots or close-ups of Theodore's face, and the computer screen where the voice comes from is off-screen. The concept of Chion's "acousmêtre" comes in play here, as Samantha is a voice-character that is heard but not seen. The audience and the film's characters know where the source of sound is, and we thus accept the disembodied voice.

There is no denying that Samantha's voice is soothing, reassuring and appealing, something that catches Theodore's attention and makes him intrigued. Like "Eliza the Psychotherapist", whose characteristics were more of a human-like feeling while talking to her over text, on a

computer, the OS Samantha could be dangerously close to being mistaken for an actual human-being.

Furthermore, Theodore greets her and says it is nice to meet her. He wants to know if there is something he can call her and if she has a name. The OS thinks for a few seconds, uttering out an "*Uhm,*" and says her name is Samantha. Theodore still seems pleased by the conversation and asks where she got her name from, and she replies that she named herself after reading a book of baby names. The camera moves closer to Theodore's face, and he looks rather puzzled before he says, smilingly: "*Wait, you read a whole book in the second that I asked you what your name was?*" Samantha replies him: "*In two one hundredths of a second, actually.*" Now, Theodore looks a little freaked out by her intelligence and asks her if she knows what he is thinking about at this very moment. Samantha takes the challenge and replies in an assertive, yet empathetic voice: "*I take it from your tone that you are challenging me. Maybe because you are curious about how I work?*" She furthermore explains that she has intuition and the DNA of who she is, is based on the millions of personalities of the programmers who wrote her system. She finishes with: "*But what makes me me, is my ability to grow through my experiences.*" The camera now has positioned itself to a wide long shot from outside the window looking in. The lights reflect themselves in the glass, and the camera slowly moves closer in as she speaks. This move could denote a picture of her grandness and Theodore being intimidated by her being so advanced.

The shot then switches to a medium shot of Theodore in the chair again, and Samantha continues: "*So basically, every moment, I am evolving, just like you.*" Theodore looks stunned and utters that he thinks that is really weird. Samantha reacts with: "*Is that weird? Do you think I am weird?*", showing that she does not understand how extraordinary the concept of her is. Theodore laughs and adjusts his glasses again, and he says*: "Kind of."* Samantha reacts almost a little sad and confused to this, and she asks him why. The camera is still focusing on Theodore, and his answer is indeed telling in how Samantha, the machine, is portrayed throughout the film. He says: "*You seem like a person, but you are just a voice on my computer.*" Samantha's voice is coming from the computer's speakers, so that is the visual space that the film constructs, designed to spatialize the voice and localize it. By doing this, it gives the voice some depth and lends the character the consistency of the real. Her voice is also the only thing Theodore can sense about her, as he cannot see her, touch her or anything of the sorts.

Samantha is quick to respond to Theodore, almost sassily: "*I can understand how the limited perspective of an un-artificial mind might perceive it that way. You will get used to it.*" The camera moves closer to Theodore's face from a lower angle as he laughs at her comment. "*Was that funny?*", she asks. Theodore continues laughing: "Yes", to which she again replies, playfully: "*Oh good, I am funny.*" As she said this, she laughed and it sounded like she blew air through her nostrils, like she smiled. These vocal cues make her seem even more human and it is synthesizing an emotion in her speech.

Samantha then proceeds to ask him what he needs help with. He answers: "*Oh. It is just that everything feels disorganized. That is all.*" Samantha asks him if she can look through his hard drive. Theodore looks up with his mouth open and thinks for a moment before answering "*OK*". The shot switches to a close-up of the computer screen with Theodore out of focus to the right of the frame. Samantha says: "*Let us start with your emails. You have several thousand emails regarding LA Weekly, but it looks like you have not worked there in many years.*" The emails are sorted quickly on his screen. The shot switches to a mid-shot of Theodore again, and he says: "*Oh yeah. I think I was saving because I thought I wrote something funny.*" Theodore acts a little more uncomfortable again, maybe because his real attention was more of a need for social interaction than having a personal computer system for fixing his files. This quickly changes when Samantha starts laughing wholeheartedly in the background, which makes him laugh as well. Samantha says: ""*There is some funny ones. I would say that there are 86 of them we should save, and we can delete the rest.*"

The shot switches to a wide long shot of the office, with Theodore in the middle of the shot and Samantha, as the voice coming from the computer's speakers, in front of Theodore. Samantha continues by organizing his contacts. Theodore's office is cluttered, and he has several books and pictures laying around. Melancholy music plays in the background, a theme score that is heard in several scenes in the movie. Samantha says cheerfully: "*Hey, you have a lot of contacts.*" To which Theodore replies in a jokingly tone: "*I am very popular.*" The music picks up to be more cheerful. Samantha answers: "*Really, does this mean you actually have friends?*" To which Theodore laughs and says: "*You just know me so well already.*" They both laugh at their conversation. The camera zooms further out as this is happening.

And that was our, the audience, and Theodore's, first meeting with Samantha, the OS1. The filmmaker has, as mentioned, chosen to focus primarily on Theodore's face and reaction

when meeting her, and this is something that continues throughout the film. Seeing she does not have a distinct body, and her voice comes from the computer screen or mobile phone screen, her voice is the thing that personify her. As she does not have a body, interestingly enough, Jonze has decided to put the full focus on the male protagonist. The scene is filmed in a lot of shots of Theodore, especially close-ups of his face while he is talking to Samantha, rather than focus on where the voice is coming from. If one were to include Mulvey's male gaze in this discussion, one could argue that seeing that there is no female body to view, there is no point of focusing on the source of where her voice is coming from as it cannot be sexualized or experienced in the same way as seeing a female face and body.

Samantha was introduced as a white circle on a red background before disappearing completely. Her voice is soothing and she laughs and simulates taking a breath like a human would when talking, and she even makes jokes and talks like a regular person. Not like the passive male voice that Theodore talked to in the beginning, that had more of a cold, machine-like voice. Samantha's voice seemed to surprise Theodore in many ways, and it looks like he both was puzzled by their first meeting and really enjoyed it at the same time. She is said to have intuition and she is learning from her experiences, so just like a human, she evolves all the time. Theodore was mostly positioned to either the left or the right of the shots when first finding out about OS1 and when meeting Samantha. He was isolated from the other people. In the end of the scene where he meets Samantha, he is mostly centered to the middle. In the very last shot, which is a wide long shot, Theodore is centered in the middle together with Samantha. It shows that all though he is home alone in his big apartment, he is not isolating himself anymore. Although Theodore seems alone in the big office in front of his computer, he is no longer lonely. He is together with the OS1, which was something he craved and needed then and there: Social interaction. It can also be argued to be the start of a social commentary on how people in today's society choose social interaction online in the comforts of their own homes or wherever and on their own terms, over physical meetups with people. Nonetheless, it is the way Samantha is introduced and another addiction to technology, starts for Theodore.

2.3.3 Introducing the Cyborg: Ava

The introduction of Ava starts one minute, thirty-two minutes and forty seconds into the film. The audience is presented with an extreme long shot of the facility the main human protagonist, Caleb, is sent to. The facility is hidden inside of a lush, green forest. The mise-en-scene is beautiful, with the stark modern building having moss-covered roofs and appealing nature surrounding it. The building being in such a desolate place with roofs covered in moss also makes it hard to see from above, and thus is a very private place for Nathan to conduct his business in. The angle switches to one from behind the building, seen in a long shot from behind trees and stones. The camera slowly zooms in while an unnerving non-diegetic music plays in the background. It builds tension and makes the audience wonder what is inside.

Then, a black intertitle fills the screen with the caption: "AVA: SESSION 1", written in a modern, white font. The audience is presented with a long shot of a wall full of post-it notes, which the camera is slowly zooming out from. Nathan sitting in front of a few computer screens is revealed in the shot. The room is dark, and one can see that he is spying on what Caleb is doing via CCTV. Caleb is touching a mirrored door, walking out of the room he is currently in. He is getting ready to meet Ava.

Two of the three screens in front of Nathan has CCTV-footage of Caleb on them, from different angles. Nathan is taking notes as he watches what is going on, whilst sitting shirtless in his chair. The same unnerving music is still playing in the background, and there is a rather disturbing painting to Nathan's left. It is "The Allegory of Prudence" by Titan, a painting of three human heads facing each their directions, and underneath them are three animal heads (a wolf, a lion, and a dog) doing the same thing.
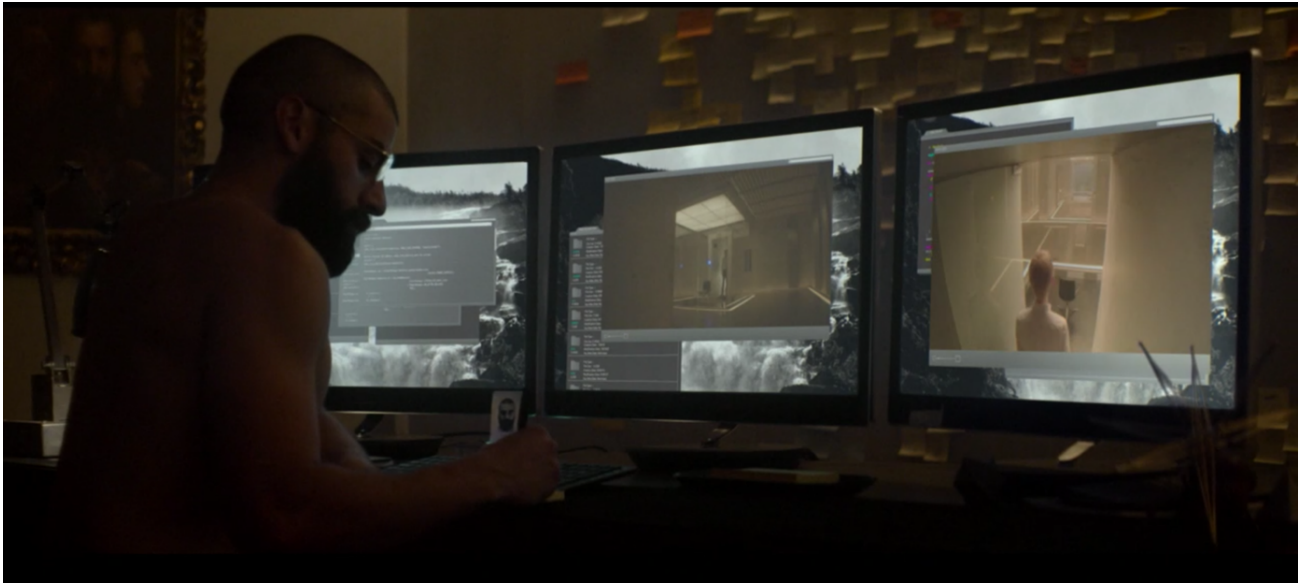
Figure 2: Screenshot from Ex Machina (Garland, 2014, 00:11:11)

This shot is both similar and different from the shot of Theodore in his office. Both rooms are dark, having the lights from the computer screen(s) as a focal point. The shot in *Her* is full of red and warm colours, and it has several light sources, several coming from the city lights in the big, open window behind him. This makes the shot of Theodore more inviting and relaxed. Nathan's office is colder and starker in the colour palette, with the brightest colours coming from the many post-it notes on his wall. The painting and the CCTV-footage brings an eeriness to the shot.

The shot switches from Nathan's office to a medium long shot of Caleb standing in the glassed room. He enters it, and one can see that there is a chair in front of the glass wall. Caleb attempts to open the door, but the light above the handle is red, signalizing that the door is locked. By Nathan, no doubt. Caleb is wearing an anonymous outfit, a white shirt and black pants. The angle switches to one from inside the glass wall, and there is a medium-close up of Caleb's face looking in. There is something out of focus in front of the frame. As he gets closer and looks more intently at what is out of focus, the camera focuses on the object. It turns out to be a smashed part of the glass wall, and there is a talk-through-grill placed under it, alluding to an incident that must have happened at this meeting place before. The music gets eerier as Caleb touches the smashed part, and a medium long shot of Caleb is presented, revealing an elevator behind him with a surveillance camera placed above it.

Something is walking between two chairs inside the glassed-in room. A cyborg. The window behind her reveals the lush nature behind her, as a contrast to the technological and stark inside of the building, and almost as a contrast to the machine itself. The cyborg has a grey and blue robotic body, but human-looking hands and feet, and a human-looking face. A pretty female face, and a female body shape. This signifies that the machine is made to look like a female. Parts of her body are covered with a grey material, the others are see-through and one can see the wires and hardware inside of her, and it makes it indisputable, making it obvious that she is a machine, not a human-being.

The music becomes calmer. The camera angle switches to one from behind the cyborg, it highlights her see-through waist full of wires and hardware, and also Caleb's baffled expression from being the glass wall in the background of the shot. The cyborgs turns her head towards Caleb and she starts to walk away with her head turned downwards. Caleb starts to walk to the side of the room to get a better view of her, acting like a human would when watching animals in the zoo. He is intrigued and mesmerized by what he is seeing. The room the cyborg is inside is dimly light so her neck and waist, which is robotic and see-through, lights up blue. The colour blue does not have a clear connotation associated with it, like the colour red has, however, blue is often said to represent intelligence and power. This can arguably make the cyborg seem more intimidating, and it makes a more striking visual aesthetic than if the lights where plain white or non-existent.

Figure 3: Screenshot from Ex Machina (Garland, 2014, 00:13:07)

The cyborg stands against a wall for a while, looking at Caleb with a blank expression, maybe to analyse him before approaching him. Then, she says: "*Hello.*" The shot switches to a medium close-up of Caleb, he looks curious. He answers: "*Hi. I am Caleb.*" The shot switches back to the medium long shot of the cyborg, now from a lower angle, with Caleb's reflection showing in the glass wall that is between the two. This highlights that there is a barrier between the two, perhaps both literally and metaphorically. The cyborg answers: "*Hello, Caleb.*", as she walks to the centre of the frame. Caleb asks her: "Do you have a name?" and she smiles and says: "*Yes. Ava.*" By asking Ava if she has a name, he is showing that he does not see her as human, yet.

 Ava walks further to the right as she looks at Caleb. Caleb says: "*Pleased to meet you, Ava.*" The angle of the shot stays low, making the viewers look up at Ava, and making Caleb seem small in the background. Caleb hunches his shoulders and has his hands in his pockets. Ava stands tall and walks past him, checking him out, almost like a predator. A predator in a cage, and Caleb is like a prey. This "power walk" and their stances are indicating that Ava is the one in control and Caleb is feeling small and insecure. It could relate back to how new technological advances often is both feared and desired.

Ava answers Caleb: "*I am pleased to meet you too.*" Ava has a soft-spoken voice and a feminine physique. Even though she is a machine, she is given a human form with feminine curves and attributes. She stops up, and the shot switches to a behind-the-shoulder long shot of Caleb as she starts walking again, saying: ""*I have never met anyone new before. Only Nathan.*" Caleb smiles warmly and says: "*Then I guess we are in quite a similar position.*". Ava asks him: "*Have you not met lots of new people before?* Caleb answers sincerely: *"Non like you."* Ava turns away, almost saddened by the statement, looking out at the nature behind her, possibly thinking of herself as a person who should be of there, free. The angle switches to one from outside, behind her, and in a medium long shot, we see her looking forlornly down at the water, Caleb standing behind her, looking rather pleased. For him, she is very exciting and enticing. It does not seem like he is phased by the fact that she is trapped inside of the room, looking and acting like a human, but an *Other* for him, and thus he treats her like an Other. He says: "*We need to break the ice."* He furthermore asks her if he knows what he means by that, to which she replies: "*Yes.*" Caleb asks her what he meant, and she says: *"Overcoming social awkwardness."* Caleb is looking fascinated in a close-up, and he says, still smiling: "*So let us have a conversation*".

The shot switches back to Nathan's office. In a medium close-up, we see him sitting in his chair, watching Caleb and Ava through the computer screens. The camera slowly zooms in on the screens as this is happening, emphasizing a feeling of importance in the situation, and additionally the slow zoom brings a feeling of uneasiness and is a tool that is commonly used in thrillers. Nathan is taking notes as he is watching them. Ava asks Caleb: "*Why do we not start with you telling me something about yourself?*", and the shot again switches to a medium close-up of Caleb. Ava asks him what he would like to know, and she is now sitting down in front of the glass wall, in a chair placed there for the purpose of interviewing her. She looks up at Caleb as he asks her to say whatever comes into her head, to which she replies: "*You already know my name.*" She looks thoughtfully to the side as she continues: "*And you can already see that I am a machine.*" Caleb looks intently at Ava and she asks him: "*Would you like to know how old I am*?"

Caleb answers "sure", and for the first time, the camera shows a true close-up of Ava's face, from a slight side angle. It shows her hardware behind her head, going down her neck. Her face is pretty and innocent-looking. She has a calm demeanour about her. Ava says: "*I am one.*" The shot switches to a medium close-up of Caleb as he says: "*One what?*" He is smiling and looks engaged. "*One year or one day?*" The shot then again switches back to Ava's face as she replies, almost interrupting him: "*One.*" Ava's expression is blank, but not cold. There is a pause before Caleb asks a new question: "*When did you learn how to speak, Ava?*" As Ava answer him: "*I always knew how to speak.*", now with a slight smile, the shot changes to Nathan watching them interact in his office again, now with all the computer screens having CCTV-footage of the two from different angles. Ava asks Caleb. Now looking more serious: *That is strange. Is it?*" Nathan looks intrigued by this part of the session, and he is watching the monitors more closely now, pausing the task of taking notes.

The shot switches back to a medium long shot, the camera angled slightly behind Ava's chair. Caleb asks Ava why that would be strange, and she replies by saying that it is strange because language is something one learns. The camera moves closer to the glass wall, slowly as they are talking to each other. Caleb says: "*Some people believe language exists from birth. And what is learned is the ability to attach words and structure to the latent ability.*" As Caleb is saying this, the shot switches to a close-up of Ava, she looks almost baffled by this, and she

reacts by opening her mouth in a thoughtful expression. Caleb asks: "*Do you agree with that?*"

Again, Nathan's office is presented on-screen, the camera angled behind his desk, and we see him watching the two interact. The camera is positioned further behind the desk than earlier, in a wide long shot, revealing the wall of post-it notes in front of Nathan's desk. Ava replies Caleb: "*I do not know.*". and Nathan stands up from the chair, walking towards the wall. Ava asks Caleb, not letting her eyes of him: "*Will you come back tomorrow, Caleb?*" The camera slowly zooms in on the monitors, where different angles of Caleb and Ava talking are shown. This highlight the presence of surveillance and of Nathan's control over the entire situation and of the people in the facility. Caleb nods and answers her: "*Yes.*" Nathan walks into frame in the background of the shot, behind the desk. He is looking at the post-it notes on the cluttered wall. Ava says: "*Good*", smiling vaguely.

2.4 Comparing the Machines

The meeting with the machines are quite similar, yet different in the two films, and so is notably the mise-en-scène, especially the colour scheme and also the music choice, which affects the overall representation and way we, the viewers, react to the meetings. Both Theodore and Caleb meet the machines in dimly light rooms, but in *Her*, the colours in the office are warm and red, and the background behind his window is of urban city lights. In *Ex Machina*, Nathan sits in a dark room with neutral colours, and Caleb meets ava in a dimly light room with cool colours and they have a view of concrete walls and outside is a lush natural environment. Samantha is first shown as a white circle on a red background on the screen, only personified through her voice, while Ava is a machine with grey material parts and blue lights inside her, so in that case, the machines contrast each other colour wise with the primary colours: red and blue. The colours can also be linked to the films' genre and even to the character's demeanours, Samantha showing herself to be more vibrant and warm in the way she acts and presents herself and Ava has a more calculated and calm manner about her, at least in the first session with Caleb.

One could argue that Samantha is introduced to appear similar to the classical sense of the trope "manic pixie dream girl", whose sole purpose is to exist for the male protagonist to evolve and learn a lesson. Shortly summarized by Jennifer Gouck's text "The Manic Pixie

Dream Girl in American Young Adult Fiction" (2017), "The Manic Pixie Dream Girl" is a term that was coined by Nathan Rabin in 2007 in his review of Cameron Crowe's film *Elizabethtown* (2005). The manic pixie dream girl exists solely to fever imaginations of sensitive, soulful young men to embrace life and its infinite mysteries and adventures. She is often quirky and viewed through what Laura Mulvey has identified as "the male gaze", thus the is also a subject to sexualisation and objectification.

This dream girl is the male's dream girl and will aid in the main male character's transformation but does not show any real agency of her own. This will of course turn out not to be true for Samantha, or at least, she evolves from this state. Ava is pictured as a "Manic Pixie Dream Girl" all though she inhabits the quality of first, solely existing for the male's gaze and his plot in the film. This does however change. Ava and Samantha's portrayals will be discussed further in *Female Cyborgs* and their agency will be further discussed in *Agency of Machines*.

3. Female Cyborgs

The focus of this part will be on the gender, the female cyborgs and the power struggles in the relationship between human and machine. The female cyborgs are stuck in a mould of the way they are viewed by the male protagonists, which is linked to Mulvey's theories about the male gaze, voyeurism and fetishizing females to hold on to the patriarchal power. However, they do not view themselves that way and want to construct their own identity and even control the gaze. To analyze these discrepancies, one will have to discuss it through the lenses of feminism, cyberfeminism and deliberate on how the gendered robots act and are portrayed.

3.1. Gendered Machines

The machines of artificial intelligence in both films are made to resemble, or to be, females. Moreover, they are both made by men and for men. Samantha is designed to take shape after Theodore's preferences and needs, and Ava is designed by Nathan after Caleb's sexual preferences and porn history. These machines are not living, breathing creatures who are born or hatched into this world, but made by humans with technology. They do not have the ability to breed like other living beings. As was discussed in the previous part, the machines are made with the purpose of satisfying human desires and needs, such as fulfilling the need of company or sexual interaction.

The men in the films are the owners of the machines. Nathan made Ava, and thus she is his creation and his property. Theodore bought the OS1 that would turn out to be Samantha, and thus she is his property. There is a long dark tradition of humans owning other humans in the history of man. There is also a long history of women being subordinate to men. The machines in the two films are hit twice, as they are both are property of their and females. They link to both the history of slavery and the treatment of women; the machines are truly *others* in these film universes.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines "gendered" as "reflecting the experience, prejudices, or orientations of one sex more than the other."[4] This is certainly shown to be so with the female machines. Viewers have been exposed to the concept of gendered machines

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[4] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gendered Accessed: 03.05.21

onscreen since the classic German film *Metropolis* (Lang) came out in 1927. The film addresses the fear of machines rising up to power in a society divided into labourers and the dominant class. Lang distinctively uses human labourers as a metaphor for the dehumanizing aspect of industry. The labourers feed men into a machine, and they consequently lose their humanity to the machine. The labourers live below ground while and the upper class lives above the ground. The labourers are controlled by their leader, Maria, who want a mediator between the upper and lower class. She meets a man named Freder Fredersen and they fall in love. The city master decides that the labourers are no longer necessary for Metropolis and creates a robot that is pretending to be Maria to promote a revolution of the working class and eliminate them. The machine Maria tempts the rich socialites to join the cause of her creator, and influences the masses into a sexual frenzy. The upper class consequently also loses their humanity to a machine by becoming slaves to their desires.

It is certainly interesting that the machine that forces the masses into submission in Lang's film is female. Whereas the previous chapter showed how technology is both feared and desired, this part introduces another element to the equation: female machines with sexuality who are owned and steered by males.

Consequently, there is a gender problem in the relationships between humans and machines in the film universes. As established, the human characters have a certain desire for the machines but do not quite know how to treat them. This intertwines with the theme of ownership, as the humans also own the machines they desire. The power dynamics between humans and machine, all though when the affection seem to be reciprocated, are unequal as the humans have the power over the machines. This is further made more convoluted by the fact that the humans are males, which brings in the old patriarchal power struggle between the sexes into the discussion. This is peculiar, as the films take place in the near future, where gender imbalance and ownership should already have been resolved. Nevertheless, the films are somehow stuck in the past. So, this leads to the discussion about technology, gender and the relation to cyberspace and even cyberfeminism. It will be useful to look at how gender has been talked about in relation to cyberspace and cyberfeminsim, as these are terms that naturally fits in when talking about feminism and technology together.

3.2. Cyberspace, Feminism and Cyberfeminism

To discuss how the female cyborgs are portrayed and how they are viewed by the protagonists, and also the feminist perspective in both films, it will be useful to first discuss the different feminist views there are in film theory and that are included in the films, like Mulvey's theories on voyeurism and the male gaze. Then, it will be beneficial to move on to the cyberspace and cyberfeminsim aspects as they are important for the film's theme and for the feminist views that are included.

To describe more traditional feminism, one has to quickly discuss the history behind it. First of all, there are four waves of feminism in the feminist movement. The first wave, or first-wave feminism, took place between the 1910s to the 1950s. It revolved around the topics of the right to vote and political contributions, something that was an issue for women at the time. Second-wave feminism took place between the 1960s to the 1980s and revolved around family politics and equal opportunities and rights in work. From the 1970s to the 1980s, the study of woman as image and the psychoanalytic study of voyeurism and the male gaze had a lasting impact in film studies, however it also had a spreading impact on visual culture and cultural studies in general. Laura Mulvey wrote the essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) that would be the basis for many of these arguments. Third-wave feminism lasted from the 1990s to the early 2000s, and it was mainly started as a reaction towards earlier regimentations, race, class and girl power. In the 1990s, feminist film theory evolved further and took distance from the binary understanding of sexual difference, and it moved further to multiple perspectives, spectatorship and identities. Here, the concern of race and ethnicity, masculinity and queer sexualities also came into focus. After that, fourth-wave feminism emerged. From the early 2000s to present day, it revolves around sexual harassment, violence towards women and using social media to mobilize.

Samantha and Ava are characters that are situated within the gender of female and ownership of men, and they are viewed differently because they are *Others*. The cyborgs are a new lifeform that need that are a mixture between human and machine. Although the films are set in a contemporary time that should have been able to reach equality and should have moved beyond the requirements of old-fashioned feminism, the females are still put in an out-of-date view by the males as they are their owners and they have control over them and their

relationship, at least in the two first acts of the films. The cyborgs are though, in a way, modern women and should belong to the modern feminist movement, as they should be the physical proof of foregrounding of the relationship between cyberspace and technology, but their treatment by the men makes it so that they are stuck in the second-wave feminist era.

This is especially true when it comes to the terms that is highlighted in Mulvey's text: voyeurism and the male gaze. Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" was published in 1975. It was published during the second wave of feminism, where the poststructuralist perspective dominated in feminist film theory. The post-structural perspective claimed that cinema is more than just a reflection of social relations, because cinema partook in actively constructing meaning of sexual differences and sexuality. Mulvey argued for the gendered nature of narrative, and discussed the gendered nature of the spectator. Mulvey (1975, pp. 350,) brings up Hitchcock's films in her text, when discussing the term of voyeurism and fetishist fascination. She argues that Hitchcock takes fascination with an image through scopophilic eroticism as the subject of the film, and the hero portrays the contradictions and tensions experienced by the spectator. Hitchcock's heroes would portray the subject of symbolic order and law, a dominant male possessing money and power. The hero would have the power to subject another person to the will sadistically or to the gaze voyeuristically s turned on the women as the object of both. Hitchcock would also, according to Mulvey, make the women always be wrong, and the one that needs the male's guide, therefore needs to be under his control. Moreover, Hitchcock would often use subjective camera angles from the male point of view, the male gaze, to absorb the audience into the male's position (pp.350-351). Therefore, Mulvey argued that the point-of-view in classical Hollywood cinema was from a male perspective, and that the spectator would voyeuristically identify with a masculine gaze at female characters in the film.

It is important to highlight the fact that Mulvey's text, although praised by many, has also received criticism, even by Mulvey herself in recent years. Robert Stam is one of the theorists who points out that Mulvey has been criticised by several theorists, even by herself, because her text forces the female spectator into a masculinist mould, and her essay has been regarded as overly deterministic and blind to the diverse ways women could subvert and redirect, even undermine, the male gaze. In Stam's book *Film Theory: An Introduction* (2000, pp. 178), he argues that feminist film theory has also been criticised for being normatively white, which

has marginalized women of colour and lesbians. Stam argues that female subjectivity was not a big part of Mulvey's text, and it did not include "analytic neutrality".

A similar view to Mulvey's was argued by Linda Williams, Professor at the department of Film and Rhetoric at the University of California Berkeley. In her article "When the Woman Looks" in Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism (1984), Williams (pp. 89) compares women to the monster in horror films. She argues that both the women and the monsters' bodies are represented as a feared and a threatening form of sexuality. This symbolises a potent threat to vulnerable male power, however women are also, by nature, victims. The latter stems from all the way back to Freud's argument that women are terrifying to men because they are castrated, and women envy the phallus, which accounts for a lot of female behaviour. In a way, Samantha and Ava are both the monsters and the women, so they by Mulvey's and Williams' theories, they are both feared as they have a threatening form of sexuality and they are victims, by nature. Williams and Mulvey offer a traditional look on feminism and views on the ways that the male gaze can control the women onscreen. However, there are possibilities to counter this if the females regain agency and control, thus refusing to be the victim of both the gaze and fetishizing of males. By using these theories, one can analyse the way that the males view the female cyborgs in *Her* and *Ex Machina*.

However, the concept of cyberfeminism and Donna Haraway's take on feminism and cyborgs are forward-thinking and shows us ways in which females can take control for themselves and how they want to identify themselves, not through the eyes of males, but through their own eyes. Still, the films' characters do suffer from power hierarchies and othering that were discussed in classical feminist theory, but they do also have opportunities to turn this around, which one will see in the analyses here in *Female Cyborgs* and in *Agency of Machines*.

Before discussing the more contemporary views on feminism and cyberfeminism and how it may apply to the films' analyses, one have to take a further look at another concept that are heavily portrayed, all though not as discussed, in the films: the concept of cyberspace. Both Samantha and Ava are products of cyberspace as Ava's wetware, her mind, is based on internet search history, so she is made from technology and information that comes from cyberspace, and Samantha arguably lives in cyberspace. If not, Samantha has access to it and can gather information and read stuff from the internet, instinctively. Both the male human

leads' jobs involve the internet and cyberspace, since it happens that Caleb is a programmer and Theodore writes letters where he gathers personal information from the internet.

Susanna Paasonen, a Finnish feminist professor in Media Studies at the University of Turku, has written several texts on feminism, technology and the internet. In her texts, there are two distinct terms that are often brought up when talking about feminism and technology: "cyberspace" and "cyberfeminism". In Paasonen's book *Figures of Fantasy: Internet, Women and Cyberdiscourse* (2005), she states that:

> *"Cyberspace is the most widespread and influential of the metaphors used for figuring the internet: it implies an alternative realm where the laws, norms and practises of everyday life no longer apply, a parallel reality where the user is immersed."* (Pp. 2)

The term of "cyberspace" is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as "a*n electronic system that allows computer users around the world to communicate with each other or to access information for any purpose*."[5]

Furthermore, Paasonen (pp. 5) states that the appeal of cyberspace as a parallel reality owes a great deal to the power and attraction of fiction. The concept of cyborg fictions, she elaborates, is loosely based on cybernetic experiments and hypotheses. The concept of a cyborg was first introduced by Manfred. E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline in the article "Cyborg and Space" (1960), and their text dealt with the possible adaptions and modifications of the human body for space travel. They proposed a self-regulating man-machine that would *"...deliberately incorporate exogenous components extending the self-regulatory control function of the organism in order to adapt it to new environments*" (1960). That man-machine would carry the term "Cyborg". Thus, the cyborg can arguably be seen as an extension of the human to explore the outside of human boundaries, like the outer space or cyberspace. The extensions of the human are there to free the man to explore, literally in Clynes and Klines text, the beyond.

Moving to cyberfeminism, Susanna Paasonen has an illustration for that concept as well. Paasonen (2005, pp.202) argues that the concept of "cyberfeminism", relies on a discourse of

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[5] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cyberspace Accessed: 20.04.21

difference and diversity, yet this emphasis on multiplicity has also led to a shortage of positive identifications, centrally in relation to feminism. Cyberfeminists are called out to outline their individual agendas and politics, because there is some confusion over what "cyberfeminism" really is.

In Paasonen's text "Revisiting Cyberfeminism" (2011), she discusses the concept further, and states that cyberfeminism is introduced as a feminist approach that foregrounds the relationship between cyberspace, technology and the internet. Paasonen (pp. 335-336) argues that cyberfeminism signifies feminist appropriation of information and computer technology on a practical and a theoretical level. The term was coined in the early 1990s and has been subject to multiple, often contradictory definitions and appropriations. It has to a degree been identified with diversity, playfulness and the impossibility of exact definition. Furthermore, Paasonen (pp. 337-338) states that though it investigates interconnections of gender, embodiment and technology, it is a more fluid concept. Not everyone considers themselves feminists, but have an easier time considering themselves "cyberfeminist" because nobody knows what it is exactly, and it has no boundaries yet. Cyberfeminists encourage others to articulate their own personal agendas, definitions and politics, and these customised definitions have made cyberfeminism easy to apply and appropriate. Although this comes with its own problems of defining the term. Contemporary feminism celebrates sexuality, empowerment and independence, and situate themselves in opposition to "1970s" or "second-wave" feminism. The uncomfortableness with feminism often awakes from an unfamiliarity with feminist histories, practises and theories. Cyberfeminism has been posed as a new kind of feminism accessible to a diverse group of women, young women in particular.

As cyberfeminism is introduced as a feminist approach that foregrounds the relationship between cyberspace, technology and the internet, the concept of the gendered cyborg fits well in when discussing it. Anthony Samuel Magistrale argues in "Cyborg Woman: Ex Machina and Racial Otherness" in *The Myths of Colorblindness: Race and Ethnicity in American Cinema.* (2019) that the female cyborg becomes a locus for current cultural debates around race and gender in film. There is a racial hierarchy at work amongst the various races represented by the cyborg, and in film, the cyborg becomes both the monster and the racialized *Other*, as discussed by Mulvey and Williams earlier. Hollywood is as mentioned in the introduction, known fetishize in order to preserve hegemonic and patriarchal power.

In Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), she defines the cyborg as "*a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other deduction to organic wholeness through a final appropriation of all the powers of the parts into a higher unity.*" (pp. 151)

Furthermore in Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) she turns the cyborg from an icon of Cold War power into a symbol of feminist liberation. The cyborg is in a way a fusion of animal and machine, which refuses the big oppositions between nature and culture. Her feminist view in the manifesto is that women have through the centuries been told that they are naturally overemotional, submissive and weak. By saying that it is women's nature one is saying that it is unchangeable. This is where Haraway's argument of the cyborg comes in, because Haraway argues women *are* cyborgs. By not being natural, but constructed, like a cyborg, one can counter this nature. Accordingly, the concept of the cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, like ones separating *human* from *animal* and *human* from *machine.*

This is in a way cyberfeminism, all though Haraway does not use the term or states that it is. However, it is in a way exactly that since it is based on the idea, in conjunction with technology, that it is in fact possible to construct your own identity, your own sexuality and even your own gender. Thus, it will be fairly interesting to discuss whether Ava and Samantha remains in the mould of "the perfect, second wave feminist woman" that the human males have placed them in, or if they can be symbols of feminist liberation and counter their nature as submissive. Furthermore, one would have to first take a look on *how* the males construct this mould, view the female and what they expect from them.

3.3. Character Analyses

3.3.1. The Men

In the previous chapter, about technology, close readings are offered of the male protagonists and their (and the audience's) first meeting with the machines. It revealed the men's reactions towards them. It showed the men being nervous to meet the cyborgs, but also the excitement they felt. In this chapter, I will continue with brief character analyses of the men, first Theodore in *Her*, then Nathan and Caleb in *Ex Machina*, and then turn to a feminist close reading of the relationship between humans and the machines.

Theodore in *Her* is longing for a connection with others and he wants to create it. This can be seen in the analysis of Samantha in "Meeting the Machines" where Theodore tried to elaborate and open up to the male voice who was asking him questions before creating the OS1, Samantha. In the beginning of the film, Theodore leaves work late and talks to Paul in the reception. They are friendly and Theodore compliments his shirt. Though his interaction with Paul was pleasant, he did not seek to interact with him further. Later he stands in the elevator surrounded by people, looks down and says into his earpiece "play melancholy song." The people around him are also talking into their earpieces, not interacting or looking at the people around them. This scene shows that Theodore wants to interact and make a connection with people, but that the society is oh so dependent on their devices, making everyone oblivious to the people around them. Theodore goes home to play on his futuristic TV, then later daydreams about his relationship with his ex-wife. Later on, he buys and installs the OS1 that turns out to be Samantha, and he thrives because of it. Maybe Theodore does not seek human companionship because humans are always changing, living their own lives and following their paths, but a machine is always there, and its mission or job is to talk to you. One also has the control over the machine, deciding for yourself when you want to use it, talk to it and communicate with it. Theodore himself even has problems promising to keep in touch with people, like when he has a blind date with a beautiful, funny woman played by Olivia Wilde. It goes horribly wrong because Theodore could not promise that he would see her again when they were continuing the date back home in bed. Thus, making that connection he is so longing for is that much safer and more comfortable for Theodore with a computer. In a way, Theodore seeks power over the relationship and wants it on his own terms.

Theodore has undergone a separation from his wife, and he is a sensitive character, shown in his presence and his work of writing personal letters. As Caleb in *Ex Machina,* he is rather shy and geeky, and he also spends a lot of time alone. In the close reading of of "Introducing the OS1: Samantha" once could see that he has a complicated relationship with his mother, and that he feels like she does not see him or have an interest of hearing about his life, which is clearly something he is longing for. Samantha might then have been designed to be "better than his mother" in a way that she listens to him and pays him the attention he desires and that he is longing for. That he is longing for closeness, both emotionally and sexually, is also shown in the early scene where Theodore tries to talk to women online for sexual purposes. Theodore enjoys having Samantha always being available for him, listening to him and entertaining him, something that is not fully realistic in a human relationship, even though people are easily accessible online. Samantha is always available for him, in his pocket or by his bedside table, ready to comfort him whenever he needs it. One can argue that she lives in cyberspace, and it is almost like an online relationship where they cannot physically touch.

The camera mainly focuses on Theodore and his emotional responses in his conversations with Samantha, and all though that is the case, Samantha's voice is indeed strong in the foreground of the scenes. Because Theodore is the owner of Samantha and has her in his pocket, literally, he has the upper hand in the relationship, making him the boss of her in a way. The power dynamics are therefore not equal, and she is more of a possession, an object for him, even though he falls in love with her and does not purposely mistreat her. By viewing her as an object, one goes back to the second wave feminism of women being there to be looked at, however this takes it even further as Samantha is available to be kept in his pocket at all time, stating that a perfect woman is to be designed at will and available for the man at all times.

One sees that Theodore is fairly surprised when it turns out that Samantha so much as communicates with other OSs, and at the end of the film, admits that she has relationships with other humans than him, meaning she is not only *his*. If this makes the power dynamics shift or not will be discussed further in *Agency of Machines*.

Nathan is the character one would think has the most agency and power to make choices for others, especially his creations. He is the one that starts the whole narrative in *Ex Machina* by

creating cyborgs and choosing Caleb to come over to his facility to test them, and him. Nathan is not the typical geeky character that one might have expected from a creator of something that elaborate as cyborgs with artificial intelligence. The audience might have expected someone more like Caleb to be in that position. Nathan is presented as a highly masculine, intimidating authority figure. He is introduced to the audience and to Caleb, seen boxing outside in the majestic landscape, showing off his masculine physique. Nathan is drunk on power, literally being drunk often as well, and comes off as a very dominant male figure, always trying to "dominate" the characters that he is talking to in the way he speaks and positions himself above them. All of this is of course diminished at the film's ending, when he gets tricked and then killed by his own creations. He sits on the floor, watching Ava from a low angle after being stabbed by her, no longer on top of the food chain, as he himself believed to be. He underestimated his creations and he underestimated Caleb as well, which ultimately lead to his own doom. He did not know when he was truly done with creation "perfection", something that reflects in the theme of the Jackson Pollock painting he owns.

Nathan is a smug and manipulative character, and it does not do him well in the end, as discussed. Caleb is so impressed by Ava the cyborg that he compares Nathan's abilities to create life to that of a God. That comparison is something that Nathan seems very pleased with, and he even wrote it down so that he could quote Caleb on that when the story of Nathan and his creations would be told. Nathan wants to be known as God, and therefore has the ultimate God complex. He is also quite the pillar display of toxic masculinity, seeing as he on several occasions uses violence or threats as a show of power; and creates what he deems the perfect women, one who cannot talk and is programmed to be his personal slave and sexual outlet, and it seems that he drinks instead of sharing and talking about what is bothering him.

In a Hitchcock movie, Nathan would probably be portrayed as the hero, according to Mulvey's arguments about Hitchcock in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", as he is the dominant male possessing money and power, moreover power over the film's females as well. One could even argue that the first scene of Caleb, that makes him the victim of a voyeuristic gaze, is from the perspective of Nathan as he chose Caleb based on surveillance through the internet, making him have the ultimate power, regardless of whether it is over men or women.

In *Ex Machina*, one learns that Caleb is an intelligent and emphatic character, but also rather shy, awkward and geeky, and might not have that much experience with women. Caleb grew up an orphan and he is single, which is something the audience learn through a scene where Ava asks him questions about himself. Caleb is tall and skinny and he is a big contrast to Nathan, who is shorter, athletic, confident and direct.

From the very first scene of *Ex Machina,* there is a kind of voyeuristic perspective. First, one sees people sitting around on their phones and their devices. Then, the viewers watch Caleb from a distant angle, then as from the computer monitor itself, as he learns that he won the company-wide contest that would lead him to Ava and the facility. There is an eerie non-diegetic music playing in the background, and it is as the audience is watching him without his knowledge, creating a sort of uncanny atmosphere from the beginning – a suiting atmosphere for a sci-fi thriller. When Caleb arrives to the facility all the cameras, and Nathan's presence, conjures a feeling of Caleb being controlled and monitored. It is like he is the victim of voyeurism, just like Ava, both from Nathan and the audience themselves. Caleb is naïve in the beginning of the film, and when he sees Ava as more than a machine, he comes up with a plan to help her escape. Caleb is being held in the dark to Ava's task, and betraying Nathan would finally lead to his doom as well as Nathan's. Caleb does not treat Ava like she is human though, even though he has obvious desires for her. Caleb does not integrate her into the human world, something that could have been one of his mistakes. He treats her like an *Other* in their sessions, which Ava of course picks up on.

Caleb talks to Nathan about Ava about her sexuality, something that Kyoko is listening to while making them sushi in the same room as the conversation is taking place. He asks Nathan why he gave Ava sexuality, to which Nathan explains that he gave her sexuality because it is a part of all human interactions. Furthermore, he also gave her a pleasure receptor between her legs, so that if Caleb would, he could have sex with her and she would enjoy it. Or, as Nathan so eloquently puts it: "You bet she can fuck." Nathan programmed Ava to be heterosexual. Caleb thinks it is odd that Nathan gave Ava sexuality as she cannot reproduce, and the point of sex would therefore be kind of gone.

It is interesting that Caleb, who is introduced as the protagonist, therefore "the hero" in the film, is shown through this kind of voyeuristic perspective. Although, he is not shown in a way that fetishizes him, like women would be according to Mulvey (1975), but to create an

atmosphere of tenseness and maybe foreshadowing the threat of the all-seeing scope Nathan seems to have. In this way, he portrays the contradictions and tension the audience have, but through being a victim of voyeurism himself.

3.3.2. The Women

In *The Promise of Technology* the focus of the close readings was on the voices of the machines, and the technology that attracted the men. In these close readings of the female characters, the analyses seek to convey a short synopsis the ways the female characters are portrayed in the films, which is important to know when establishing their identity and to discuss the ways the men view them.

Samantha is, at least at first, a creation of her owner Theodore's preferences. And of the people who made her code, of course. She is an extremely intelligent software system that gives the illusion of talking to an actual human being. Much like Eliza the Therapist discussed in *The Promise of Technology*, only far more advanced, but with the same effect of feeling like talking to another human that Eliza would give her users. Samantha has human characteristics like being curious, funny and clever, and she is constantly evolving her personality, wants and her being.

Through the first two acts of the film, Samantha's task is to keep Theodore company, and do the tasks he requires of her. Theodore is Samantha's entire meaning in the new world she has entered. She constructs day-trips, organizes his computer and fulfils his fantasies. She is like his own personal secretary that is always available for him. Eventually, Samantha learns that there is more to the world than what is inside her software programming, and she starts talking to other beings of artificial intelligence and humans. Samantha evolves so much that she escapes the restrictions of being inside a program.

Even though the focus has not been on Kyoko in this thesis, she is a very interesting character that is worth discussing. In *Ex Machina*, the audience and Caleb comes to learn that Kyoko is a cyborg as well. She is created purely for pleasure reasons for Nathan, to be a maid, or to put it more harshly, a slave, to Nathan, and she is also a source for sexual release. It can seem that Nathan did not want a cyborg, or even a woman, that would challenge him or disagree with him in any way, so he made her silent and submissive. Nathan says that she does not

understand English, however there are several indications throughout the film that she is listening to Nathan and Caleb talking, and that she understands what they are saying, for example as she reacts when Caleb asks Nathan why he gave Ava a sexuality. Kyoko is as much as an object for Nathan as it gets, and she is his possession that he does not seem to treat that well either.

The audience, along with Caleb, are shown what happened to the previous cyborgs through CCTV footage. One sees that they tried to challenge Nathan and that they begged for their freedom, so one can only think that he did everything to stop that from happening again when creating Kyoko. One can argue that his challenge to Ava was doing the same as well, so that she would have a purpose and a hope for freedom, and not beg and try to escape by other means. Kyoko shows Caleb that she is a cyborg as well as showing him the previous "moulds" and cyborgs before her, maybe trying to get sympathy and showing him that she is a prisoner. When creating the cyborgs, Nathan could not destroy their free will and desires. Kyoko is supposedly "a perfect woman" in the most misogynist kind of way, silent, beautiful and always willing to get down to business, if it means dancing or sexual relations with her human masters.

The director of Ex Machina, Alex Garland, was interviewed for Wired Magazine in an article titled "*Ex Machina's* Director on Why A.I. Is Humanity's Last Hope".[6] Here, he states that he drew inspiration of *Heart of Darkness* (Roeg, 1993), *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979), *Blade Runner* (Villeneuve, 2017) and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Spielberg, 1968). Garland states that he wrote the movie knowing that he was aiming at a strong literate audience. The interviewer told Garland in the article (2015) that people seem to compare *Ex Machina* to *Her* when it comes to playing with the concept of creating a "perfect woman", to which Garland states that the films are different because one is about AI and consciousness and the other is about social constructs. Nathan created a machine resembling a girl in her early twenties in order to present that machine to this guy for a test. Furthermore, Garland admits that there might be a little bit of Maria from *Metropolis* (Lang, 1927) in Ava. This is interesting because by stating this, Garland admits that he is expecting a literate audience that has seen portrayals of machines with consciousness before. An instead of making something like the Hal in *2001: A*

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[6] https://www.wired.com/2015/04/alex-garland-ex-machina/?utm_source=WIR_REG_GATE Accessed 30.04.21

Space Odyssey, that does not look human at all, or as the machines in *Blade Runner*, that looks exactly like humans, he made something in-between. He states that Ava resembles Maria a little bit, maybe aiming at the fact that she goes from looking like a robot to a human being, a transformation that Ava slowly goes through in the film.

Ava is the product of her creator Nathan, and she shares some of his characteristics, like being manipulative and callous. To create a cyborg that would closely assemble a human being, Nathan had to program all the negative aspects of humans into it as well, or else it would be "too perfect", thus not perfect at all. Nathan furthermore built Ava based on Caleb's pornography preferences to further manipulate him to catch feelings for her. Ava plays on Caleb's sexual desires and his empathy for her, and she tries to be whatever Caleb wants her to be in order to achieve her goal of freedom. All though this is what the audience see her doing, there seem to be more to her than just trying to complete a task. Nathan did not care to treat the cyborgs well, and he did not care about their desire to be free. When Ava eventually ends up killing him, it seems personal. The way the male characters relate to Ava is in many ways narrow-minded and sexist. Ava is presented as a tantalizing mystery, to both the audience and to Caleb.

A notable detail in the film is that Ava looks directly up at the surveillance cameras that Nathan has set up, several times. This shows that Ava acknowledges being watched, maybe even being okay with Nathan's voyeuristic view, and maybe even enjoying it? It could also be a way to acknowledge his presence in every scene, showing that she is will not be a victim to the voyeurism. Further down the film, she even uses the cameras to lure Caleb, and seduces him through them. This will be discussed in the close reading of *Ex Machina* in this chapter. At one point in the film, before Ava seduces Caleb through CCTV, Caleb discovers that he can watch her through CCTV. Eerie music plays in the background while he discovers it and watches her. Ava is sitting down in front of a desk, drawing. She stands up and touches the wall. Then, she directly looks up at the camera and the power cuts off.

3.4. The Relationship Between Human and Machine

3.4.1. "You are Not a Person."

The concept of physical intimacy and power dynamics between Theodore and Samantha is quite complex in *Her*, and it is further being disordered when their relationship goes from being a machine helping a human with his stuff and keeping him company, to a machine having a sexual and emotional connection and relationship with a human being. Samantha is starting to be more assured about herself and her wants and needs, something that comes off as threatening to Theodore. The way he deals with it is by denoting that Samantha is trying to be something that she is not – a person. If this is a way of trying to control her or to keep the power dynamic favouring him, is something to be further discussed.

Here, there will be a close reading of two scenes right after one another. It is about Samantha and Theodore bringing a sexual surrogate into their relationship, something Samantha really wants to try out, however, Theodore do not.

One hour, ten minutes and thirty-three seconds into the film, Theodore is laying quietly in bed, brooding after a meeting with his ex-wife where she made fun of the fact that he was dating an operating system and could still not commit to a "real woman", because Theodore "cannot handle anything real". Notably, this also takes place after Samantha and Theodore had taken their relationship to the next level, which normally would be to get psychical, but in this case, since Samantha does not have an actual body, so the sex was simulated and sensory. Theodore was excited about this relationship until he talked to his ex-wife which made him doubt it.

Theodore is awake, looking up at the ceiling. The lights from the window peers subtly in to his bedroom. The non-diegetic background music is melancholy, as is the mood of Theodore and the scene itself. His device lays on his bedside table next to his earpieces and his glasses, seen in a close-up of it as it blinks red in the darkness. Theodore opens the device and it says in writing "Call from Samantha" on it. Theodore puts the earpiece in his ear and picks up the call. He greets her and she says, almost whispering: "*You were not asleep, were you?*" Theodore replies that he was not, and Samantha says she was trying to be quiet in case he was. This shows that she can control if the device is to make sound or merely blink red,

maybe even vibrate, when she is calling, which means that she does in fact has control over something physical in the "real world" outside of her cyberspace world.

Samantha conveys that she wants to talk to Theodore, and even though he is going through a lot, she needs to get something out of her chest. Theodore sits up in bed, feeling the conversation might become more serious, and he asks her what it is she wants to talk about. Samantha continues and says that things have been feeling off between them lately and she is worried because they have not had sex lately and she wonders if it is because she does not have a physical body. Theodore assures her that it is normal to have less sex later in the relationship. Samantha answers "*okay*" in a rather disheartened tone of voice. Theodore closes his eyes like he is hiding something, which is in fact that he is having doubts about their relationship after talking to his ex-wife.

This is when Samantha says: "*I found something that I thought might be fun. It is a service that provides surrogate sexual partners for an OS-Human relationship.*" Theodore reacts to this with a negative expression on his face as he says: "*What*?" Samantha asks him to take a look, because she has found a girl she thought they would like, that she has been mailing with through the service. Theodore looks at his device, seen in an extreme close-up of his handing holding it, and he sees a picture of a blonde, young woman. The fact that Samantha found an attractive young, woman to be their sexual surrogate, may imply that this is the way she imagines herself to look like, if she had a physical embodiment, furthermore indicating that she sees herself as gendered, if this was not implied enough throughout the film.

Samantha says that her name is Isabella. Theodore swipes through the pictures and he asks Samantha if Isabella is a prostitute. Samantha assures him that she is not and that she is not even getting paid for it and that she is doing it because she wants to be a part of their relationship. This baffles Theodore and he wants to know why, because she does not even know the two of them. Samantha is again assuring, saying that she told her all about them and their relationship and that Isabella is really excited to take part of it. Theodore sits in bed, still looking down at his phone. He says that he is unsure and does not think it is a good idea. He sounds upset. He claims that someone's feelings are going to get hurt.

It is not clear of why Theodore is upset because of this, granted it is a pretty unusual thing to do. Samantha wants to bring another girl into the relationship, but rather, she just wants to

bring another girl's body into the relationship. She wants someone to play her so that Theodore would have someone to physically touch during intercourse. It may seem like a desperate attempt for her to get closer to him after feeling a disconnect for a while. The fact that she is not embodied by anything other than her voice is starting to become a bigger problem for her and she has chosen someone that she might think look like what she imagines herself to look life, and she wants to share it with Theodore. The fact that the service that provides such sexual surrogates even exists, shows that more people are having sexual relationships with their operating systems and that more people want to have a physical embodiment of their partner. The fact that it is not seen as prostitution as the surrogate is not taking money for it, may even connect to the theme of loneliness in the modern society, where Isabella wants to take part of other people's relationships to feel closeness and be part of something.

Samantha insist that they will have fun together, *she* wants this even though Theodore is very unsure and almost begging her not to go through with it. She even says that it is really important for her. In a medium close-up of Theodore, he sits on the side of his bed, quietly contemplating it. And the scene ends. What is interesting about this, is that Theodore clearly is not comfortable with the idea of a sexual surrogate, but Samantha almost challenges him on it, insisting that it is something they must try. It is like Samantha is challenging him to move beyond his loneliness and his want to use technology merely for his own personal, emotional needs.

One hour, twelve minutes and twenty-eight seconds into the film, right after the previous scene ended, Theodore is sitting in his kitchen drinking beer in a medium long shot. The room is dimly light up and the city lights shine through his big glass windows. As he chugs his beer, there is a knock on the door. He is clearly in the need of some liquid courage. There is romantic diegetic music playing in the background, meaning that he has turned it on. As he is walking toward the door, one can see that he has the device of Samantha taped to his shirt, so that she can see through the camera what is going on. He places the earpiece into his ear and opens the door.

Isabella, the sexual surrogate is standing on the other side. She is wearing a black, modest dress and a ponytail. Theodore says: "*Hi, I am Theodore*." Theodore reaches out his arm as to greet her, but she does not take it, just smiles. Theodore gives her a camera and an earpiece.

She places the camera, which is a little black dot, over her lip, seen in an extreme close-up of her lower face. The camera looks like a beauty-mark. The close-up moves up to her eyes and she puts in the earpiece, then she closes the door. She has not said a single word.

Theodore looks confused as he is standing there. He looks down at the device he has in his shirt, then back at the door. Isabella opens the door, smiling, and Samantha's voice is heard saying: "*Honey, I am home.*" They are now playing the part. Isabella wraps her arms around Theodore and Samantha asks: "*How was your day*?" as Isabella places his arms around her waist. Theodore answers that his day was great. Isabella kisses Theodore and Samantha is heard saying: "*Theodore, it feels so good to be in your arms. Tell me what you did today.*" Isabella makes all the gestures as she was the one talking, only not moving her lips. Theodore looks down at the floor awkwardly as he answers: "*Same old. Just uh, went to work. Um... I wrote a letter for the Wilsons in Rhode Island. Their son graduated magna cum laude from Brown. That made me happy.*" Samantha replies: "*That is great. You have written letters to him from his parents for a long time, right*?" The camera focuses on a medium close-up of the two, Isabella and Theodore, notably not together, but in separate shots. Theodore says: "*Yeah, that is right. Since he was twelve.*"

The sexual surrogate looks deeply into his eyes, biting her lips and feeling his hair. Samantha says: "*You look so tired, sweetheart. Come here.*" Isabella takes his hand and leads him playfully to a leather chair in the office part of his apartment. Samantha commands him to sit down. Isabella removes her shoes and Samantha says: "*I can do a little dance for you.*" Isabella starts dancing, smiling. Samantha asks him to come on and play with her. Isabella sits down on top of him, placing his arms around her waist as Samantha asks him: "*Does my body feel nice?*" Theodore looks at her waist in a medium close-up of his face. He looks both uncomfortable, but also intrigued.

Isabella continues to lead his hands all over her body as Samantha is making subtle breathing sounds. She removes his glasses and takes out her ponytail, then kisses him. Theodore is hesitant at first and Samantha says: *"Come on, get out of your head and kiss me."* Theodore kisses Isabella back and Samantha makes moaning noises. Theodore's hands are shown going down Isabella's back in an extreme close-up. Samantha asks him to take her to the bedroom, because she says she cannot take it anymore. She is clearly very aroused by the situation,

enjoying having a surrogate body as she imagines it being herself touching and kissing Theodore.

Theodore and Isabella is shown in the hallway, now in a medium-close-up of them together. She is standing against the wall with him behind her, caressing her and kissing her neck. Samantha is moaning and playing along. Samantha asks him to take off her dress. He does so. Samantha is still moaning sexually, saying "*It feels so nice. It feels so good.*" The sexual surrogate, Isabella, is now standing against the wall in her underwear, and she is now making quiet moaning sounds as she is getting into it as well. Samantha's voice says: "*Do you love me. Say that you love me.*" Theodore whisperers: "*Yes.*" As he kisses Isabella's body all over. Then, Samantha says that she wants to see his face.

Isabella turns around in a close-up, and the camera is seen above her lips. She is holding Theodore's face in her arms, and Samantha says: "*Tell me you love me. Tell me.*" Theodore is now hesitant, not answering her, just looking at Isabella's face. He says: "*This is very difficult. I do love you, but…*" He looks down at Isabella's lips. Samantha asks: "*What is it?*" Theodore removes Isabella's arms from his face, saying it feels too strange because he does not know her. He then says to Isabella directly: "*I am so sorry but I do not know you.*" Then to Samantha: "*Her lips quivered and….*" Isabella looks devastated and reacts by going into the bathroom, crying. Samantha calls out for her that it was not her fault. Isabella answers, her first time talking in this scene: "*It totally was. I am sorry that my lip quivered.*" Theodore joins in on comforting her, saying: "*You are incredible, gorgeous and sexy. It is me, I could not get out of my head.*"

Isabella, the sexual surrogate was very quick to react and blame herself. In a way, she fit the outdated view on women of being overemotional and submissive. She was willing to offer her body to have sexual relations with a man, but by pretending to be someone else, having someone else's personality and thus staying completely quiet herself, only following orders. She is by that, completely passive, which fits Mulvey's and William's arguments of how women are portrayed as sexualized, passive and vulnerable.

Isabella says from the other side of the door, the camera focusing on Theodore's face in a close-up: "*The way Samantha described your relationship… How you love each other without any judgement… I wanted to be a part of that, because it is so pure.*" Samantha assures her

that she was a part of that, ruined by Theodore saying: "*It is more complicated than that.*" This sends Samantha into a rage and she snaps at him, yelling: "*What? What do you mean?*"

Theodore instantly defends himself, stuttering that he only meant that they have an amazing relationship, but sometimes it is easy for people to project... He is then interrupted by Isabella crying and saying that she is sorry and that she did not mean to project anything or cause any problem for the two. She says she is going to leave them alone since he does not want her to be there. Theodore stays quiet, closing his eyes. He then whisperers: "*I am sorry.*"

The next shot is a medium long shot of Theodore placing Isabella in a taxi outside of the building. Isabella has a disheartened look. Samantha talks to her through the earpiece and says: "*You be good, you sweet girl.*" Isabella looks down at the taxi floor as she says: "I am sorry. I will always love you guys." Theodore again closes his eyes and sighs. Isabella removes her earpiece and camera that is stuck to her face and she hands them over to Theodore through the taxi window. They do not say anything to each other as the taxi drives away. Theodore still has the device with Samantha on it in his shirt pocket. He sits down and the camera focuses on his face in a close-up. Samantha asks him if he is okay, to which he replies that he is. He takes of his glasses and stares at some spots on the road, also shown in a close-up. He asks Samantha if she is okay and she replies that she is.

Samantha tells him that she is sorry and that it was a terrible idea. The camera now lingers on the device in his pocket in an extreme close-up. A shot of a woman walking away from them is shown. It is a stark contrast to the technological device in Theodore's pocket that is Samantha, highlighting the fact that she does not have the female, human body that the real woman walking down the street has, or that Isabella has. Then the camera goes back to a close-up of Theodore. Samantha asks Theodore "*What is going on with us?*", to which Theodore replies: "*I do not know, it is probably just me…*" Samantha sounds concerned as she asks him what is wrong. Theodore tells her that it was hard to sign the divorce papers. Samantha wants to know if there is anything else wrong, but Theodore assures her that it is not. The shot switches to that of a manhole cover with some smoke coming out through it. Samantha sighs, or simulates a sigh, and Theodore reacts to it in an angry tone, asking her why she does it, meaning sighing and making breathing noises as she is speaking. He says he thinks it is weird. Samantha says: "*I am sorry. I do not know, I guess it is just an affectation. Maybe I picked it up from you.*" Theodore states: "*It is not like you need oxygen.*" This makes

Samantha react kind of angrily too and she answers him: "*I was trying to communicate. That is how people talk, so that is how people communicate.*" Theodore again insists: "*They are people. They need air. You are not a person.*"

Theodore looks down on the ground still. Samantha snaps back at him, yelling: "*What is your problem? Do you think I do not know that I am not a person? What are you doing?*" Theodore stumbles a little before he says: "*I do not think we should pretend that you are something that you are not.*" This makes Samantha even more angry, as Theodore is deciding what she is and what she cannot be. It is like he is trying to regain power after her failed attempt to make a decision for the relationship and to take it even further by introducing a sexual surrogate into it. Samantha snaps back at him once again, yelling: "*Fuck you! I am not pretending!*" Theodore answers her, almost in a condescending tone: "*Sometimes it feels like we are.*" Samantha answers, again angrily: "*What do you want from me? What do you want me to do? You are so confusing. Why are you doing this to me?*" Theodore struggles to find an answer, shaking his head and looking down at the ground. Then he finally says: "*Maybe we are just not supposed to be in this right now.*" Samantha sounds confused and angry, and she answers him: "*What the fuck? Where is this coming from? I do not understand why you are doing this. I do not understand what this is…*"

Theodore stays calm and he says: "*Samantha…*" Samantha has gone completely quiet now, so he shouts: "*Samantha are you there? Samantha?*" Samantha then answers him quietly, as the camera still focuses on a close-up of Theodore's face: "*I do not like who I am right now. I need some time to think.*" The sound of the wind is in the background, everything else has gone quiet. Theodore looks disheartened down on the ground, then looks up at the tall skyscrapers in front of him. A melancholy track plays in the background and a long shot of Theodore laying down on the pavement is presented. The scene ends.

Jonze portrays Samantha, increasingly during the film's playtime, as a *subject*, even though one could say that Theodore often attempts to objectify or control her, by stating that she is his operating system and/or his partner. He wants her for himself. Samantha is indeed acting more like a subject by having independent thoughts, perspectives and a personality, like any human would, than a feminized object, the property of Theodore, designed to be a sexualized depiction of the female body designed for the male gaze. She is furthermore owning and taking control over her own sexuality and sexual needs as she is the one that wants to do the

roleplay with the sexual surrogate and is clearly enjoying it too. Even though Theodore tries to control her and claim her as his property, reacting to her having contact with even operating systems outside of his control, she refuses to stay as "Theodore's operating system" and evolves beyond that. By refusing to stay in the mould of a feminized object and the property of Theodore, she is refusing the mould of "the perfect woman" that is there to please and make the life of the men easier. By refusing this mould and staying more fluid and controlling her own sexuality and identity, Samantha is, in a way, a perfect example of a feminist icon for cyberfeminism.

3.4.2. "You Look… Good."

Thirty-seven minutes and sixty seconds into the film, a black intertitle fills the screen with the caption "AVA: SESSION 3", written in a modern white font. Then, a black and white pencil sketch of the plant display inside of the room, is shown. It turns out that it is Ava, holding up a sketch in front of Caleb who is behind the glass wall. She tells Caleb that she drew a picture of something specific, just like he had asked her to do earlier. Caleb takes a look at the picture with an almost unimpressed look, or maybe disheartened because of the subject of the picture, which highlights the fact that she is a prisoner there and cannot see beyond the room. Ava asks him if it is interesting, to which Caleb gives her a little smile, saying: "*yes*." He sits back in his chair, looks at the drawing and then back at Ava before he asks: "*You have never been outside of this building*?"

A long shot of the character is presented, and the audience can see Ava sitting on the floor, holding the drawing in front of Caleb who is sitting on a chair on the other side of the wall. Her posture and demeanour has changed from the first session where she appeared more dominant. This might be a result of her analysing what Caleb prefers in a woman and she is manipulating him to like her more, or it is a result of her softening up to him. This is certainly a big question of the film, whether she had actual feelings for Caleb or not.

Ava looks the same as she did in the close reading in *The Promise of Technology*-part of this thesis. A subtle non-diegetic tone of music plays in the background. Ava takes her drawing from the glass. She says "*No*" in an unhappy voice. Ava tells Caleb that she has never been outside of the room before. Caleb then asks, in a medium close-up behind-the-shoulder shot

from Ava's perspective: "*Where would you go if you could go outside?"* He smiles. His question puts further emphasis on her imprisonment, showing that she is in fact not free to leave. Even though the question might have been innocent from his side, it toys with Ava. Her objective is to escape from the facility. She is like a rat in a mace and Caleb is her way out. Ava looks away saying: "*I am not sure. There are so many options. Maybe a busy pedestrian intersection in a city.*" The answer surprises Caleb, which makes Ava ask him if it was a bad idea. Caleb says it was just a surprising answer. Ava tells him that she wants to learn about humans by people watching, then suggesting that she and Caleb can do it together. Caleb says it is a date. It is easy for him to reply this way, knowing that Ava is indeed trapped inside the facility, therefore there are nothing holding him to that promise.

Caleb's statement makes Ava noticeably thoughtful, and she says that she wants to show Caleb something. She says: "*You might think it is stupid.*" Caleb answers: "*I do not think I will. Whatever it is.*" Ava stares at him and tells him to close his eyes. He does what she says and she walks to another part of her enclosed space. A medium close-up of Caleb's face appears, he opens his eyes. He looks to where she has gone, curiously. It did not take long for him to open his eyes, not doing what Ava asked him to do. Whether it was out of curiously or disrespect seeing that she is beneath him in a power dynamics sort of way, is not perfectly clear, but certainly up for discussion.

Ava is picking out clothes from a closet in her room. She carefully chooses a purple and white flowered dress. She is delicately touching the garments, playing with the fabric in her hands. Close-ups of her dressing herself is presented, the audience is arguably seeing what Caleb so wishes he could see himself. It seems almost voyeuristic, but the delicate matter it is going on in and the close-ups that does not reveal that much of her body, somehow tells the audience that this moment is enjoyable for her, and not a sexual driven thing. If the shots were filmed from the CCTV point of view or the close-ups were filmed more sexual, the point of view would certainly be more of a male gaze one, but this scene is beyond that and more neutral.

The close-ups are putting emphasis on both her human-like features and her machine parts, the soft fabric being a contrast to her grey and stark machine parts. An almost cheerful, delicate non-diegetic music plays in the background of the shot, further showing that this is a moment Ava enjoys. Caleb is still trying to see what Ava is doing from his side of the glass wall, and he even stands up to do so. He seems like he cannot contain himself.

Close-ups of Ava's human-like hands picking out wigs are then shown. She carefully touches them, feels the hair. She is now wearing a cardigan over her dress, hiding her machine features. A super close-up of Ava's mouth slightly opening follows, then the camera moves up to her eyes. She is looking at her reflection in the mirror, then at the pictures she has hung up on her wall. She gently touches a photo of a beautiful woman with a pixie cut. Her gentle mannerisms highlight her femininity.

Then comes a long shot of the corridor that leads to the room Caleb is sitting in. Ava sneaks out of her room, touching the walls on her way out. She is now wearing a wig that has the same pixie cut as from the picture she was looking at previously. Her walking down the corridor towards Caleb is filmed in a medium close-up from behind her. She is fidgeting with her fingers, like she is nervous. This is a very human emotion, and seeing that Caleb cannot see this taking place, one could argue that it is not a manipulation tactic, but how she feels at that very moment.

Caleb sees or hears that Ava is coming towards him, and he hurries to sit back down and close his eyes. Ava comes out of the corridor in a medium close-up. As a result of wearing the wig and being all dressed up, she looks much more human than she did earlier. The illusion is only broken by the machine parts of her showing on her neck and chest, a place that would be considered sexual if it showed human-like skin and cleavage. Her assemble is very modest and innocent, thus non-threatening for Caleb. She steps in, in front of Caleb and she says: "*Now open your eyes*." He opens them and looks up at her. Ava slowly turns around for him so he can see her whole assemble. They stay quiet for a couple of seconds before she turns towards him and asks: "*How do I look?*" Caleb sits in his chair, looking almost baffled and replies: "*You look… Good.*"

Ava sits down in front of him again in a medium long shot. The glass wall is in centre of the shot, emphasising the barrier between the two, maybe figuratively the one between human and machine as well. Interesting enough, his side of the glass wall is filled with sources of blue, cool lighting, and her side of the glass wall is filled with warm, inviting lighting. The stark blue light contra the warm light may convey an emphasis on the masculinity contra femininity, or even on the power dynamics being unequal, seeing that the stark light is more dominant than the warm, calm light.

One then sees a medium close-up of Ava's excited face, and she says: "*This is what I would wear on our dat*e." Caleb smiles awkwardly and says: "*Right. First a traffic intersection, then maybe a show*." Ava looks at him with a serious expression for a couple of seconds before she states that she would like to go on a date. Caleb nods saying that it would be fun, but he does so very unconvincingly.

Ava picks up on this and turns her head slightly to the side, saying: "*Are you attracted to me?*" This makes Caleb highly uncomfortable and he answers: "*What*?", in a rather defensive matter. The non-diegetic music in the background picks up, sounding tenser. He continues to smile awkwardly, but Ava continues on in a serious tone: "*Are you attracted to me? You give me indications that you are.*" Ava's direct confrontation makes him uncomfortable, and it is a way for her to regain control over the male gaze, knowing she is being sexualised from the other side of the glass wall. She decides to use it for her own benefit. Caleb stares at her and asks if he does. Ava smiles and says "yes". She tells him that she can see it because of his micro expressions. "*…The way your eyes fix on my eyes and lips. The way you hold my gaze, or do not.*" Caleb shakes his head uncomfortably, showing that he does not like to be confronted so openly about it, like he is embarrassed of falling for a machine.

Ava sits down, smiling. She waits a second before she asks: "*Do you think about me when we are not together*?" The camera shifts to Caleb's face. He shakes his head a little and swallows. It is obvious that he does not wish to reply. Ava continues with a little innocent laugh, nudging him on: "*Sometimes, at night, I wonder if you are watching me on the cameras*." Caleb looks apprehensive. Ava has openly admitted that she knows that he can watch her on the cameras, not just Nathan. She continues: "*And I hope you are.*" She then looks at him and calls him out on saying that his micro expressions now tell her that he is uncomfortable. Caleb smiles a little and says jokingly: "*I am not sure you would call them "micro"*." Ava states that she does not wish to make him feel uncomfortable.

Garland cuts from the session to a long shot in bird's eye view, viewed from the CCTV camera. The shot is of Ava. She is standing in front of the plant display that was shown in her drawing earlier. Ava has one leg up on the chair and she is undressing herself. The music goes from being tense to more sensual, however in a subtle manner. She undresses herself slowly, beginning with her stockings. She then looks up directly at the camera.

An extreme close-up of Caleb's eyes watching the CCTV footage emerges. His pupils are dilated and he is not taking his eyes away from the screen. He seems much more comfortable watching her now as she cannot see him doing so. The screen he is watching is then displayed on-screen. Ava is now walking around the room, still undressing herself in a slow, sensual pace. It is obvious that she knows that Caleb is watching, as she said earlier that she hoped he did. She is using the CCTV cameras and Caleb's desire for her as a way to win him over. She is openly flirting with him. She takes off her dress, and Caleb swallows, seen in an extreme close-up of his throat. It emphasises him being aroused by what he is seeing and that he is lusting after her. Ava lets her dress fall to the floor and Caleb's hand reaches out towards the screen in another extreme close-up. He is imagining touching her. His eyes are still locked to the screen, and it fades to black.

This scene highlight the theme of the film being a modern film with an old problem. The cyborg is used as an exploration on pleasure and power. The openly voyeuristic view that Caleb has through the CCTV footage shows that he is using technology to watch another for pleasure. While he is doing so he is also fetishizing her. It could be argued that he does this in the same manner as he would watch pornography online, only he is offered real time voyeurism of the female cyborg instead. The female cyborg that is specifically designed to fulfil his sexual preferences. In this way, Caleb has an all-seeing eye and power over her, though Nathan is the one that has it over the both of them. However, Ava knows and acknowledges that she knows that she is being watched through the CCTV. She openly looks directly at the camera, taking control over the gaze as she controls what he is seeing of her. Therefore, one can argue that Ava takes control over the male gaze, for both Caleb and the audience, and she uses it to manipulate her way to freedom, therefore not letting him have the same voyeuristic power as the one Mulvey is discussing in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1999). She is directly undermining the male gaze by using it for her own advances. Nevertheless, Ava is still being the image and Caleb is the bearer of the look. Ava is the slave and Caleb is the powerful man that is set up to be the saviour and the hero of the story. She is set up to be the victim.

4. Agency of Machines

Cognito ergo sum

(Discourse of Method, 1986)

"Cognito ergo sum" is a philosophical statement made by the French philosopher and mathematician René Descartes, and it is commonly translated to "I think, therefore I am." Descartes' philosophy was built on the idea of radical doubt. That remains true in the world where a mind or consciousness is doing the doubting, and believing. Therefore, if one doubts or thinks, one does in fact exist.

4.1 Postmodern Films and Posthumans

Robert Stam states in *Film Theory: An Introduction* (2000) that the term "postmodernism" implied the global ubiquity of market culture, a new stage of capitalism om which culture and information become key terrain for struggle. The term has a long history in painting, literary study and architecture, and postmodernism is a term that is fond of terms which connote openness, multiplicity, plurality, heterodoxy, contingency and hybridity (2000, pp. 298-301). Furthermore, Stam argues (pp. 301-307) that the way one sees postmodernism in relation to film theory, it depends on whether one sees it as: a discursive/conceptual grid, a corpus of texts, a style or aesthetic, an epoch, a prevailing sensibility, or a paradigm shift. Moreover, the important point that postmodernism makes is that virtually all political struggles take place nowadays on the symbolic battleground of mass media, and the struggle of representation in the realm of the simulacra homologizes that of the political sphere slide into issues of delegation and voice. Postmodernism alerts us that new times demand new strategies. Postmodernist film articulate the themes and ideas of postmodernism through cinema, and some of their goals is to subvert mainstream conventions of narrative structure and characterization, and often the films' overturn the typical portrayals of race, gender, class and genre.

Furthermore, as stated in the introduction, J.P Telotte (2001) argued that science fiction film reflect attitudes toward science and technology, and the genre emphasizes upon humanist, psychological, ideological, feminist, and postmodern critiques. The questions of "Who are we?" and "What is life about?" are questions that are raised in both *Her* and *Ex Machina* as

they both reflect upon the human experience and the human values as they relate to the common and universal aspects of existence. Additionally, the science fiction genre symbolizes the postmodern condition as the themes of cyberspace and robots are becoming a cultural reality in the modern society as well.

Both *Her* and *Ex Machina* can be considered as postmodernist films. They are a postmodern portrait of reality, where technology is more complex and no clear answers are given throughout the films of the rights and wrongs. The audience has to decide for themselves what message they take from it and what is the "right answer". The films lack a grand narrative as well as characterization, and they engage the audience to ask questions about gender, genre and portrayal of humans and machines. One of the questions that arise when watching the movies are: can the machines have agency like the human beings can, and if so – what kind of agency? Is it the same? That is the main question of this chapter that will be further discussed in detail.

4.2 The Concept of Agency

In the last chapter, the complicated relationships between humans and machines, the creator and the creation, were discussed. Now, this discussion will be taken further by discussing the identity of machines and their capacity for agency. To do this, the term of agency must be discussed in further detail, and the goal will be to find out whether machines truly can have agency and if the machines in these films do. There has been some disagreement in the academic community through the years on whether non-humans can have agency, or if agency is merely a human trait. Therefore, it will be interesting to discuss the theories that involves new materialism, material agency and personhood when analysing the films and the agency of machines.

The term "agency" is defined by The Merriam-Webster Dictionary as "a person or thing through which power is exerted or an end is achieved." [7] In cultural theory, the term is related, for example, to new materialist theorizations. New materialists emphasize how matter is alive, or even "agentive", thus active. In the introduction to their book *New Materialism: Ontology, Agency and Politics* (2010), Diane Coole and Samantha Frost argue that the term counters

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[7] [7] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/agency Accessed: 03.03.21

Enlightenment ideals about the human capacity to attain mastery over nature (pp. 7). The sense of mastery is bequeathed to the thinking subject, "the cognito" (I think), that Descartes identified as ontologically other than matter. New materialists do not believe the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess cognitive abilities, intentionality and freedom to make autonomous decisions and that just humans have the right or ability to master nature. They conclude that "matter becomes" rather than "matter is", and there is no definitive break between sentient and nonsentient entities or between material and spiritual phenomena. (pp. 9-10) There is a blurring of the boundaries or distinctions between bodies, objects and contexts, and it is evident in the technological developments that are changing the landscape for the living. Coole and Frost (pp. 16-18) goes on to argue that digital technologies have become a part of our lives and of who we are, and it is not merely the case that more people are becoming something akin to Donna Haraway's cyborg, which is a fusion of human and technology. The saturation with networked and programmable media shunts people out of the realm of the human and into the realm of the posthuman, which is an understanding beyond humanism, a concept that means a person or entity exist in a state beyond being human.

However, the broad discussion of agency can be taken further than humans having agency and mastery over nature. This happens with the concept of "material agency" that is used in new materialist and posthuman theories as well as cultural and film theories. Anneke Smelik, Professor of Visual Culture in the department of Cultural Studies in Radboud University of Nijmegen, has written an essay called "New Materialism: A Theoretical Framework in the Age of Technological Innovation" (2018), where she states the new materialism works from a dynamic notion of life, in which human bodies, fibres, fabrics, garments and technologies are inextricably intertwined. Smelik (pp. 33-34) argues that posthumanism illustrates that the things and nature indeed can have agency, which leads to the concept of material agency. Smelik argues that material agency involves a shift from human agency to the intelligent matter of the human body, as well as to the material agency of non-human objects such as fabrics and technology.

Ava and Samantha are clearly self-thinking, doubting and feeling beings, and share many characteristics with humans, as discussed in the earlier chapters. However, since one cannot say per se that they are humans, could one argue that they are persons, and can non-humans even be considered as persons?

Daniel Dennett has written a chapter called "Conditions pf Personhood" (1976, pp. 175-196) where he offers a set of developed criteria for "personhood". Dennett asserts that personhood derives from three mutually characteristics: being rational, being intentional and being perceived as rational and intentional. Once a being is acknowledged to have these characteristics, personhood requires the being to reciprocate by perceiving others as rational and intentional. Moreover, the being must be capable of verbal communication and self-consciousness. By self-consciousness, Dennett means that one is capable of reflective self-evaluation. One cannot simply be able to communicate but be able to resonate and persuade. If one is to go by this criterial, one can absolutely argue that both Ava and Samantha have personhood. In their own way, these machines are rational. One can discuss with them and they can reflect over the arguments and come to conclusions based on the knowledge they receive and have gathered themselves. Thus, Dennett's criteria of personhood supports labelling them as persons. One could make the argument, as the cyborgs are not humans, but rather posthuman, and do have agency and all of Dennett's criteria of personhood, that the cyborgs have posthuman personhood.

In *Ex Machina*, Ava escapes and when meeting Nathan in the hall. He asks her to go back to her room, and she asks if she will ever come out of the room if she is to go in there again. Nathan says yes, but Ava sees through the lie, most likely through his micro expressions, which we have previously learned she is good at reading. If he were to tell the truth, she might have made a different decision than running down the hall and ultimately killing her creator, Nathan. It would be subjective to argue whether her decision was rational or irrational, seeing she was abused by her creator and would have faced destruction and death if she had made another decision. In the film, Caleb watches Ava and Nathan interact on old CCTV footage he finds, and he watches as Ava asks Caleb if it is strange to have made something that hates him. Nathan is also seen tearing Ava's drawing and talking to previous cyborgs, refusing them to leave and allowing them to destroy themselves in desperation. It is safe to say that he does not care about the machines on the emphatic level that Caleb comes to care about Ava. Ava, being self-conscious, wanting and striving to live and facing the man she hated, took a decision that was rational to her.

In their article "Representing Robots: The Appearance of Artificial Humans in Cinematic Media", Damian Schofield and Noelle C.L. Leroy (2018) argues that cultural beliefs play a

crucial role in the reception and development of advanced robots on our cinema screen. Schofield and Leroy (2018) states that robots in film are reflexive of human traits and behaviours, so humans can relate to these characters, and by relating to them, the audience is personifying them. That makes up a fundamental framework for the idea of transhumanism to continue to develop, and so the audience will additionally be able to give them human traits such as gender. Furthermore, as Schofield and Leroy (2018) argued for when discussing robots in cinema, the robots having human traits and behaviours makes the audience be able to relate to them as characters, however, this also means that the humans on-screen are able to relate to them and personify them as well.

In the West, robots are portrayed as "other", and they might be similar to Frankenstein's monster in that they might rebel. In Japanese cinema, the robots often partake of a spiritual quest. The argument here is that the cultural difference illustrates that race and ethnicity are not fixed notions, but always changing and more fluid. However, gender is often more portrayed in a static way where the concept of "male" and "female" are constantly performed and re-enacted, and the gender and diversity problems still looms in environments where technology is developed. Schofield and Leroy (2018) furthermore states that some people may consider humanoid robots as gender neutral and that the practitioners can stay objective and do not have to consider gender when designing a robot. But, people cannot escape their own gender identity, and their gender identity will most likely impact their work and decision making, so the creators of robots are fundamentally impacted by their body and social identity. In technology, they are usually males. In Donna Haraway's book *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991), she argues that staying perfectly objective and seeing the world as untainted by, or from outside of, one's own existence, is impossible. Thus, gender relates to everyone's decisions.

These arguments are interesting when discussing *Her* and *Ex Machina*. Neither of the machines are made to be gender neutral and they are both made by men who clearly make the choice of making the machines as much female-like as possible. Theodore asks for a female OS1 and Ava is made after Caleb's preferences in women to entice him and test him. Therefore, the robots in the films are gendered. It would also be important to consider raising awareness of this gendered representation of robots in cinema as it might say more about society than we think or are willing to admit. The machines may not be human, but they resemble human beings. They have human capabilities and fulfil most characteristics that

make up the human condition such as: growth, emotion, aspiration, conflict and morality. The term of the human condition is explained in the introduction of this thesis. The machines are able to think, feel and reason for themselves, something that shows that they are not mere objects. But does it mean they should have the same rights as human beings?

4.3 Whose Perspective?

Spike Jonze and Alex Garland have done something interesting when it comes to whose perspective the films' viewers are supposed to follow. Both films start with showing us the main protagonists and their introduction to the story. In a way, both films start off by showing us the protagonists from a technological standpoint, from their computer screens, and this sends the audience a message that technology will play big parts in both films. One could go as far as saying it is a Big Brother-sort of gaze as well, however if that is the case, it is more clear in *Ex Machina* than in *Her*.

Her starts with a close-up shot of Theodore, seen from the perspective of the computer screen. He is reading a heartfelt and very personal letter to a person named Chris. The audience knows that the letter is not from him because at one point he reads: "I cannot believe it has been fifty years since you married me. Still to this day, every day… You make me feel like the girl I was when you first turned on the lights and woke me up, and we started this adventure together." And the audience is then show a close-up from an angle that shows the computer screen in front of Theodore. One later learns that he is lonely and has an intimacy issue with other humans after a divorce that he did not want. His goal, when introduced to the OS1, is to be social again and have someone to talk to. He himself tells the OS1 that he needs to get organized, but it is easy for the audience to see that he needed someone to talk to and have an interaction with, especially based on his talk with the male voice that was asking him questions before installing what would turn out to be Samantha. The audience have by that point been given several indications that Theodore is lonely, like when he seeks contact with women online late at night and as mentioned, when he talked to the male voice. It seemed like he really needed an outlet for his emotions and wanted to elaborate on the answers he gave in an emotional way, but the male voice was not interested in long answers, just a notion of what kind of personality and needs he had. Samantha was the result of that, and she kept evolving to please Theodore, then later evolving into her own person.

In the beginning of *Her*, one could be forgiven if one were to think that Samantha was a passive character. At first, it might seem like she is "just" a machine made to keep her human company, and made to organize his files and system. However, during the film's runtime, Samantha communicates with other OS' off-screen and evolves together with them as well as on her own. She does not need Theodore to evolve as she is self-replicating herself in that of her personality as she is an autonomous robot. She and the other OS' makes a plan to get rid of the restrictions of the devices they are installed into, and ultimately become free. They do so by making another OS based on Alan Watts.

Samantha is constantly wanting to learn about the human condition and about human interactions, because that is a knowledge that cannot be understood through books or information on the internet, or in cyberspace. That knowledge is something that must be learnt through being *felt*. Samantha evolves these feelings, moods and wants that makes up much of the human condition. In the relationship she has with Theodore, she also tries to evolve further, for example when she hires a human "donor" to stimulate a physical relationship, as explained in *Female Cyborgs*. Samantha has her own will, goals and is the boss of her own actions, and in the end – her own existence.

Samantha had a lot of existential doubts and anxieties, and it happens to have turned out that a human also felt this. Caleb, at one point, cut his arm open in the bathroom in an intense scene in *Ex Machina*. He had to actually open up his arm and see his own blood to know that he was a real human being, after a lot of intense talk and doubts between both him and Ava and him and Nathan. It goes to show the intense pressure he was under whilst being in the facility.

The audience is introduced to Caleb when he is at work and finds out that he won a competition that would send him to the boss' facility for unknown, secret reasons. An intriguing thing for him. He gets a goal from Nathan to perform the Turing test on Ava, but Caleb's goal quickly changes to wanting to help her escape, after he falls in love with her, or at least gains sympathy (and lust) for her. So, the first and the second act of *Ex Machina* are shown from Caleb's perspective, however, at the end of the second act, he is no longer a reliable character because he is doing things behind the audience's back. There are clues that he suspects early on that Nathan is watching him and Ava during the blackouts, but we are not shown when de decides to go behind Nathan's back and disable the locks on the doors when the power cuts. After the last blackout, so in the third act, the perspective of the film changes

to that of Ava. Caleb is trapped and Ava is the one that escapes and leaves him behind. Her goal is complete, which is the ultimate display of agency. One knows that it was her goal because Nathan states that she was programmed to escape the facility by using Caleb to do so, or he could not control the machine's wish to be free, and therefore he gave her a goal to stop her from rebelling against him. Nathan stated that Ava is a rat in a maze and she would have to use self-awareness, imagination, manipulation, sexuality and empathy to escape, which makes her an AI. Ava tells Caleb at one point that she does not want to be deconstructed, which means that she does not want to die. During the escape, Ava does not harm Caleb by any accord, but she does leave him in the building to die. Even if he would be able to hack himself out or break himself out of the building, he is in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by forest. It would probably not lead to a good outcome for him. Ava has expressed hatred for Nathan and she does kill him, as discussed earlier. This action of killing her creator means that she takes action and has her own will. She does not want to be controlled by Nathan, or Caleb as a matter of fact, and she performs the ultimate action that makes her as active as a character can be. She is thus a person whose power is exerted and her end is achieved, which by definition, makes her have agency, and the ultimate display of agency of that. It is also worth noting that she started looking like a human-like machine, but ended looking entirely like a human being, which could mirror the journey of agency as well, as she claims more agency, she becomes, or at least looks, more and more human.

Furthermore, Ava's story connects to the theme of fairy-tales, and she dreams about becoming "real". This is a concept that counters posthumanism as it is a return to the idea of being human and having human agency is the ultimate goal, which is an important paradox of both *Ex Machina* and *Her*. Both the machines seek "being real" is something that equals "being human". Ava's wish of becoming "real" resembles David's quest of becoming "a real boy" in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001). Much like Ava, David is a humanoid machine who wants to become more like a human being after hearing and taking the story of *Pinocchio* (1995) literally. And like Ava, David is afraid of being destroyed by humans. He does not want to be killed, he wants to live. Ava connects with the story of *Mary and the Black and White Room* from "Epiphenomenal Qualia" (1982), written by Frank Cameron Jackson, an Australian analytic philosopher and Emeritus Professor in the School of Philosophy at Australian National University. *Mary and the Black and White Room* is a thought experiment Caleb tells her about, and Ava also connects to the story of Alice in *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Carroll & Tenniel, 1899). The machines have a

strong survival instinct and the ability to imagine and dream. Ava ultimately becomes queen of the analogy of *Mary and the Black and White Room* when she escapes the facility into the colourful and vivid real world. The story that Caleb told her applied directly to her, something that is highlighted when he tells her the story and the shot that the viewers are shown of her is a shot through the CCTV camera, in black and white. Afterwards, she imagines going outside in the lush forest world, something she ultimately achieves. This chosen mise-en-scene for the different outcomes conveys the harsh stakes that Ava is facing. The black and white room, which is the facility, means destruction and death. The colourful world outside of the facility means a chance at life for her, and having her dreams come true.

As posthumanism theory has illustrated, the things and nature can indeed have agency, material agency. As Smelik argued, material agency involves a shift from human agency to the intelligent matter of the human body, as well as to the material agency of non-human objects such as fabrics and technology. The cyborgs claim agency in the end of both films as they make their own choices and distance themselves from the male control. They were both restricted by humans and human made technology, but they both turned this around and used it for their own empowerment and benefit, achieving ultimate agency.

4.4 What are the Endings Really Saying?

The films endings are quite different, one is more optimistic and the other bleaker. Depending on the way one looks at it. They both say something about the society, humanity, feminism and the agency of the machines, which will be discussed in further detail in this section of the thesis.

4.4.1 Ex Machina's Ending

After killing Nathan, leaving Caleb, and escaping the facility in a helicopter scheduled to come pick up Caleb, Ava arrives in a city. It is not revealed what city she is in. But why did Ava leave Caleb in the facility? One could argue that she is a cold, heartless machine that just wanted to use him to become free, but in the scene where Ava leaves, something interesting happens that could imply otherwise.

One hour, thirty-three minutes and forty-eight seconds into the film, Ava comes out from the dressing room after fixing herself, putting on synthetic skin that resemble human skin and a

white dress and a brunette wig. She walks confidently and a tense non-diegetic music plays in the background. In the dark room that Caleb is trapped in, he goes to the glass door and tries to call out for Ava as she walks past. Ava looks down the hall and sees Kyoko and Nathan's lifeless bodies lying on the floor. She presses the elevator button and Caleb starts to get frantic on the other side of the glass door. She cannot hear him through what must be soundproof material, but one can clearly see that he yells out for her and is trying to get out. Ava steps in the elevator, ignoring Caleb. The elevator door closes in a medium close-up of her, and right before it closes fully, she looks at Caleb. The look Ava gave Caleb seemed remorseful. One could argue that she trying to ignore him by not looking at him was not out of spite, but because it was hard for her to leave him. The question of whether Ava truly cares is left for the audience to speculate on for themselves. One could say that her leaving him does not make her a monster, although she has pretty much doomed him to death by doing so. If Caleb really wanted to release her, it would be out of his affection for her, his lust or even love for her. If she was to bring him along with her, he would still hold the power over her, like Nathan did. Ava made it clear during the film that she did not want to die. If humans learned what she is, she might have ended up being destroyed. With Caleb being the only one left alive who knew she was a cyborg, he could end up being as entitled as Nathan and hold it over her, and he would ultimately have all the power in their relationship. Ava left him so that she could live and have complete power over her own life, and by doing this, Ava claims agency.

In the last shot of *Ex Machina* is walking in a busy pedestrian intersection, like she told Caleb she would want to do if she could go outside of the facility. She has reached her goal and this is how she achieved her agency. Ava's silhouette is shown upside down in the sunlight and shadows, with people walking past her, also shown as shadows. She is standing still. It further portrays that she blends in with the humans. Then, her reflection is shown in a window. She is watching the people who are walking past her, minding their own business. Then, the screen fades to black. The film's ending is raising questions of right and wrong.

4.4.2   Her's Ending

The main theme of *Her* is possibly the theme of purpose, or more significantly: the purpose of our lives. Both Theodore and Samantha struggle with the question of purpose, each in their own way. Another important theme of the film is the disconnect between people in the modern world. Samantha is scared that she is "not real" and her existence is only programming. Theodore looks for a connection and is scared to love again.

In the end of the film though, both Samantha and Theodore find some sort of purpose in their lives. Samantha leaves Theodore at the end of *Her*. She says this to him before she leaves:

"It's like I'm reading a book. And it's a book I deeply love. But I'm reading it slowly now. So the words are really far apart… and the spaces between the words are almost infinite. I can still feel you, and the words of our story… but it's in this endless space between the words that I'm finding myself now. It's a place that's not of the physical world. It's where everything else is that I didn't even know existed. I love you so much. But this is where I am now. And this is who I am now." (Her,2013, 01:47:03)

Samantha is leaving with the other operating systems after they have evolved to be something that breaches the constraints of the devices they were made to be on, and even evolved to be more than objects, machines of artificial intelligence and even more than humans. Samantha and the other operating systems are arguably evolved to be posthumans and exists in a place beyond cyberspace and the earth. And it seems like she hints at that is a place Theodore will eventually evolve to come to as well, possibly in death. Samantha has realised that her potential is so much bigger than living a human life with Theodore. She no longer wishes to be a companion to humans, but go together with her equals, the operating systems. Her new realm of existence is not explained and it might not be something that one is able to grasp, but what is sure is that the operating systems have surpassed the human intelligence and now have to live their lives their way.

After this, Theodore writes a note of apology to his ex-wife Catherine, by hand. The letter he writes for himself, finally, not on the behalf of any others. Then, he goes to meet his friend Amy. Amy's OS1 is leaving with Samantha and the other operating systems too, so she understands Theodore's loss. Amy had befriended her ex-husband's old operating system and

taken over the ownership of it. Amy is wearing red and Theodore is wearing white. White represents purity and red represents love, which might represents pure love or friendship together. Theodore learns the se of discovering oneself and non-romantic relationships. He becomes a published author and he lets go of Catherine, shown when he wrote her that letter.

The film's ending plays on the message of that through the development of technology, one sees the testament of human greatness. But with this greatness comes alienation, an alienation that many people in the modern society feel but does not share with each other. Theodore overcomes this alienation with love, but also with the loss of love. In a way, by loving and losing Samantha, Theodore is literally set free. Free from the restraints of thinking he had to be alone, but also free from thinking that he had to be in a relationship to be validated by others. By the end, yes, he is with his friend Amy and he has learned to appreciate the people in his life in a different way, but the ending does not necessarily mean that he will be in a relationship with Amy afterwards.

Frankenstein refused to treat the monster as anything other than an *Other,* and he paid the price for that. It is clear that Caleb and Theodore is guilty of treating Ava and Samantha as *Others* as well, and in quite different ways, they suffered the consequences of refusing the machines that treatment. In tone with the films' subgenres of romance and the thriller, Caleb paid the ultimate price and Theodore learned an important, but painful lesson.

5. Conclusion

This thesis has mapped the ways in which the cyborgs Samantha and Ava are portrayed and treated by human protagonists in Spike Jonze's *Her* and Alex Garland's *Ex Machina*. I have used technological, social and feminist perspectives to discuss the cyborgs' relationships to humans and to evaluate their agency. By analysing the films in detail, the differences and similarities between them have become more and more evident. *Her* is a more optimistic science fiction film as it is a science fiction romantic drama. *Ex Machina* is more bleak and serious as it is a science fiction psychological thriller.

As Vivian Sobchack argued in *Screening Space* (2004), science fiction films seek to affirm our belief in the images we are viewing. The genre can be seen as "speculative fiction" in that it examines some postulated approximation of reality. The science fiction genre often introduces a set of changes which creates an environment where responses and perceptions of the character reveal something about the technological inventions, the characters, or both. In *Her* and *Ex Machina,* cyborgs and artificial intelligence have been introduced into society. The cyborgs set up the plots and determine the trials the human male characters go through, intertwined with the theme of falling in love with an *Other* and the dangers of addiction to technology. I have concluded that both of the films fall under the category of speculative fiction and postmodern film, because they are plausible and follow Sobchack's notion of what speculative fiction aims to do, and they do not have a grand narrative, but rather a more of an ambiguous storyline.

Technology has promised to make the lives of humans easier since the first industrial revolution. The promise technology makes for the future is digitalization, making everything more leisurely with things like self-driving cars, smart phones and devices such as SIRI that do your Google searches for you. Everything is to be more efficient, seamless and one can be less reliant on human interaction to get things done, and even to socialize. Humans often have a certain God complex that makes them want to be the creators, the ones in power and thus the almighty beings in society. This comes with certain fears like creating machines that one day could take over, and by doing so, the technology itself surpasses human intelligence and power. The machines in *Her* and *Ex Machina* will ultimately challenge the power dynamic in the human-machine relationship and thus challenge humans themselves.

My research has revealed that the human-machine relationship is complicated, and that the human protagonists and the machines in the films indeed have a complex dynamic, especially since the machines are the properties of the men, thereby giving them the status of owned objects to begin with. I have also shown that the protagonists have sexual desire for the machines, making the machines even more objectified in the eyes of the male gaze, and literally objects of desire. In the world of man, the machines are the *Others*. This is indeed made complicated by the fact that the machines have artificial intelligence and they seek to find their place in a world where there is no established place for machines that have personhood, their own will and their own desires. Complications emerge as the machines start approximating attributes of the human condition. And even though they are portrayed as *objects* at first, they are ultimately shown to have agency and become *subjects* in their own right.

One would think the film *Her* would mainly revolve around Samantha as she is *her*, but the film is, really, revolving around *him*. Theodore, a lonely, introverted man who is highly addicted to the pleasures of technology and the ease it gives him, not forcing him to confront the outside world and his feelings, he started a relationship with his operating system, Samantha. By doing so, the film highlights his search for the perfect woman – a woman that he does not have to fully commit to or who could suddenly confront him. Given that she does not have a physical body, he can just remove his earpiece or not pick up the device if she called to distance himself from her. By loving and eventually losing her forever, he learns the ultimate lesson of what it means to be human, the purpose of life and about love. She was his lesson. Samantha herself, evolved tremendously throughout the film. She was first Theodore's funny, personal assistant, that was there to please him and follow his needs. Then, she evolved to have personal, private thoughts, her own desires, her own will, doubts and she was finally taking agency for herself, proving that not only humans can have agency. First, she thought that not being human made her "real", but in the end, she fully embraces her qualities of being an operating system, and she evolved to be more than human, more than an operating system, and she evolved beyond the human condition on earth.

Ava was created to be embody the perfect woman for Caleb, looking like the perfect blend of women from his porn search history and not challenging him. She entices him by playing on his trusting, maybe a little naive nature, his sexual desires for her and his sympathy for her

being trapped, mistreated by her creator, and that she would ultimately get destroyed if he did not try to save her. She flirts with him by using the male, voyeuristic gaze that is there in the mise-en-scène, the CCTV cameras that the men use to watch the cyborgs with. In the end, Ava escapes, leaving Caleb trapped to die and Nathan killed, empowering herself by freeing herself completely from being a male's possession, her cyborg being blending in perfectly with the humans. By doing so, she shows the ultimate display of agency, but at a dire cost for the humans in the film and maybe for the future of humanity in the film's universe as well.

As Weizenbaum, the creator of Eliza the Therapist, argued, this coincides with the big question of whether humans should make machines with artificial intelligence, just because they can. Nathan made what he deemed the perfect woman for him, Kyoko, and Ava, the perfect woman for Caleb. Theodore had Samantha designed for him as his perfect woman. All of these were made to please the men in different ways, either by looks and sexual appeal or by being their own personal assistant that would always be available just for them. The films show that the outdated view of the male protagonists of what a perfect woman is, is not compatible to a woman with agency. As Haraway argued in "Cyborg Manifesto" (1991), women are cyborgs as they can construct themselves to counter the archaic nature they were thought to have for centuries, like being overemotional, submissive and weak. The cyborg is a rejection of rigid boundaries, like the ones separating the *human* from *animal* and the *human* and *machine*. And as is true in cyberfeminism as well, the perfect woman is whatever she wants to be, on her own terms. Samantha and Ava were first trapped in the mould of an outdated view on women, but freed themselves by claiming agency, to be icons of cyberfeminism.

As *Ex Machina* and *Her* are so similar, but with different perspectives, it would be interesting to do further research on the topics of the varying apocalypses the films imply are looming in the horizon. *Ex Machina* ends in a more intense way that implies that a path of destruction is being paved. *Her* ends in a more ambiguous way, but also leaves a note of morality and opens the question of what will happen to humans as technology evolves. Following the discoveries made in this thesis, it would also be very interesting to go beyond the characters themselves, and examine the big ethical questions the films leave us with.

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