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AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH COMPLEX TV DRAMAS

Posthuman Narratives and Human Identity

The case of HBO's *Westworld*

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Abstract

Through qualitative interviews with ten study participants, this research investigates connections between the theme of artificial intelligence on HBO's *Westworld* and issues of identities of its audience members. The thesis critically examines audience engagement with complex television dramas. It begins with the analysis of industrial contexts of narratively complex serialized fiction. First, it provides HBO's brief institutional overview, the theoretical summary of complex narratives, and practices of the modern audience. Then, it analyses viewers' engagement modes with *Westworld's* complex narrative by relying on poetics of television storytelling. Lastly, it puts together viewers' reflections on Android representations on *Westworld* and links them to the concept of human identity from the perspective of posthumanism.

What this case illuminates is that complex narratives in television dramas engage viewers with great cognitive and emotional intensity. It demonstrates that *Westworld*, as a symptomatic and multi-layered entertainment media text of its times, is not about escapism but about the rigorous internal dialogue of audience members, who try to make sense of their own identities, and subjectivities in the face of seismic technological changes.

Key words: Complex Television Drama, Audiences, Posthumanism, Narrative, Identity, Subjectivity, Artificial Intelligence

Table of Contents

Introduction	6
Literature Review	10
Situating HBO in contemporary television industry	10
Narrative as key for engagement	12
Evolved audience in fragmented media environment	15
Engagement with popular texts	17
Identity and subjectivity.....	18
Posthumanism.....	20
Genre of science fiction.....	22
Research methodology and methods.....	24
Narrative poetics and case study anchored in cultural studies approach	24
Where I stand.....	25
Recruitment and sampling	26
Ethical considerations and limitations	29
Interview process	30
Analyzing the data	32
Exploring modes of audience engagement with <i>Westworld</i>	33
Analysis: exploring modes of audience engagement with <i>Westworld</i>	34
Contexts of viewing: pace and domestic space	34
Paratexts: from ephemeral conversations to following spoilers	36
Narrative strategies: time distortion produces desirable levels of confusion	39
Music as narrative clue: storylistening and references to pop culture	40
PoV: Othering humans-anthropomorphizing machines.....	4
From narrative form to viewer subjectivity: shaping awareness and fragmenting the self	47
Human identity: self-affirmation through difference and through similarity: fear and self- doubt in emergent techno dynamics	50
Post-human thinking equaling animals, humans and artificial intelligence	56

Concluding remarks.....	69
Appendix	73
Appendix A	73
Appendix B.....	75
Appendix C.....	85
Appendix D	96

1. Introduction

Media discourses about risks that human societies face in light of upcoming intelligent machines are strengthening and proliferating on a daily basis. They remind audiences that human workforce will be replaced by machines. This time, the forecast is that automation will take away jobs from qualified middle class. The prospects of worsening inequalities and subsequent political upheavals are predicted to sweep already precarious human societies. Once speculative cautionary tales from science-fiction about machines rising are projected to not only materialize but expose many to insecurity and uncertainty. In this state of affairs, prevail concerns that humans and their policies are not ready to safeguard stability in the age of imminent artificial intelligence.

Popular culture and contemporary television entertainment, for that matter, are reflecting these dynamics. Serialized fictional texts that speculate about forthcoming techno future and the place of humans in it are produced, recycled and spread via global media flows compulsively. Unlike a few decades ago, when musings about super machines circulated within the niche domain of science fiction, nowadays they preoccupy globally consumed television entertainment channels. Thus, the myth of creation turning against its creator which has haunted cultural imagination since Mary Shelley's gothic novel *Frankenstein* (1818), has permeated deeper layers of collective consciousness.

In these circumstances, the question arises about the role of such widely consumed popular culture texts in providing space for identity formation and critical reflection to their audience members, particularly, in relation to undergoing technological developments. Hermes informs that popular cultural texts can be used 'to understand, take up, reflect on and reform identities' (Hermes, 2005: 10). With this in mind, the given thesis aims to examine how television dramas, and particularly the ones that disseminate narratives about artificial intelligence, engage audience members in making sense of themselves as well as the transforming world which they inhabit.

For this purpose, the research focuses on HBO's recent hit *Westworld* which tells the story of robots becoming conscious. Apart from thematic connection to current technological and socio-cultural developments, *Westworld* exemplifies narratively complex television dramas. These kinds of quality dramas, as media scholars postulate, have ushered television into its new golden age (Damico & Quay, 2016), and attracted a more demanding segment of audiences to television's serial storytelling.

The thesis adopts an audience research approach. On the one hand, it critically analyses modes of engagement with the complex narrative of *Westworld*, and on the other, the study explores how audience engagement with fictional television dramas about artificial consciousness illuminates their identities and subjectivities. The thesis achieves this through qualitative interviews with ten study participants who are audience members of *Westworld*. It begins with the analysis of industrial contexts for narratively complex serialized fiction. First, it provides HBO's brief institutional overview, the theoretical summary of complex narratives, and practices of the modern audience. Then, it analyses viewers' engagement modes with *Westworld's* complex narrative by relying on poetics of television storytelling. Lastly, it puts together viewers' reflections on Android representations in this TV drama and links them to their identity work from the philosophical perspective of posthumanism. This research uses posthuman theory for critical analysis of *Westworld* audiences because it realizes the need of inventing new philosophical ideas about what human is in light of robotic technologies, nanotechnology, prosthetics, smart machines, genetic manipulation, etc. (Pepperell, 2003). It revises traditional ideas of humanism and reimagines human subject as a collaborative species with technology and non-human others (Braidotti, 2013). Thus, this research bridges the field of audience studies, with posthuman theory and brings into focus the broader concept of *human identity*.

In sum, the study aims to critically examine audience engagement with complex television drama *Westworld* from posthumanist perspective. With this goal in mind, it asks the following questions:

1.1 Research Questions:

1. In what ways do viewers engage or disengage with complex narrative in television drama *Westworld*?
2. How does the poetics of storytelling in *Westworld* connect with audience identities and the technology of artificial intelligence and how can this be understood from posthumanist point of view?

1.2 Context to *Westworld*

Westworld was predicted to repeat HBO's 'Game of Thrones' success (newyorker.com, 2016). With the budget worth 100 million, this sci-fi meets Western drama premiered on HBO in October 2016. It garnered critical acclaim immediately and became the network's most-watched series in three years. It brought 12 million viewers an episode and helped HBO reach 1, 5 billion in revenue. *Westworld* also increased HBO's domestic subscriber base alone, by more than two million (polygon.com).

Westworld is based on Michael Crichton original film from 1973 which tells the story of the robot-populated theme park. However, unlike its precursor which followed monsters gone haywire plotline, the series reimagines its narrative and represents a world seen from androids' perspective. What viewers watch all along the 10-episode season, is robots struggle on their journey to awareness, while humans get less humane in their quest for gratification. They inflict horrors upon androids whose memories are erased at the end of the day, only to be exposed to the rampage over and over again.

In the Western theme park, which is designed to provide entertainment to the wealthy, conventional moral values are redundant. This recreation of Old West town is designed by

a pair of creative masterminds but owned and run by a profit-oriented corporation. Westworld is produced in HBO's traditions, depicting violence, sex, and gore unapologetically. The focus is shifted to the abused androids, and the story is told from their standpoint.

Apart from fan art and fiction, Westworld has also inspired vigorous philosophical discussions. Reddit threads, blogs, and other online sites have devoted serious philosophical and analytic conversations to the drama. The Blackwell Philosophy and Pop Culture Series (andphilosophy.com) for example, has announced the call for papers, asking participants to submit essays around philosophical topics that Westworld has problematized. Such contests and conversations have indicated that the drama has spread beyond the domain of pure entertainment and stimulated social and cultural reflection.

2. Literature Review

This chapter examines the ways in which audience members engage with complex narratives of contemporary TV dramas. First, it elaborates on the general industrial context which has generated the need to produce immersive content. In this respect, HBO's institutional overview is provided since the research focuses on its flagship science fiction drama *Westworld*. Afterward, new forms of storytelling are overviewed which is defined by media scholars as narrative complexity (Mittel, 2015). Thirdly, the section summarizes the increased role and autonomy of contemporary audiences whose engagement or disengagement influences narrative forms on television.

Another part of the chapter adopts post-human theory to understand *Westworld*'s role in providing conditions for identity work for audience members.

2.1 Situating HBO in contemporary television industry

Scholars and critics postulate that television entertainment has entered its new golden age (Damico and Quay, 2016). The new wave of revival in the industry is related to the rise of both the quantity and the quality of cinematically sophisticated television dramas that have appeared on air since the turn of the twenty-first century.

Television studies scholarship has dubbed the influx of artistically accomplished American television fiction, as American quality TV (McCabe and Akass, 2007). The historical review of American television industry suggests that in the production business of small screen dramas, newly set standards enforced changes that lead to rejection of the formulaic approach to content production. Key elements that include the introduction of literary and cinematic values, incorporating social and cultural commentaries in TV dramas, established American quality TV as a prominent genre on the global television landscape (Fricker, 2007: 14).

Several formal factors that emerged within the television industry in the 1980s had crucial importance in the process of American TV drama quality development. These were technological transformations that modified production, broadcast delivery and

distribution systems in the United States. In parallel, changes in the industry's economic landscape generated the environment in which brand equity was favored and the market was differentiated (McCabe and Akass, 2007: 1-3).

The cable and satellite pay television company HBO (Home BOX Office), established itself as the field innovator around the same time (Leverette et al. 2008). HBO became the first TV network to broadcast via satellite, and then, encrypt its signal digitally (Leverette et al. 2008: 3). With this move, HBO was the first to introduce premium pay television model which didn't air commercials but instead, relied on subscriber fees (Santo, 2008).

A subscription model has had a significant influence on HBO's original production. It has ensured freedom in narrative development, which doesn't have to adjust to commercial interruptions (Santo, 2008: 21-28).

While most scholars agree that HBO has defined its brand identity as synonymous with quality on the contemporary televisual landscape (McCabe and Akass, 2008: 84), there are some industry rules that the network has not been able to overlook completely. One major canon which affects content selection and production is that HBO is forced to swing between familiarity and originality. Despite the fact that HBO has positioned itself as a forerunner in creating original programming, it oscillates between staying commercially profitable by luring more subscribers and offering more and more ambitious quality content. Because of its commercial nature, HBO is oriented on expanding subscriber base, so the network has to make sure that popular pleasures are always present in its productions. By keeping the element of familiarity through mixing up and adapting popular genres, HBO both attracts the new wave of potential subscribers but also, sustains those viewers who are loyal connoisseurs of well-established genres (Santo, 2008: 28-29).

Another significant component which defines HBO's status as one of the industry's frontrunners is the risk. Namely, its boldness in experimentation with content. Jonathan Gray informs that so far, television industry, out of the concern for retaining viewer numbers, has favored repetition of tried formulas. So, copying more of the same, or dragging shows until audience interest, and with it, profits diminish, is the way television

entertainment has mostly operated (Gray, 2008: 23-24). But when it comes to HBO, scholar Tony Kelso argues, that the risk is the key feature which is deeply embedded in HBO's corporate culture (Kelso, 2008: 48). The propensity for riskiness has pushed the television to go against the grain of usual television production conventions (Kelso, 2008:46-61). HBO has remained loyal to this approach for a very pragmatic purpose--to '...offer viewers a reason to keep watching' (McCabe and Akass, 2008:84).

HBO has had the long-standing impact on content quality production at the industrial scope. As Edgerton and Jones inform, its dramas '...have provoked an "aftereffect" in the industry, which raises the bar and influences the kind of original programming that all of its various competitors across subscription, cable, and satellite, and broadcast TV produce' (Edgerton & Jones, 2008: 319).

Even on the global scene of entertainment television industry, HBO has succeeded to carve out a distinct position. Having established itself as a multifaceted entity HBO is not only a cable and satellite network, or a production studio but '...an internationally diversified entertainment corporation' (Edgerton & Jones, 2008: 322) which delivers its content across the globe through various digital and online forms.

To great extent, HBO's prestige and dominance on international televisual landscape rest on its flagship TV dramas that are distinguished by evolved cinematic properties and multilayered narratives. Its most recent break-out hit and the focus of this thesis, *Westworld* is produced in HBO's best traditions. The drama stands out with its narrative complexity which as scholars suggest, is the major marker of contemporary television seriality and a key device for inspiring intensive audience engagement (Mittel, 2015).

2.2 Narrative as key for engagement

Paul Copley puts it succinctly when he points out that since the dawn of the twentieth century, the mass media has made narratives readily available for consumption and accessible to everyone. The ubiquity of narratives that various forms of media are producing and disseminating have profound effects on the consciousness of modern humans (Copley, 2014: p. 179). Pervasiveness of radio, televisual and now digitally constructed narratives,

have demoted previous authority of narratives (Ibid: 181), especially in the contemporary information society in which audiences and viewers tune in or out of the multitude of mediated recounts, at their own convenience.

Televisual media has made fictional narratives integral part of everyday life in industrial societies. Raymond Williams duly notes on this phenomenon that watching television dramas, has become a common practice at the previously unimaginable frequency and scope. Regular access to and the act of ‘...watching the dramatic simulation of a wide range of experiences is now an essential part of our modern cultural pattern’ (Williams, 2003: p. 56).

Considering a number of fictional narratives that viewers consume nowadays, bring up questions about the broader socio-cultural implications of the phenomenon, to which Helen Fulton offers the answer. Whether ‘realist’ or ‘fictional’, ‘...our sense of reality is increasingly structured by narrative’ (Fulton, et. al., 2005: 1). Therefore, the way people perceive the world largely depends on what is made meaningful for them by the media and by means of narratives that they produce.

Media scholar Jason Mittel contends that the key element which distinguishes modern television dramas from their more formulaic predecessors is complexity of their narratives (Mittel, 2015). Experimentation with narrative structure impacts immersive power of today’s serial content and generates more pleasurable, more rewarding viewing experience in audiences. Since consumption of complex narratives requires far more attention to details and focus during viewing process, it also stimulates better comprehension and appreciation of a TV drama. Respectively, audience dedication to complex content, encourages their participation through various digital platforms which eventually results in viewers’ and fans’ active feedback to the television industry (Ibid: 35-36).

Complex forms of narrative which foreground quality TV dramas such as *Westworld*, is the offspring of broader industrial developments that have changed the face and status of contemporary television. If media researchers have treated television storytelling as simplistic, repetitive and structurally limited device before, at the turn of 21st century,

formal industrial shifts on the mainstream commercial American television created conditions that lead to narrative experimentations. These dynamics not only changed cultural value of TV dramas but of television as a cultural phenomenon, which is ‘...always in dialogue with cultural contexts, historical formations, and modes of practice’ (Ibid: 4).

The narrative complexity of HBO’s dramas which is also the defining feature of *Westworld* has become the foundation on which both the cable network’s reputation and subscriber base has been built (Ibid: 17). Narrative complexity became central in establishing HBO produced serial dramas as artworks that, has attracted upscale audience base with particular taste preferences.

The essence of narrative complexity and its ubiquity on contemporary television was well observed a few years before Mittel’s comprehensive work would shed light on the importance and the roots of storytelling peculiarities of today’s TV dramas. While Mittel has focused on formal qualities of television produced narratives, Fulton, Huisman, Murphet and Dunn (2005), have offered a look at the ways in which media narratives have been successful in creating meanings and addressing media audiences. In their book *Narrative and Media*, the authors concentrate on the dimension of meaning generation in storytelling. However, like Mittel, they have made one important remark in relation to shifts in television’s narrative structures. Helen Fulton stipulates that most of the contemporary television fiction has outgrown classic forms of narration and instead, they have consistently offered ‘...multiple story threads, temporary or partial resolutions, or none at all’ (Fulton, 2005: 130). New, more complex forms of narrative constructs as they have implied, introduced possibilities of destabilizing meanings and myths that the media, including television fiction, have normalized amongst their audiences and accustomed them to. These sort of narratives, she has explained, tend to affect audiences at subjective level because they ‘...fail to offer transparent window into a coherent reality’. This means that non-linear and non-traditional forms of storytelling require conscious interpretive effort and while doing so, subjectivities of readers are exposed as fragile. When the authorial direction towards one ‘right’ meaning is not present in these narratives due to

their complexity, 'The possibility of multiple meanings threatens the stability and coherence of the subject' (Fulton, 2005: 302).

Fulton, Huisman, Murphet and Dunn place such 'difficult' texts under the theoretical label of post-structuralism and explain that readers of these sorts of texts normally require 'external assistance' (ibid. p. 302) which in case of *Westworld* can be interpreted as Reddit forums or other digital platforms where viewers share their experiences, try to speculate, resolve and predict particularly complicated plotlines. The instability of meaning which characterizes such unconventionally structured narratives whether in terms of causality, temporality, motivation or closure (ibid: 300), paradoxically, tend to encourage deeper audience engagement with them because the aforementioned texts demand more attentive and conscious work from readers in the process of interpretation. Although they work at the level of meaning, these properties of 'difficult' texts share similarities with Mittel's definition of complex narratives, especially when it comes to their ability to inspire intensive engagement with television fiction texts. These separate but related definitions of 'complex' media narratives, takes us back to the main point of this section which situates new storytelling forms on television as central in defining contemporary TV fiction as a deeply engaging medium.

2.3 Evolved Audience in Fragmented Media Environment

Focusing on technology-driven transformations in the media environment, Philip M. Napoli suggests that audiences today are evolving in parallel with the media industries (Napoli, 2011: 4). In his book which is concerned with the ways in which conceptualizations of institutionalized audience change over time, he stresses that at present, adaptation and development of media industries are mainly driven by technological changes (Ibid: 4). In the midst of these transformations not only industry's perception of audience changes but practices of audiences themselves, as well.

The proliferation of media channels, content-delivery platforms, and devices are producing increasingly fragmented media environment (Napoli, 2011). In given circumstances, audiences are gaining previously unmatched control over the process of media

consumption. The multiplicity of choice in terms of what, when, how and where to consume, only increases their autonomy (Ibid: 1-11). Such state of affairs forces media organizations to readjust their perceptions not only about audiences but their decisions about content production as well (Ibid: 8-19).

Sharon Marie Ross, who has explored the role of multimedia technology, in particular, the role that the internet has played in reforming TV drama reception in audiences, highlighted that ‘...the Internet has begun to alter people’s experiences with television today’ (Ross, 2008: 3) to the extent, that visiting specific TV drama-related web-sites or ‘...other activities typically associated with “the fan”, is becoming an increasingly common activity for “regular viewers”’ (Ibid:4). These dynamics have led the industry creatives to integrate evolved viewing practices of audiences, into designing their television productions. Thus ‘social audiences’ as Ross refers to the spectators who prompt ‘buzz’ around particular TV serials through their sociality (Ibid: 7) have generated an ‘...impact on storytelling’ (Ibid: 27). Their participation in discussions about specific fictional serials has turned into ‘...crucial element in industrial strategies to capture the ever-splintering audience, as well as a crucial element in viewers’ expectation for television’ (Ibid: 18).

Shawn Schimpach argues that in the contemporary age of digital media, there is the need to expand the concept of viewing (Schimpach, 2011: 62-81). He suggests that viewing is a complex process. In its most fundamental sense, viewing examines interrelationships between ‘...the subject, the medium, and the conditions of the encounter’ but implies that an audience member is active (Ibid: 62-63).

This is particularly true, in the era of ‘digital forms of content’ and ‘mobility of use’ of hand-held devices, when viewing is an active behavior which requires concrete steps, conceived as ‘using, interacting, and searching’ (Ibid: 77). Schimpach sees viewing as a construct in relation to political and cultural discourses within given historical point. At present, when visual media relies heavily on the attention of viewers, viewing is an activity which produces the value of any media text. Therefore, it can be understood as a form of cultural practice (Ibid: 81).

Nick Couldry acknowledges that the media convergence (Jenkins 2006) has created new challenges for studying audience practices because it has altered their engagement dynamics with texts and changed their media experiences (Couldry, 2011: 222). Against this background, he suggests that changing nature of television experiences amongst audiences in complex, multiplatform environment, is an unaddressed area (Ibid: 225). With this in mind, the given thesis aspires to investigate engagement modes of viewers with *Westworld*.

Wood and Taylor also establish that fragmented digital media age poses challenges to the field of television audience research (Wood & Taylor, 2008: 144-149). They underline that programs that are now tailored to the '...tastes, lifestyles, and individual interests' of audience members, (Ibid: 145) redefine them into 'individual "cultural programmers"':

Audiences apparently converge to produce new hybrid interactive consumption practices: "viewers" combine "using" and "viewing" to make the new "connected consumers" of the future (Ibid: 145).

Henry Jenkins (2006) explains that convergence, alongside with flow of content across multiple media platforms and industries, also means 'migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of entertainment experiences they want' (Jenkins, 2006: 2). Convergence is 'a cultural shift' (Ibid: 3) which '...alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences' (Ibid:15). It represents a mutually influential phenomenon and involves '...both a change in the way media is produced and a change in the way media is consumed' (Ibid: 16).

2. 4 Engagement with popular texts

Joke Hermes offers a valuable approach to think about popular culture as a welcoming realm which brings people together in discussions and fantasies '...about the ideals and hopes that we have for society, as well as to ponder what we fear' (Hermes, 2005: 3). Her understanding of popular texts makes us consider that first of all, '...they help us to know

who we are' and then, they tend to engage us in discussions about '...how our culture and society will develop, with the pleasure of sharing...thoughts, emotions, and deliberations inspired by what we read, watch and listen to' (Ibid: 1-3).

Hermes argues that by nature, popular culture tends to 'seduce' people through 'usable stories' into social reflection (Ibid: 135). She asks her readers to reevaluate popular culture and see it as a 'cohesive social force' (Ibid: 1) as well as a favorable site for producing cultural citizenship through the means of engaging people with popular artifacts. She calls for reevaluation of assumptions that envision popular culture to be only the instrument for '...commercial exploitation, capitalist junk, or resistance against powers that be'. At the same time, it also '...engages with what interests us and what binds us' (Ibid: 153).

Jonathan Gray observes that television fiction not only provides avenues for escape, but it involves us in tales about truth by lying (Gray, 2008: 119). While it 'augments or bastardizes reality' through the same tactics, it points to the same reality in powerful ways (Ibid: 14). Furthermore, entertainment television often proves to be far more effective in involving viewers in 'the very real here and now' (Ibid: 13) than 'serious' genres of the medium because it speaks to viewers of the context in which it was produced, but it succeeds by evoking the emotional connection.

In agreement with Gray's speculation on the role of entertainment in linking people to what is real, Richard Dyer (2002) claims that the entertainment, just because it amuses, is not a socially negligent medium. On the contrary: '...any entertainment carries assumptions about and attitudes towards the world, even if these are not the point of the thing...' (Dyer, 2002: 2). It is not produced in vacuum or enjoyed without some sort of reflection because '... entertainment is historically and culturally specific' (Ibid: 1).

2.5 Identity and Subjectivity

Jonathan Gray touches upon the role of television entertainment in constructing our complex identities as it helps us to ‘work out who we are’ (Gray, 2008: 54-58). Identities change and metamorphose through engagement with the external processes, including with the media and television entertainment. Identities are always in the process of transformation and subject to discursive formations that the media have a substantial stake in circulating. At least this is what Stuart Hall (1996) suggests, according to whom, identities are never unified, singular but fragmented and historically contingent.

Identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not ‘who we are’ or ‘where we came from’, so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves (Hall, 1996:4).

What rings with Hall’s postulates on identity formation is Stephen Frosh’s (1991) comparison of the process of creating the self to the work of art which requires ‘...taking the bits and pieces of the world and fitting them together to say something...’ (Frosh, 1991: 13).

Identity, a constitutive part of subjectivity to which Corner refers to as the “‘space of the self’ both at conscious and unconscious levels’ (Corner, 2011: 86) is an important component of this essay. As to why this will become clearer in the last section of this chapter. Particularly, the notion of the ability of the self to recast and reform itself will prove to be a useful concept in locating the argument of the thesis. But before this happens, it should be pinpointed that neither continuous formation of identity nor its broader notion of subjectivity, is separable but fundamentally connected to all forms of engagement in which the media play a substantial role today (Ibid: 89).

Indeed, the subject and the self is a mediated entity formed through discourse (Mansfield, 2000: VII) which is constantly fed and reinforced by the media. Like identity, ‘subjectivity

never quite forms' (Ibid: 81). It is linked to the increasingly technologized environment. The dominant popular mediated discourses in it predict the future where machines will surpass humans and this, as Mansfield posits, causes anxiety about 'some unforeseen change which may lead to an irreversible dehumanization' (Ibid: 148). But then again, by some, the technology is seen 'as the forge of a new humanity and consequently another type of subjectivity' (Ibid, 151-152).

2.6 Posthumanism

Narratives about artificial intelligence is rife in contemporary popular culture. The entertainment media in particular, have a substantial stake in this state of affairs. A quick look at it shows that its 'recurring dreams' (Gray, 2008: 122) are increasingly comprised of imaginations on artificial consciousness.

This cultural trend is not new. Neil Badmington (2000) points out that popular culture caught up with avant-garde anxieties and critical theories about the end of humanism in early 20th century. Narratives about the end of human sovereignty infiltrated entertainment media. Science fiction films and Hollywood in particular, started to tell stories of the threat that posed the man from 'an inhuman other' (Ibid: 7). He argues that these compulsive worries echoed ideas of scholars who began to articulate post-humanist thoughts already decades ago, albeit they gave the concept different names.

Post-humanism is 'a philosophical critique of anthropocentrism' (Roden, 2015: 20) and it comes in several categories but despite differences, all are '...opposed to some form of human centered worldview' (Ibid: 20-21).

One of the early influential texts that have informed post-humanist theorizing is post-structuralist Donna Haraway's '*A Cyborg Manifesto*' (1985). She claims that rigid dualisms that rule human consciousness are culprits that feed myths of political identities (Haraway, in Weiss, J. et. al, 2006: 140), therefore otherness and all forms of oppressions that stem

from this differentiation. She sees opportunities in the intensive intrusion of technology into the everyday. She stresses that such blurring of boundaries with the help of high-tech culture, can affect unified subjectivity and make it more fluid (Ibid: 143).

Depending on the perspective, the course of events where technology merges with the every day and the body, may be perceived as a threat to humanity, however, Haraway interprets these developments in a way that they promise new possibilities:

[A] cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints. The political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point (Ibid: 122).

Contemporary scholars have been criticizing social mechanisms that underpin identities, institutions and practices (Braidotti, 2013: 3) that are losing their edge at this complex moment in history. Rosi Braidotti, for instance, asserts that post-human theory can be a ‘...generative tool to help us rethink the basic unit of reference for human in the bio-genetic age known as ‘anthropocene’, the historical moment when the Human has become a geological force capable of affecting all life on this planet’ (Ibid: 5). Like Haraway, she points towards the need for reinventing subjectivity, coming up with ‘new schemes of thought’ that will fit in with current times of transition, hybridization, mobility, and a high degree of technological permeation. According to her, the post-human way of thinking rests on a promising concept of fluid subjectivity:

[T]he posthuman predicament enforces the necessity to think again and to think harder about the status of the human, the importance of recasting subjectivity accordingly, and the need to invent forms of ethical relations, norms, and values worthy of the complexity of our times (Braidotti, 2013: 186).

On the same wavelength, although from the technological standpoint, speaks Julian Pepperell who predicts the end of ‘human centered universe’ and the ‘belief in the

infallibility of human power' (Pepperell: 2003: 171). He underscores the necessity of inventing new philosophical ideas that will help us to define what human nature is in the midst of the ongoing '... shifts in our understanding of nature and the cosmos' (Ibid: 13). He argues that as distinctions between humans and machines are blurring, life without mechanical aids is becoming impossible (Ibid: 2). In his terms, we are living in the era of posthuman technologies such as robotics, nanotechnology, prosthetics, smart machines, genetic manipulation, and artificial life, to name a few. Pepperell stresses that in the face of changing nature of human which is '...undergoing a profound transformation', biology and technology are converging to the point where '...they are increasingly becoming indistinguishable' (Ibid: IV). Furthermore, according to him, human sense of superiority is currently being challenged by the technologies that we are creating '...and it seems the balance of dominance between human and machine is slowly shifting' (Ibid: 2). The main concern of the future Pepperell maintains will be about distinguishing between the real and the artificial because '...many living functions will be machine replicable and many machines will acquire life-like qualities' (Ibid:11).

2.7 Genre of science fiction

Despite its generic hybridity, TV drama *Westworld* is a science fiction in the first place. Whether on television or in general, science fiction is historically situated. It reflects contemporary concerns and addresses pressing '...moral, ethical, political and philosophical themes...' of the day (Hockley, 2015: 62).

Across its history, since 1950-ies, science fiction television has responded to, and even 'influenced social and historical trends in the world at large' (Booker, 2004: 16). In certain cases, this influence has been literal. For example, John Tulloch and Henry Jenkins, have asserted that television series such as 'Star Trek' have played important role in '...the recruitment and development of a new generation of American researchers and technicians' (Tulloch & Jenkins: 1995: 4).

If previously, science fiction inspired and influenced trends in society and culture, in the 21-st century it has started to reflect ongoing dynamics in the technology of artificial intelligence. Amy Damico and Sara Quay (2016) maintain that ‘The presence of technological advances and “what ifs” on mainstream network programming indicate a cultural understanding of events once considered impossible’ (Damico & Quay, 2016: 160). They ‘...emerge from some real developments in science and technology that noncomputer scientists are perhaps just beginning to understand’ (Ibid: 160).

On the flip side, scholars have pointed out that real-world techno-scientific advances stunted and exhausted the genre’s traditional narrative of imagining the history progressively (Johnson-Smith, 2005, Booker, 2004). Science-fiction became less visionary and more reflective but at the same time, enabled discussions about what worries us at present:

[P]rogressively more technological cultural climate, science fiction has come to provide one of the most effective stages for addressing our own period’s key concerns—as society itself becomes ever more technologized—as well as for demonstrating series television’s ability to participate in our ongoing cultural negotiations on such topics (Telotte, 2008: 7).

Jan Johnson-Smith (2004) observes that science fiction has been accepted by the television mainstream (Johnson-Smith, 2004: 2), especially after *Star-Trek* era. These developments imply that viewership specter of science fiction has been expanded to non-fan viewers.

In parallel to ‘...technological changes in TV exhibition and distribution’ (Tryon, 2008: 302), science fiction TV and the participatory habits of its fans, have made significant contributions to redefining audience experiences of television entertainment. The active interaction and creativity of science fiction fan cultures with their favorite TV shows via

digital media have pushed the industry to redefine their textual strategies, as well as their assumptions about audiences (Ibid: 302).

3. Research Methodology and Methods

The given chapter provides details about the process of recruitment, sampling, data gathering, analysing and structuring of this research within the methodological framework.

3.1 Narrative Poetics and Case Study Anchored in Cultural Studies Approach

This research was conducted under the umbrella of media and cultural studies which means that it approached serialized television fiction, and HBO's *Westworld* specifically, as a product of broader industrial, socio-cultural and historical conditions, which at the same time, is embedded in everyday. Media and cultural studies have depth and 'regard their subjects of study as individuals who are and have been socially and culturally shaped' (Gray, 2003: 94). So, by turning to the viewers of this sci-fi TV drama, and evoking responses to questions related to this media text, and the ways in which they are understood, this empirical study attempts to 'tap into cultural structures and formations' (Gray, 2003: 14), in order to get answers to the research questions it asks.

Another epistemological approach that this research employed and combined with the audience ethnography, was the analysis of the textual structure. More specifically, it looked at how complex narrative form usually works on serialized television fiction from the perspective of poetics, the concept which emerged in film and literary studies, and is concerned with formal aspects of how texts operate (Mittel, 2015: 4-5). The poetics of narrative was analysed from the point of *Westworld* audience members' viewing practices. In addition, it touched upon post-structuralist narrative theory as a supportive frame for understanding engagement dynamics of audience members with narratively complex TV

dramas. Again, these textual approaches based the research in cultural studies further, as narrative theories are key methodologies within it (Barker, 2003: p. 25-29).

Besides, the research adopted the case study as a method to investigate its subject matter. It focused on *Westworld* and its audience members to contextualize their engagement patterns and sense-making practices. While case studies have been problematized for their lack in providing universal truths (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 66-88), they offer ‘concrete, practical, and context-dependent knowledge’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 70). Like Flyvbjerg, in defense of the case as a method in cultural studies, Ann Gray argues that it is a valuable practice which allows to ‘produce insights into cultural processes’ (Gray, 2003: 68). Therefore, this case research, rather than being strictly confined to the individual instance of *Westworld* and its audience members, provides noteworthy reflections on broader structural dynamics not only within the industry of television entertainment and its audiences, but human subjects in current socio-cultural context. By talking to the participants of this case, as Flyvbjerg puts it, the intent was to ‘enter into dialogue with individuals and society’ (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 63), so as to track trends in complex narrative consumption practices which could prove valuable for future media audience research. The secondary goal of the study was to trace the nature of cultural conversations about the technology of artificial intelligence and examine how it connected to posthuman modes of thinking.

3.2 Where I Stand

Before I proceed further, it would be reasonable to locate myself in the given research and recognize that I speak from a place of familiarity with the media text of my study, not only as a researcher but as its viewer, in the first place. I don’t embody a neutral observer, a concept which has been problematized and contested by feminist thinkers who have argued about its risks (Haraway, 1988). Much like other participants of this research, I am the audience member of *Westworld* too.

My interest to look deeper into the structure of this media text derived from the fact that it appealed to both my viewer self and to my student self in the media field. So, I was

curious to hear how other readers engaged with it. I wanted to see whether any of the associations this sci-fi TV drama evoked in me, were elicited in others and then if this was the case, what could this suggest. I am, after all, as much of the television fiction consumer, as most individuals in contemporary mediated lived culture which I inhabit. Besides, like the participants in this research, I am quite fond of science fiction. Considering all these factors, my positioning in the given research is engaged and accountable, rather than coming from nowhere or free from interpretation and representation (Haraway, 1988: 590). Such circumstances make me the participant observer in my studies (Gray, 2003: 17) which allows me to gain insight into the subject of investigation through personal experience.

3.3 Recruitment and Sampling

The sample group for this research was defined according to two criteria—those who had watched HBO's *Westworld* and could be interviewed in person. The decision to conduct face-to-face interviews was motivated by the need to have access to participants' emotions, therefore better understanding of their 'subjectivity, voice and lived experience' (Rapley, in Seale et. al, 2004:15). Because of this, the geographical location was reduced to the city of Lund in Sweden where the research itself was based and had to be conducted in a limited timeframe. However, it was clear that this constraint would hardly hinder heterogeneity of the research sample (Ritchie, et. al in Ritchie & Lewis: 84) which had to be reflected since the viewership of *Westworld* is global. In favor of this requirement, Lund could provide suitable conditions because its population is quite diverse, and the international community is represented there. I focused on young adult audience because according to Statsocial social media audience metrics which was issued in October 2016, the majority of *Westworld* viewership (74%), was aged between 18 to 44 (blog.statsocial.com, 2016). Therefore, the sample would be made up of mostly young participants in this age range.

The second step was to reach out and recruit participants. To this end, I had two strategies, and both involved the snowball method (Seale, 2011: 218) which meant that I would ask

my potential or actual interviewees to suggest friends or colleagues that they knew watched *Westworld*, and could be interviewed.

My first strategy to identify participants was to get in touch with *Westworld* viewers personally. To accomplish this, I often asked around among acquaintances. In addition, I would use the tactic of introducing my research project to those I met at informal or social events, asking if they would be interested in participation. Sometimes, television shows would naturally come up as conversation topics on these events which provided best circumstances to promote my research. There were cases when people would put themselves forward as potential interviewees. I met the first participant of my research at such a social event. Furthermore, in step with the snowball recruitment process, this participant connected me to two of his friends who like him, participated in interview sessions.

To access an additional number of interviewees, I used social media platforms as well, specifically, Facebook. With this intention, I created a digital poster (Appendix D) in which I made the announcement about my thesis project and invited interested individuals for participation. I posted in several groups which were affiliated to Lund University student communities and used my personal profile. Through this strategy, I recruited three individuals and a friend of one of those participants.

Given the channel of information dissemination, as well as the social environment in which I directly recruited participants and their friends, this resulted in the sample group made up of young people whose age ranged from 22 to 30. The group was nationally diverse and could be classified as transnational audiences whose involvement with *Westworld* constitutes the cultural practice which takes place ‘across the national boundaries...’ (Athique, 2014: 5). Therefore, this was the group which made up a symbolic community whose imagination and understanding around technology-human dynamics, as well as the experiences of contemporary television entertainment, transcend geographical borders.

The sample group represented the following countries:

Sweden: 3 male student participants. From Mathematics, Physics, and Chemical Engineering departments at Lund University. Age is given in respective order: 22, 23, 24.

Russia: 1 male student participant. From Physics department at Lund University. Age 22.

Georgia: 2 female participants. A Student of International Development and Management at Lund University, and an academic adviser at Lund University. Age is given in respective order: 24, 26.

Serbia: 1 male student participant. Global Studies Student at Lund University. Age: 27

Australia: 1 male student participant. The mathematics department at Lund University. Age: 30.

Lithuania: 1 female student participant. Global Studies Student at Lund University. Age: 27.

Ireland: 1 female participant. Project producer. Age: 28.

Turkey: 1 male pilot interview participant. Student of Communications and Media Department at Lund University. Age: 30.

In the meantime, some obstacles emerged during the sampling process. In regards to gender balance, for instance, attracting enough female participants to ensure equal representation proved problematic. Those who reached out through social media were male. Similarly, in personal encounters, most of those who were *Westworld* viewers and expressed interest in the research were also male. Recruitment of female informants took more effort and eventually, the group was comprised of 4 women and 6 male interviewees.

One explanation for the fact that female informants were harder to find, could be the nature of HBO's content which is characteristically masculine in its appeal (Edgerton & Jeffrey: 315-338). Besides, Statsocial statistics have shown that in October 2016 gender division of *Westworld* audience was 63. 77% male viewer against 36. 23% female viewers

(blog.statsocial.com, 2016). However, it must be underscored that this data illustrates only a certain timeframe, namely, the beginning of the season.

3. 4 Ethical considerations and limitations

When doing empirical research, scholars inform that it is vital to follow professional codes of ethics which entail obtaining informed consent from your interviewees (Jensen, 2002; Ryen, 2004). The purpose of this procedure is to 'enable subjects to agree or decline to participate in the study. Their decision should be based on information about the components of the study, its potential consequences for themselves, and its likely social issues' (Jensen, 2002: 290).

Considering this ethical precaution which is primarily directed towards protection of informants (Ryen in Seale, et. al, 2004: 220), all participants were informed about the terms of the interview without exception, as well as about the sample size, legitimacy of the research as the graduate degree project at Lund University, and its purpose which at that stage was rather imprecise. However, they were provided enough knowledge to understand how and for what ends their answers would be used.

Consent from participants was acquired verbally. They were made aware of the terms of confidentiality (Ryen in Seale et. al, 2004: 221), specifically by pointing out that their names would not be used in the research and their audio recordings would not be shared with any other party so as not to jeopardize their anonymity (Jensen, 2002: 290). Correspondingly, audio files were not shared with anyone and their names were removed from transcripts as well as from the processed data sheet.

When considering limitations of this research, I had to stay cognizant of the communication tool which I was going to use during data collection, and this was the English language. It would be inconsiderate for me to ignore the global nature of this qualitative study (Alasuutari, in Seale, et. al, 2004: 507). This meant that at times, there

would be limits at play in the process of communicating intended meanings with participants, the majority of whom, including myself, were not native speakers. With the intention to reduce chances of misunderstanding during conversations, interviewees were informed that they could ask for clarification at any time. Despite the language factor, it must be highlighted that any obvious miscommunication has not taken place during interviews.

The limitation associated with the snowball method is that despite its effectiveness in making contacts through your interviewees, it lessens your chances 'to cover people across a range of differences' (Seale, 2011: 218) and confines the sample to a homogenous group made up of people with common social and educational status. This was the case in my research group as well. Despite their differences in nationality, all interviewees had much in common. They were university educated, had cosmopolitan outlooks, were geographically mobile, and with exception of one participant, well versed in the genre of science fiction.

3. 5 Interview process

Interviews with *Westworld* viewers were conducted in person and recorded in English, in the Lund area. Duration of conversations ranged from 35 to 65 minutes. The location where interviews would normally take place were always of the participant's choosing. Since most of them were students, the usual interview setting was either a university cafeteria, a campus lounge or in rare cases, a coffee house. The advantage of these neutral settings was that the power dynamics between the researcher and the interviewee was more balanced and the likelihood that the informants would feel restrained, was reduced. The goal was to create a relaxed environment, free from the hierarchical approach, in which the interviewees would feel as collaborators in the two-way conversation (Legard et. al. in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 140).

The interview process started from the pilot which was vital in testing whether my approach to the research and its questions worked (Gray, 2003: 102). The pilot interview was conducted at the early stage when I was reading and writing the literature review. The pilot proved invaluable in determining the structure of the final version of the interview guide which was refined based on the shortcomings of the initial one. I found that some questions in the pilot guide were repetitive and I saw that it needed to be focused around themes that emerged during the pilot. For example, themes that persisted and stood out during the conversation were related to identity, and modes of engagement with the narrative. Revised guide was better adjusted to the theoretical framework of the thesis. The final version of the interview guide is available in (Appendix A).

The structure and flexibility were combined during interviews since the data collection method was in-depth, semi-structured interviewing which is often described as the conversation with a purpose in qualitative research tradition (Legard et. al. in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 138). Hence, the participants were encouraged to produce 'elaborated and detailed answers' (Rapley, in Seale et. al, 2004: 15) without being guided by strictly formed questionnaire. These interviews, reminiscent of 'talks' as Rapley (2004) calls them, were retrospective. One could even call it the accounts of participant's feelings, thoughts (Rapley, in Seale et. al. 2004: 16), their interpretations and readings of *Westworld*.

Interviewees were informed from the very beginning of each interview that they could take as much time as they needed to develop their answers. They were welcomed to raise additional points and return to previously discussed topics too.

Although conversations were flexible, the structure was not abandoned altogether. There was the interview guide, which was tailored to the interview dynamics with each interviewee (Gray, 2003: 95). The list contained open-ended questions around themes such as conditions of viewing, engagement, narrative, identity, artificial intelligence and paratexts (Appendix A). These questions were rarely asked in the strict order as every

conversation was different and required a distinct approach to each individual. Such structure made the data generation and collection procedure more reflexive which abided by ethnographic modes of research. In the process, respondents were active producers of meaning, who constructed their subjectivity, their 'character, their stories, emotions' (Gray, 2003: 95) in relation to *Westworld*.

It must be highlighted that in providing their accounts around this TV drama, participants relied on their memories. As explained by Gray, memory is '...something which must be selected, constructed and told to the listener' (Gray, 2003: 123). The information which research interviewees shared were reconstructions and interpretations of *Westworld*. This means that the data that these participants generated were highly subjective and reflective, enriched with experience, and recalibrated in the act of retrospection. Their conversations about *Westworld* were not reactive impressions but narrations of how they recalled their engagement with this media text. Thus, the meanings that they generated were augmented in time and in circumstances of interviewing, for 'what is remembered depends on what 'makes sense' in the context' (Lawler in Pickering, 2008: 39). Their reliance on memory meant that in the moment of communication, participants were making new connections between their past experiences of engagement with *Westworld* and their present.

3.6 Analyzing the data

Transcribing recorded interviews was the first and important step for immersion in the data. As Rapley suggests, it was my first contact with 'the textual version' (Rapley, in Seale et. al, 2004: 27) of conducted conversations and a valuable source for distilling analytical categories preliminarily. Once transcription was done (Appendix B), the process of more rigorous familiarization began with the data. Continuous rereading, repeated checking, and note-making on transcriptions helped to understand the material better. This was proceeded by the coding of each paragraph of interview transcripts, but by staying close to the vocabulary of informants. The whole processes comprised comparing and abstracting of 'the constitutive elements of meaning' (Jensen, 2002: 247) which implied that there was

a substantial ‘interpretive labor’ involved in the analytical process from my part (Jensen, 2002: 247). The intention in this process was to identify recurring themes across 10 interviews, then group them together and observe to which underlying concepts these themes led and in which ways they connected to the context of engagement with *Westworld* as well as the general context (Jensen, 2002: 251).

In parallel to the thematic coding, I kept a notebook in which I registered informal memos to myself. This helped in understanding the analysis process and the data content better, provided means to register spontaneous reflections and ideas that could eventually be used in the drafting process of the analysis chapter. For instance, I had noticed that “binge-watching seems to affect the understanding of narrative greatly. Those who watched fast seem to have forgotten important scenes from the drama”. This insight became one of the focal points in my analysis of viewer’s engagement modes with complex narratives.

The coding process itself comprised of three steps. First, I started to undertake open coding technique (Seale, 2011: 370) meaning that every sentence was coded by using interviewees’ vocabulary to avoid early interpretation and ensure that at the initial stage, the analytical process was grounded in the data (Ritchie et. al. in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003: 222). Then, these codes were grouped into analytic categories, and then, dominant categories were sorted into themes (Seale, 2011: 374-376). Like Anne Gray recommends, I tried not to force themes into the process by constantly reflecting on the data (Gray, 2003: 151).

The whole material was organized into a digital file, in the form of a table (Appendix C). Colors marked common themes. After major themes were identified, the writing process of analysis chapter began in which sections were developed and guided according to emerged themes.

4. Analysis: Exploring Modes of Audience Engagement with *Westworld*

In literature review chapter, it was established that complexity in the narrative structure is what makes contemporary TV dramas immersive media texts (Mittel, 2015). Experimentation with main elements of storytelling invites intensive engagement with serialized TV fiction.

This analytical chapter uses qualitative research of TV drama *Westworld* to demonstrate how unconventional forms of serial storytelling encourage emotional and cognitive work in viewers by using various strategies. It also reveals how audience members engage in critical self-reflection about their identity and how this connects with posthuman perspectives on subjectivity.

4.1 Contexts of viewing

Pace and Domestic Space

Contextual elements such as the pace of viewing and place of reception have emerged during interviews as two important themes. These components had a profound impact on the ways in which *Westworld's* serial narrative was experienced and ultimately, comprehended by audience members. Digital technology-driven flexibility in practices such as scheduling time and choosing the location for viewing have had a considerable impact on the way viewers retained and remembered *Westworld's* narrative.

In most cases, the choice was made in favor of solo viewing, in an exclusively domestic environment. Even when done in company, viewing never involved more than one extra person, either a close friend or a partner. Despite the mobility of digital media devices and on-demand content delivery services that the interviewees used for their engagement with television entertainment, one could argue that domestic, individual atmosphere was preferred because it created better settings for focused attention. Freedom in re-watching complicated scenes, something so vital for following complex modes of storytelling, was the reason why participants preferred to watch *Westworld* alone. However, this choice was

not made only for the sake of convenience but for some kind of intimacy that some viewers required for enhancement of their viewing experience.

One interviewee articulated her personal preferences for *Westworld* viewing in the following way:

It was very much contained in my home environment, very much individual watching experience. Not something I wanted to share with people (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

Another contextual element which emerged during conversations was the pace at which *Westworld* narrative was consumed. In some instances, it was tactically used as means for exerting control over exposure to 'heavy themes' and as a prevention for emotional burnout.

The emotional aspect is probably why I could watch one episode at a time because for me it wasn't a brain-fluff in a way that a lot of TV series are. It called on some heavy themes (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

Conversations with *Westworld* audience members revealed a recurrent tendency amongst those participants who watched this TV drama at a fast-pace. It should be noted that such viewers were in the minority but their recollections about the narrative were less detailed. They happened to have forgotten many crucial parts of the story. One participant, who was interviewed after a few months he had binge-watched *Westworld*, observed that he could hardly remember the beginning of the show but recalled the ending 'better than the beginning'. He thought that:

[T]he show was complete as a whole and it didn't really have very good or very bad episodes or ones that I distinguish. It's probably due to the fact that I watched it in one day (22-year-old male student, Russia).

Him forgetting important parts of the storytelling such as the beginning, for instance, can be explained by the fact that complex television narratives require a different type of commitment from audience members than non-stop viewing marathons. The experience

of complex TV dramas become especially enriching when time and space is given to process and appreciate what it has to offer, as they are:

[D]esigned for a discerning viewer not only to pay close attention once but to rewatch in order to notice the depth of references, to marvel at displays of craft and continuities, and to appreciate details that require the liberal use of pause and rewind (Mittel, 2015: 38).

4.2 Orienting Practices

Paratexts: From ephemeral conversations to following spoilers

Westworld, just like any other television series of the day, is hardly self-contained work. It exists in the media environment which is abundant in paratexts that viewers may turn to when they need ‘external assistance’ (Fulton, et. al: 302) to orient themselves through storytelling forms of contemporary television fiction. Utilizing paratexts for better comprehension of the plot is a common habit among modern audience members, and in television scholarship, it is ‘...regarded as part of the same spectrum of viewing practices’ (Mittel, 2015: 262). Such behavior serves to:

[F]igure out how the pieces fit together or to propose alternative ways of seeing the story that might not be suggested by or contained within the original narrative design (Mittel, 2015: 262).

While orienting strategies of the informants varied in intensity, purpose, and form, all of them used these practices. Those who avoided any potential encounters with ‘spoilers’ or *Westworld* related online discussions intentionally, still engaged in conversations about the show with friends. Some of these talks revolved around acting skills and unexpected plot twists but others were as far-fetched, as possible ways of creating artificial intelligence, more efficient worker safety and health regulations in times of AI advent.

There were those who familiarized themselves with the anatomy of production, watched interviews with creators and gained different sorts of extratextual information to enrich

their experience of the narrative with extra layers of information. Some even found educational value in *Westworld*. One informant stated that she often discussed with friends. They:

[E]xchanged different speeches, finding references to different literature because some of them [themes] I wouldn't catch. I have a friend who studies psychology so he would give me references how it related to some theories. He'd link all these articles. I listened to a podcast about philosophical underpinnings of *Westworld*, theories they drew from (24-year-old female student, Georgia).

The same viewer belonged to the category of the audience who followed fan theories. While others tried to avoid this behavior, she got 'pleasure' in knowing plot development scenarios in advance:

I was reading these predictions from the fans which I couldn't hold myself back and a lot of mysteries they predicted, they revealed early on. Yeah, I don't think it deducted from my pleasure...I watched a lot of videos where they show the clues in the earlier episodes that you don't recognize... at that point, but they rebuild later (24 year-old female student, Georgia).

Another interviewee pointed out:

I was following a *Westworld* sub-Reddit when I watched this show, and these guys predicted pretty much everything that happened in finale. I predicted one of the points myself (22-year-old male student, Russia).

There was one who 'kept updated' with predictions on sub-Reddits but implied that he belonged to the group which preferred the game of guessing plot development:

I quite like theories but I think a lot of them was too much on what the story and subject is about (24-year-old male student, Sweden).

It turns out that such pursuit for knowing how the story unfolds ahead of time, is part of the cognitive engagement with complex narratives (Mittel, 2015: 173) which helps viewers to direct their attention towards other aspects of storytelling. With their curiosity-

driven theorizing, viewers ‘dictate the terms of their own narrative experience’(Mittel, 2015: 175). They transform the whole process in order to focus on:

[T]he “how” and “why” of the storytelling as well as the operational aesthetic of how the story is being told, mirroring the experience of rewatching the program, (Mittel, 2015: 174).

More generally, through their act of hypothesizing and following fan communities to solve narrative questions, these individuals engaged themselves into cultural practice of theorizing which takes place in numerous cultural forms, ranging from ‘interpersonal conversations on the couch during commercial breaks to popular websites’ (Mittel, 2015: 173).

In some cases, *Westworld* narrative consumption was preceded with online research around the show. Some viewers used paratexts as resources to make a decision on whether to start watching the series:

I read articles about it and I thought ‘Oh my god! I would like to see this because it felt also part of the culture now as well, and I always like to be up to date. So, I started and I couldn’t stop (27-year-old-female student, Lithuania).

Another participant recalled:

I read that it would be most well-funded HBO production after Game of Thrones and the guy who made the intro for Game of Thrones did the theme for Westworld. So, I thought, well, this is gonna be the next Game of Thrones in terms of production (27-year-old male student, Serbia).

What the given research material has suggested, brings to mind Schimpach’s (2011) reconceptualization and expansion of the meaning of viewing. Nowadays this phenomenon encompasses a much wider range of activities than just a sight-based encounter with visual media text (Schimpach, 2011: 62). Viewing of *Westworld* for instance necessitates a set of actions which starts from purely technological aspects, such as accessibility to and the ability to use media devices. Then, it implies navigation through intertextual media

environment which enriches the information base on the narrative and thus enhances the overall story-watching experience. Finally, the viewing includes informal chats and theorizing with friends or on online platforms.

All these set of activities comprise a complex cultural practice that on the one hand, serve the interests of complex TV series but on the other, provide participation means to audience members into the gratifying game of puzzle solving, as well as ways of enhancing their viewing experiences.

4. 3 Narrative Strategies

Time distortion produces desirable levels of confusion

New forms of television storytelling employ various techniques to stimulate audience engagement. To this end, complex television:

[O]ften challenge the ease with which casual viewers might make sense of a program, inviting temporary disorientation and confusion, allowing viewers to build up their comprehension skills through long-term viewing and active engagement (Mittel, 2015: 261).

One main source of such ‘temporary disorientation’ which was commented on by the interviewees, was narrative time and manipulation with it in Westworld’s plot:

I found the timelines very difficult to keep track of. Obviously, it added to the attraction of the series for me because it kept me engaged and interested and slightly confused and wanting to find out more and wondering who’s doing what, when, where?...What’s going on?... It left me confused which I guess was also the point (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

These quotes provide evidence to how reshuffling the order of incidents in the story causes confusion in audience members but by doing this, provokes curiosity and pleasure. Viewers are encouraged to put the pieces together and engage with the narrative cognitively. Non-

linearity in plot structure prompts temporary disorientation but generates emotional states that as another interviewee described, made her feel ‘comfortable with’:

It’s one of the shows where you don’t understand things and you are confused but you feel comfortable in this confusion. So...I knew that there were at least three-four storylines going on but I felt comfortable not knowing at that stage (24-year-old female student, Georgia).

Given data illustrate how plot design plays a vital role for complex forms of serialized TV fiction, such as *Westworld*. Ricoeur contends that plot is the ‘intelligible whole that governs a succession of events in a story’. It ‘...places us at the crossing point of temporality and narrativity...’ (Ricoeur in Mcquillan, 2000: 257). Plot is the narrative device which tends to distort time in order to ‘suit its own ends’, so time in it can be unorderly and ‘...obey only its own sense of what is most appropriate for the increase of pleasure and the maximization of aesthetic effect’ (Murphet, 2005: 61). Therefore, plot structure in *Westworld* serves as a vehicle for creating manageable and even, a desirable level of confusion in viewers. As one of the interviewees commented on ‘two concurrent timelines’ in the series:

It made it [storyline] more intriguing...I thought it was enjoyable (30-year-old male student, Australia).

4.4 Music as Narrative Clue

Storylistening and references to pop culture

Mittel points out that evoking the emotional response in audience members is crucial. To achieve full impact in storytelling, television cues our ‘...attention through visual, aural, and temporal strategies...’, in addition to other techniques such as ‘...revelations, enigmas, and ambiguities’ (Mittel, 2015:166).

Aural strategies such as diegetic or non-diegetic music and sound, in primarily visual storytelling, are used to orient viewers emotionally and assist them in the process of

narrative comprehension. Affect stimulating devices such as music, is used with the knowledge that people are prone to engage with stories through their senses. That said, music as a narrative element, carries not only aesthetic value but affects the way a story is received and remembered by viewers.

Increasingly media literate audience members realize and appreciate the role of music in visual forms of storytelling. In relation to this, conducted interviews brought forward an interesting finding which highlighted viewer proclivities to narrativize music and infuse meaning into it.

Some interviewees articulated that music in *Westworld* was not a mere mood inducing, or associative device for them but a narrative clue which they compared to the storyline development. This sort of ‘storylistening’ (Cobley, 2014:2) or deriving meanings from essentially non-narrative forms of media such as music within the plot, brings to the mind Cobley’s argument that ‘wherever there are humans, there appear to be narratives’ (Cobley, 2014:2). People show a natural impulse to think about most phenomena around them as a story.

Since non-diegetic aural components comprise an important part in television storytelling, it is interesting to listen to viewer interpretations of *Westworld’s* musical accompaniment. One informant, for example, read the show’s introduction theme this way:

In the beginning how it starts that somebody controls as it plays. The theme repeats itself, and for me, it goes freestyle afterwards. For me it relates to how artificial intelligence are programmed...they only do what they are programmed to do and then, it feels like the music starts improvising and goes off the loop. So, for me it’s like...intro theme relates to artificial intelligence evolution throughout the series (24-year-old female student, Georgia).

On this note, it should be emphasized that this interviewee deciphered story out of the introductory musical theme in retrospect. It was the accumulated knowledge about narrative which allowed her to infuse meaning in music.

Sound and music on television fiction, just like in film, is one of the most ‘versatile signifiers...a powerful creator of meaning, mood and textuality’, also a significant ‘element of narrative cohesion, helping to link scenes together, or, alternatively, to mark a sudden change of location or mood’ (Fulton, 2005: 108-109).

In this respect, one interviewee recalled a scene from *Westworld* as a memorable element in the show:

[W]hen the man in black became the man in black...it was when both the camera movement and the change of score happened, when individual scores got mixed (24-year-old male student, Sweden).

Non-diegetic music on *Westworld* caught the attention of other informants too. Some of them were surprised to find out that typical Western genre music was not present, while others pointed out:

I really enjoyed the Radiohead and Soundgarden done with the parlor piano. That was really cool, and after the show I listened to the soundtrack. I thought it was done really well and the people who watch the show are kind of my age. So, they grew up with that kind of music and to bring it into the Western setting was very clever (30-year-old male student, Australia).

This excerpt illustrates how generically hybrid TV dramas like *Westworld*, tend to go against genre conventions, as they combine familiarity and novelty in unexpected ways through various storytelling elements. By introducing ‘postmodern music’-as one participant put it-in Western setting, this media text speaks to younger demographics of viewer in intelligible language. It allows emotional relatability, but also, generates opportunities for making exciting discoveries about intertextual references to pop culture, and thus, renders engagement with the narrative sensorily and cognitively far more rewarding.

4.5 PoV: Othering Humans-Anthropomorphizing Machines

What makes *Westworld* narrative unconventional is its depiction of the fictional reality from android's perspective. In it, non-human's point of view is equally, if not more emphasized than those of many human characters. Furthermore, the character around which the narrative revolves is in fact, an android who is slowly but surely developing consciousness and agency. It is through following inner journeys of non-human entities that *Westworld* asks its audience to engage with the story and 'to imagine themselves as another' (Gray, 2008: 121).

By observing the story development from the android's point of view through several sub-techniques such as focalization, and close-up (Murphet, 2005: 86-98), all of which are present in *Westworld*, viewers are enabled to sympathize and to a certain extent, even identify with it.

This is what one interviewee stated:

I think some of the audience members still identify a lot of the androids more human than humankind within the show (24-year-old male student, Sweden).

While the term identification has been challenged by some media scholars due to its inaccuracy in describing viewer engagement with media texts (Mittel, 2015: 127-129), it is undisputable that point of view plays a crucial role in making inner states of *Westworld's* non-human characters accessible to audience members. In general, its function within cinematic context, which also applies to televisual forms of storytelling, is to tie viewers to characters cognitively and emotionally:

To a large extent, the question of 'identification' in the cinema is the question of 'point of view' and focalization...Focalization becomes an issue when we shift into the diegetic world and begin to have our perceptions and thoughts shaped by the characters who attract and direct narrative discourse (Murphet, 2000: 89).

One interviewee for instance, when asked to recall emotions that he felt during *Westworld* viewing, described a specific scene which involved character's point of view:

When Maeve sees two guys shooting a host on the floor of the bar...and when she was starting to get emotions seeing it, I felt that. When she was watching this host being shot at by a guest, I was kind of angry about that (22-year-old male student, Sweden).

Another participant's comment also illustrated that when the question is about eliciting compassion in viewers towards a character, no matter if it is human or not, the point of view matters a great deal.

The main female android character, she was always confused. She didn't know what was happening which also left me feeling as a watcher, also being confused. I empathized quite strongly with the character and I was also confused for her (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

Contrary to humanoids, many interviewees pointed out that representations of *Westworld's* human characters lacked depth. They were described as flat and 'two-dimensional', in most cases, captured during their acts of violent gratification and motivated by the urge to release their vile fantasies. It was precisely due to such representations that viewers began to see human characters as others.

One informant highlighted:

You just saw humans in the midst of their vices. Whereas the robots, you see them as slaves basically. So, you sympathize with them more. And then the humans who are running the show have got all the power and control... So, this show inspires you to sympathize with robots. The humans were less favorable, I think (30-year-old male student, Australia).

By reversing roles between humans and androids, by turning the picture upside down, in which androids were represented as helpless sufferers, in contrast, to groundlessly violent humans, *Westworld* provided conditions for its viewers to perceive essentially dissimilar entities as more identifiable than their own species. People who showed the worst of their

personalities and acted against established moral norms, evoked highly negative emotions in interviewees:

I was kind of disgusted by real humans, actually the guests...there were some characters that made me doubt their own humanity or what it means to be human, whether there is distinction, because you want to believe that you are something special...that you mean something more than just being a collection of body parts and impressions and ideas. And then *Westworld* brought me close to that question and it brought me closer in an emotive way (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

The shift towards othering of humans began to emerge in conversation with another interviewee as well. He emphasized feeling 'anger' for witnessing degraded moral standards of the real people who were expected to act better than they did:

When they behave badly towards the creatures...I feel bit of resentment towards people...come on humanity, let's be good and not behave like a****s (22-year-old male student, Sweden).

With closer observation of the data, it became evident that viewers' detachment from humans and sympathy for androids was evoked for another crucial reason. Such affinity with humanoids was to a great extent, the outcome of their strong physical and behavioral resemblance to humans which was even further enhanced by the focus on their perspectives during storytelling. As this interviewee put it:

[Y]ou feel this compassion for the robots. Maybe that is due to the fact that they are so much like humans and you feel like they are trapped in this park and they are being exploited, killed and then repaired, and you see humans making use of them. Had they not been looking so much similar to humans, maybe you wouldn't be feeling that (26-year-old female, academic adviser, Georgia).

This quote and other participants' comments have unearthed strong presence of the theme of anthropomorphism in conversations around *Westworld*. Anthropomorphism denotes

attributing humanlike characteristics to non-human others (Braidotti, 2013) in order to allow them into the human domain and extend ‘the principle of moral and legal equality’ onto them. Braidotti argues that while this might seem a noble gesture, it is ‘inherently flawed’ because anthropomorphism only ‘confirms the binary distinction’ without acknowledging specificity of others (Braidotti, 2013: 79). Rather, it imposes values on non-humans that humans consider universal. Such state of affairs only reinforces anthropocentric or strictly hierarchical mindset in which humans remain superior to others. When it comes to *Westworld*, viewers deeply sympathized with humanoid characters but this was possible because of their representations that complied with anthropocentric ideals of normality. They looked and acted so similar that ‘the dialectics of otherness’ (Braidotti, 68) between viewers and non-human characters was reduced.

4.6 From Narrative Form to Viewer Subjectivity

Shaping awareness and fragmenting the self

Helen Fulton informs that post-structuralist analytical theories approach ‘difficult’ texts as producers of ‘unstable’ subjectivities. With complex narratives that enable multiple interpretations, ‘...we are no longer stable subjects, moving effortlessly from text to meaning...’ (Fulton, 2005: 302), so our sense of who we are becomes unsteady. Her summary, concerning how narrative form can fragment a reader’s selfhood, takes us to Corner’s claim which points to another side of the same coin, suggesting that form of the media text is ‘intimately connected with subjectivity’ (Corner, 2011: 3), namely, with matters of construction of self and identity. The form is ‘an active constituent in the production of meaning and of pleasure’ (Corner, 2011: 77). It is closely tied to the symbolic power of the media which is about their ability to generate meanings and values, therefore shape conditions for the formation of ‘subjectivity, of awareness, knowledge and affective orientation’ (Corner, 2011: 15).

Despite its fictional form with which *Westworld* hyperbolizes technology of artificial intelligence, this TV drama is marked by ‘psychological realism’ (Corner, 2011: 71). It

produces meanings that viewers see as relevant to the existing social reality, suggesting that it addresses them at a personal level as well.

With regards to this, one interviewee stressed that *Westworld's* narrative had a strong impact on her because of:

[H]ow paralleled themes were to real life, and the complexity of it. It had many, many layers (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

She compared the series to those dystopian works and counterfactuals that are 'embedded in real', which is why she was:

[F]ar more emotionally affected by it and question a lot more. That's why I'm affected by *Westworld* because it's a possible truth and near-possible truth (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

Subjectivity implies 'self's constitution and agency' (Corner, 2011: 86) but entails its contingency as well, because it is never completely separated from the external world, other people, institutions, and the media. '...the subject is always linked to something outside of it—an idea or principle or the society of other subjects...', it '...operates at the intersection of general truths and shared principles' (Mansfield, 2000: 3).

The theme of the subject who is situated and shares general principles with others within social milieu resurfaced several times during research interviews. A considerable part of conversations touched upon values, and ethical norms which were inspired by *Westworld's* representation of violence against non-human creatures. Quite often, interviewees drew parallels between their everyday life and *Westworld*.

One participant for example, underscored that the series 'mirrors what is happening in society', and because of it, she was inspired to speculate on the role of ethics in general and in relation to herself:

What would we let ourselves do if there were some dolls that you could do whatever you wanted to do to it? What would I do? I have no idea. I really don't know. They show how people are really framed. They let themselves do what they want, they can kill and rape. Many people, even now, sitting here...you don't know how they are holding themselves and what they could do if there weren't any of these socially accepted rules (27-year-old female student, Lithuania).

The same interviewee had a critical insight about similarities between androids in *Westworld* and humans who abide by social roles in real life:

[T]he roles that they [androids] were playing were given to them and I think it also reflects that we are also in specific roles and we act according to them. Sometimes we want to be doing something else but that's our [social] role...Everything about them [androids] was about us, everything. The only thing is that they go to analysis mode but people also zone out (27-year-old female student, Lithuania).

The almost identical line of thought was conveyed by another participant, who elaborated on commonalities between *Westworld* humanoids and humans:

[W]e are very much preconditioned by everything around us. By family and basically, we live in the loops of doing the same thing day in, day out...being conditioned to finish school, go to college. There are loops that we all abide by. So, I like these similarities that he [Ford] draws between us not having that much free will as we think, and being programmed by, you know, norms and other things (24-year-old female student, Georgia).

Listening to these participants take television fiction as a starting point and reflect on topics that concerned their 'subjection and subjectivity' (Hermes, 2005: 6), in other terms, their acknowledgement of how their selfhood depended on surrounding social and cultural formations, illustrated how they were challenged by this realization at the same time, which revealed double nature of the complex media text. *Westworld* being the multilayered narrative, both led the viewers to form awareness about contingency of their subjectivity but simultaneously, fragmented their sense of the self by exposing the limits to

imagining what they could be or could do without normative frameworks in place. Like it was articulated: ‘What would I do? I have no idea. I really don’t know.’ One clear understanding which *Westworld* provided to these participants was that like android characters, they were following scripts in the machinery of the socio-cultural environment, self-monitoring and disciplining themselves (Foucault in Mansfield, 2000: 146). Beyond it, their sense of the self was barely thinkable. However, through the very means of perceiving these limits, new possibilities appeared for reconceiving their ‘being-in-the-world as an endless becoming new and otherwise’ (Deleuze and Guattari in Mansfield, 2000: 146).

4.7 Human identity: self-affirmation through difference and through similarity

Fear and self-doubt in emergent techno dynamics

Subjectivity, or selfhood, is an unfinished project, ‘permanently open to inconsistencies’ (Mansfield, 2000: 4-6) which ‘never quite forms’ (ibid: 81). As it was noted already, subjectivity is closely interlinked with the external world, in which it morphs constantly. It is not a fixed entity but constructed from experience and in ‘dialectical relationship with social organization’ (Frosh, 1991: 31). Although ‘subjectivity is a broader notion than identity’ (Corner, 2011: 89), the latter is its integral part and just like the former, prevails in flux and undergoes perpetual reformation. Identity is always about the search of who one is, and in this journey, what defines it, is its difference from others. ‘...Identities are constructed through, not outside, difference’ and ‘in relation to the Other’ (Hall, 1996: 4). Similar to subjectivity, they are largely dependent on ‘specific historical and institutional sites, within specific discursive formations and practices’ (Hall, 1996: 4). So, it comes from the outside as ‘...something we put or try on, not something we reveal or discover’ (Frith in Hall, 1996: 122).

The dominant discourses on the technology that nurture the present popular culture, bear a formative impact on the identities of those who are embedded in it. Pervasive and intensely mediated popular discourse of the present preaches that humanity is on the

threshold of creating autonomous machines. Furthermore, little further on the horizon lies the alleged prospect of inventing artificial consciousness.

Westworld is one of those popular culture texts through which viewers contemplate ongoing technological developments that concern artificial intelligence. With this knowledge in mind, it is sensible to ask: in what light do their convictions unveil their identity and the sense of themselves as human subjects as they speak about *Westworld*?

Before going into details, it should be noted that the opinion of most participants about the narrative of *Westworld* as being a reiteration of the well-explored tale, coincide. They evaluate the story as ‘nothing completely revolutionary’ or a ‘trope’, backing up the maxim that the tale of technology, and particularly, artificial intelligence going awry, is deeply rooted in popular culture:

Robots against people has been done many times. For me who likes sci-fi, there’s nothing new. This is a very common concept. Westworld doesn’t do anything new and this is one of my problems with it. It doesn’t take the idea anywhere yet (27-year-old male student, Serbia).

Having said that, most parts of conversations around the topic have disclosed trepidations underlying the collective consciousness which the viewers communicated over and over again. They articulated worries about possibilities of technology-driven social disruption and spoke in such manner that indicated to the collective sense of threat to the ‘...identity of humanity’ which as Mansfield observes, is ‘...always at stake in the consideration of technology’ (Mansfield, 2000: 149). Their uneasiness about what losing control over machines might bring about, ranged from the apocalyptic vision of future, implying complete annihilation, to uncertainty about what could come with the creation of potentially more powerful consciousness than those of humans. There were those too who envisioned autonomous artificial intelligence as similar to humankind, therefore,

unthreatening to its safety. However, there were those, who saw the technology as means for reinforcement of prevailing inequalities in human societies.

In his conclusive point, one participant envisioned rather dystopian future during the interview, unveiling his fears about the technology:

In 20-30 years it's going to happen. We're going to have an AI and we're going to mess up and we're going to die. I think we shouldn't play with this technology and many smart people have warned us against this. This is a very, very imminent thing. AI is going to be made by idealistic people who think they're going to improve something but then we're going to all die (27-year-old male student, Serbia).

For another male participant, the technology of artificial intelligence was perilous only if humans would fail to exercise total control over it. The idea which underpinned his viewpoint revolved around the concept of power, and the risk of its loss with insufficient foresight:

I think the more into the future, the more we will depend on AI. It doesn't really matter whether I want it or not, we will integrate more AI in our lives, and I personally don't see a problem in that, as long as we do everything correctly. And what I mean by that is that, if somehow we manage to develop an AI which is more powerful than the human brain, in terms of dimensions of the tasks it can solve, then it can become really dangerous (22-year-old male, Russia).

Yet another interviewee, gave away his lack of confidence in humans and insinuated that it is us who could be the biggest risk, not only because of our tendency to err but because of the lack of moral uprightness which could become the reason for danger. In his terms, any conceivable calamity would be reactive to the actions committed by humans that might 'not create very good promise for a sentient being to want to help'. At the same time, the notion of controlling technology was present in his comments:

What the people are most afraid about the AI is that we got to have control of it, yes? So, we are not sure what it's going to do, how it is going to behave towards us.

But we know that if we can create it under controlled conditions and we make sure that people are aware of its potential, then it'd be probably a good thing because people can benefit from that. But if we have two idiots like those two engineers there, who have released this strong AI without real thought behind it, I'd say there's a very big risk of it. Especially, if the AI realizes that maybe humanity isn't that great (22-year-old male, Sweden).

While some informants spoke of risks of human oversight and flaws, one expressed uneasiness about the idea of creating robotic human replicas. Her comment was inspired not only by humanoid representation on *Westworld* but by the latest news she had come across on robotic technology. Her comment reflected discontent with human fallibility and implied that robots could be the chance to upgrade human potential, only if they were kept in their machinic boundaries:

They made a robot to blush and I see a blush as a weakness, that you did something wrong. Why should we then keep robots doing mistakes? I don't know. I just don't like humanizing robots. This AI should be something better, something without cracks and it still can be human? It's impossible...I'm more fascinated about how AI can outgrow us in some parts but I don't want it to be made into humans. Having them reflect us doesn't help to reach the most potential (27-year-old female student, Lithuania).

The participant who explained how *Westworld* inspired him to think about artificial intelligence, maintained that it would be a hazard. He touched upon the issue of values, morals, and ethics, implying that value judgment was exclusive quality to humans and could not be universally defined or encoded:

The problem is that if we want an AI to mimic the human intelligence, they would have to program the values which are different for different people...I just have a problem with understanding how you would program morals. It's not black and white. Obviously, you can do all the stuff in binary code but it's very complicated (22-year-old male student, Russia).

In between the lines of his claim, lay the message that artificial consciousness would be a threat because of its inherent incapability of guiding its actions by the same standards as humans do, which is recognizing moral responsibility for others, and trying to behave so as not to harm the living. As Bauman explains:

Following the moral impulse means assuming responsibility for the other, which in turn leads to an engagement with the fate of the other and commitment to her/his welfare (Bauman in Hall, 1996: 33).

This interviewee argued that the artificial intelligence would be motivated by problem-solving rather than the welfare of others in its process of executing its tasks. According to him, the situation could be far more uncontrollable if such entity was able to create new tasks for itself. That is why, the main issue *Westworld* raised for him, was ‘the ethics of the interaction between AI and human beings’, yet again, referring to the notion of power:

It [*Westworld*] makes you think...if we have the power to give freedom [to AI], should we give it or not? 22-year-old male student, Russia.

In contrast to such reasoning, there were those who thought otherwise. One participant, for instance, insisted that artificial consciousness would be ‘not too different from us’:

I find it odd that a lot of sci-fi shows, all dramatically categorize AI into this box, sort of this cold, logical creature that doesn’t empathize. It doesn’t make sense to me because we’re going to be basing this AI on us, right? We are going to base it on how we usually react because we’re the only kind of sentient creatures who we are aware of. So, the way we behave is the only kind of way to go from, and we are very emotional creatures. So, why would the AI be any different from us in the sense that why would it be devoid of emotion? Why do we deny that? It’s so important for us for our morality, you know, we think a lot with our emotions. We don’t do everything purely logically. We make decisions off of previous experience. So, I don’t understand why this AI would be so alien from us... I think it will be a person, probably with feelings and emotions (22-year-old male student, Sweden).

For this interviewee, constraints of human intelligence were the source of optimism. Absence of moral judgement in artificial intelligence was inconceivable for him precisely because of the limited understanding of humans to create other forms of consciousness than similar to their own, which as he elaborated, is fueled by emotional impulses.

Alongside such arguers, was one who contended that all speculations about artificial consciousness were ‘annoyance’ because such entity would not exist for ‘the foreseeable future’. Rather than speaking of the self-aware, autonomous technology, he referred to the phenomenon as a robot. He focused on the place of advanced technology in current economic and ideological system. He stated:

My feeling is that the capitalism will simply own robots and they’ll just use them as slaves to do the work to earn more. And anyone who uses the goods produced by the robot, praise the corporation, basically. The smarter they [robots] get, the more inherently they will be tied to work they produce...Interesting thing is how do we buy things if robots do all the work if we don’t have any income? If there’s no basic income for everyone, then what happens? One option is that those who don’t own robots die off or relegate to some kind of sub-human life...and then you’ll have regular human society or people whose lives are managed by robots. That would be complete stratification...But that’s not the robot’s fault. That is gonna happen without conscious robots as well (30-year-old male student, Australia).

Rather than othering or humanizing an imaginative entity, this interviewee considered flaws in present human-centered order which was not going anywhere but turning against itself. For him, the threat was not the technology on its own but the existing economic and ideological system. In his vision of dystopian techno future, nothing endangered the place of humans on the power pyramid, other than greater inequality and divide within societies. His vision was humans against humans, not technology rising against us.

Based on these *Westworld*-inspired conversations, one could see that the principal talking point for these research participants was the fate of human and its place in the age of super technologies. Their concerns about radical differences and similarities to artificial

intelligence shaped and cemented the existing concept of human identity. Interviewees defined the human through separation and difference (Hall, 1996) sometimes even through strong similarities which again, spoke of the masked desire to remain secure, therefore in control of who we are and where we are.

More importantly, these conversations were underpinned by subtle presence of self-doubt and fear. At first glance, the source of fear was uncontrollable, more powerful other but with closer examination, these were worries about what we are now and where our own shortcomings might take us. These speculations were revelations of anxieties about what it might mean to be human in the brave new world, how could the new techno-reality affect us and what could be ‘...the horizons of possibility for human experience: what shall we feel, what might we become?’ (Mansfield, 2000: 158).

4.8 Post-Human Thinking

Equaling Animals, Humans and Artificial Intelligence

It must be underscored, that substantial part of conversations with research participants would unfold around philosophical themes naturally which they saw as central in *Westworld*. One participant, for example, said the following:

What does it mean to be human? When do you become human? When are you not a human? What is consciousness? These are the questions that it [Westworld] asks (27-year-old male student, Serbia).

Another participant pointed out:

They pose quite good questions about AI and where true consciousness begins (24-year-old male student, Sweden).

Yet another said:

A lot of questions that it [Westworld] asks to audience [is] about our existence and how we define living beings (23-year-old male student, Sweden).

As Julian Pepperell suggests, societies have entered the posthuman era which is characterized by heightened interest in questions that ask: what is human? and whether there is such a thing. He contends, that these concerns, 'would have not troubled us in the humanist era' but now, as biology and technology are converging, as the world around us is becoming increasingly interconnected, and interdependent, these questions are acquiring increasing validity. The age of posthuman, according to Pepperell, is the age of uncertainty: '...about life time employment, about political and economic theory, about what is happening to the environment, about whether scientific progress is always beneficial and about where technology is leading us' (Pepperell, 2003:184).

The most obvious signs of the end of the humanist era he notes are movements that 'resist the worst aspects of humanist behaviour' (Pepperell, 2003:171). Such movements are feminism, animal rights, environmentalism, and anti-slavery. As he states, these movements signal that:

[T]he gradual overturning of a human-centred world is well underway. More importantly, the recognition that none of us are actually distinct from each other, or the world, will profoundly affect the way we treat each other, different species and the environment. To harm anything is to harm oneself. This is why posthumanism is not just about the future, it is also as much about the present (Pepperell, 2003:171).

Coincidentally, some interviewees moved their discussions towards the issues underscored above, by drawing parallels between *Westworld* representations of human-android interrelationships and the real world. One participant, for instance, highlighted that the show provoked her to reflect on some of these matters by unsettling her emotionally. Feelings that she experienced and kept articulating during the research conversation was 'disgust', specifically at 'callous' behavior of human characters and the way they 'could treat other people that looked human but they knew they weren't':

It [Westworld] also made me think of animal rights issues. I'm a vegetarian and for me, it had a very strong parallel to how we treat animals...Production of humanlike

figures for the exploitation and use by the humans themselves. They only existed as objects of gratification and objects to be harmed or used in whatever way humans wanted, which kind of is disgusting...Also, a lot of stuff related to anthropology and colonization of another world and how Western societies can go in whether with hard or soft power into another society and take them...For me, that lacks a basic dignity (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

The same participant elaborated on how *Westworld* reminded her of the issues that had concerned her before. What she was questioning, related strongly to posthuman predicament which demands the reconsideration and redefinition of human's place and 'sense of connection to a shared world' (Braidotti, 2013: 193). She stated:

[W]hy not see artificial intelligence on the same level as a human? What makes us so special as humans?... Like, why should humans be so distinguished as species?...What makes humans think that they have the right of power over non-human life-form? (28-year-old female, project producer, Ireland).

Another participant voiced somewhat similar musings around *Westworld*. She saw links between the exploitation of androids and the animals as a result of humans' beliefs about sentience which is usually measured by the capability of experiencing pain, pleasure and complex emotions. According to her, humans don't ascribe these affective qualities in the same way to non-human others, as to their own species which is why the 'moral circle' (Zinger, 2011: 121) with which humans circumscribe their behaviour, doesn't include these creatures.

I thought it was interesting in terms of animal rights also. That's how we think about animals because we oppose eating animals if we find that they feel pain when we eat them. So, I guess, we will have the same approach with AI as soon as we realize that they feel pain, and then we will recognize them as our equals that need to be respected...I think that's the only way we judge creatures. If they feel pain, they are on par with us, if they don't feel pain, they are inferior and we don't need to

have same regard for them. So, that's the theme for me that is important in *Westworld* (24-year-old female student, Georgia).

The way these two interviewees connected dots and identified commonalities between living entities with the autonomous technology, and then critically reflected on the place of human in this network of interrelationships, echoes the new understanding of the human subjectivity as seen by posthuman theorist Rosi Braidotti. She suggests that posthuman ethics requires 'acknowledging the ties that bind us to the multiple 'others' in a vital web of complex interrelations. This ethical principle breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality and one-ness...' (Braidotti, 2013: 100). It is the vision of non-unitary human subject who has 'enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others...' (Braidotti, 2013: 49-50). In other words, her version of human subjectivity is fluid, or 'nomadic' as she calls it. It is removed from the center of all things and repositioned in broader socio-cultural as well as ecological context. Thus, it is co-dependent on other species and technology, rather than exploitative, separate or most importantly, superior, the position which sanctions oppression of other beings and even other 'sexualized, racialized' humans who are seen as inferior in any ways, who are 'reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies' (Braidotti, 2013: 15).

In light of ongoing transformations that incorporate advanced technology more and more into everyday life, when the trajectory of development is moving towards merging of technology with biology, and even with humans, 'we can no longer think about being human in the same way we used to' (Pepperell, 2003: IV). What we need is new frames of reference 'new social, ethical and discursive schemes of subject formation' (Braidotti, 2013: 100). These new philosophical ideas are necessary to both help us describe current changes that are underway (Pepperell, 2003: 13) and to make us fitter, more efficient within it. In this new kind of order, what humankind might become is 'subject that works across differences and is also internally differentiated' (Braidotti, 2013: 49).

It is something akin to this sort of expansion of self-understanding and place within the complex system of relations that these two participants referred to during research interviews with particular clarity. This is what they articulated as they engaged in critical reflection and spoke of *Westworld's* human-android relationships in emotive terms.

Concluding Remarks

The objective of this study was to critically examine audience engagement modes with narratively complex television dramas such as *Westworld* and then analyze results from the philosophical perspective of posthumanism which reimagines humans as collaborative species with technology and non-human others. More specifically, the research turned to audience members to find out what it is that complex narratives offered them in their television entertainment experience, and then, how their engagement with *Westworld* connected to the reformation of their identities and sense of the self in relation to technological advances towards artificial intelligence. Through the route of qualitative audience research, this study attempted to tap into the dynamics of post-humanist thinking among media audiences of entertainment television.

In correspondence to the global reach of *Westworld*, transnational audience members were brought together for semi-structured qualitative interviews. The research analysed their engagement modes with *Westworld's* narrative from the point of poetics of television storytelling. Then, it put together viewers' deliberations about Android representations in the TV drama in connection to their identity work.

In part, this thesis tried to address the existing gap in science fiction television research which is considered to be undertheorized in the field of media studies (Hockley, 2015). In particular, it attempted to fill this blind spot by examining the ways in which science fiction television audiences engage in the identity work of who they are (Gray, 2008: 54-58) and

who they might become (Hall, 1996) from the standpoint of posthumanism. Hence, the research bridged the field of audience studies with posthuman theory and placed focus on the broader concept of *human identity* rather than on narrower categories of identity which is usually the subject of research within the scope of cultural studies.

The research asked the following questions: In what ways do viewers engage or disengage with complex narrative in television drama *Westworld*? How does the poetics of storytelling in *Westworld* connect with audience identities and the technology of artificial intelligence and how can this be understood from posthumanist point of view?

Complex narratives in television drama are for slow and solo consumption

In connection to the first question, based on the case of *Westworld*, the given qualitative research argues that complex narratives invite audience members into intensive cognitive and affective modes of engagement. The combination of both elements maximizes their viewing experience which becomes similar to puzzle solving, therefore immersive and satisfying. However, for a complex drama narrative to be fully appreciated, slow and focused viewing is required.

The question of immersive experience is important in the broader media context. Whether a narrative can attract a viewer into the storytelling, will determine if s/he will return to it and this is decisive because in current fragmented media environment (Napoli, 2011), narratives are ubiquitous, and audiences are provided with a vast number of choices. More importantly, they have previously unmatched control over the process of their media consumption which means that they can go anywhere, at any time to experience what they want (Jenkins, 2006). Hence, the more immersive the narrative, the more audience loyalty it can sustain. Complex TV dramas such as *Westworld* cater for such need of immersive experience.

Implications of viewing conditions

As this research has demonstrated, in the process of reception, the *context* of viewing plays a significant role which is characteristically individual when it comes to engagement with complex TV dramas. The overwhelming majority of the interviewed participants stated that their preferred mode of watching *Westworld* was when they were alone, at home, at the end of the day, after their work or study day was over. In rare cases, *Westworld* was watched in company but never with more than one person, with either a very close friend or a partner. Audience preferences for domestic, undistracted atmosphere suggests that complex, multilayered TV dramas, unlike their narratively linear counterparts, demand *focused attention* which is why choice is mostly made in favor of *solo viewing*.

The second finding entails that the pace at which complex narratives are consumed changes the way it is retained and understood. By design, complex TV dramas motivate repeated watching (Mittel, 2015) in order to discern references and appreciate many layers the story has in store. In other words, binge-watching complex TV dramas is only half the experience and if viewers choose to do so, they don't get to notice intricacies of the storytelling. This explains why those research participants who had binge-watched *Westworld* did not remember crucial parts of the narrative or had missed its intertextual elements. Therefore, complex narratives are designed for *slow viewing*.

Another interesting finding in relation to the pace of viewing is its use as a regulating measure against excessive emotional exposure to 'heavy themes' in the drama. One participant found *Westworld* emotionally so overwhelming that she had to watch only one episode at a time. Such use of pace highlights how much affective work can be required during engagement with complex narratives, taking us to the principal argument of this research that complex TV dramas involve the combination of emotional and cognitive commitment from viewers. In active cognitive work which is implied when we talk about complex narratives, paratexts or in other terms, texts that surround the core narrative, played a pivotal part for research participants. In the process of narrative comprehension

(Mittel, 2015), they provided external assistance (Fulton, 2005), helping them to make sense of the plot mysteries on *Westworld*.

Unlike TV drama viewing, engagement with paratexts is more of a *social practice*. Interviewees discussed and hypothesized about the show with friends. Some tried to solve mysteries and predict plot development by following online communities, shared various materials with friends in connection to theories that *Westworld* drew on, or simply talked about their impressions of episodes with them. On the whole, what the overall analysis suggests is that whether paratexts are used for the narrative comprehension, or as means for participation in the gratifying game of plot puzzle solving in its various forms, they serve as complementary but vital elements in immersing audience members in *Westworld's* storyworld.

Narrative as puzzle

Music on *Westworld* was perceived as more than purely mood inducing or a background element of storytelling by some participants. For example, in retrospect, the introduction theme music was described as mirroring the entire narrative dynamics, starting as controlled and ending by improvised playing, reflecting the evolution of artificial intelligence. The introduction of reinterpreted famous tunes from the recent history of popular culture into the Western setting of *Westworld* was also lauded as clever, and particularly appealing to the generation who grew up with it. These findings suggest that non-diegetic as well as diegetic types of music is received by viewers as a component that evokes intertextual associations, provokes their memories and when recognized, adds to the excitement of viewing experience. Music constitutes the piece of the narrative puzzle. It bridges affective with cognitive routes of engagement, sometimes it attends to the meaning during storytelling and sometimes is self-referential, waiting to be discovered by viewers to reward them with the sense of satisfaction.

Experimentation with time in the plot, namely running several parallel timelines, and the way it was received by viewers was another noteworthy finding. Such plot structure generated confusion in viewers but in the meantime, kept them engaged and mentally

stimulated, as they tried to make sense of the challenging scenes. Hence, temporary puzzlement rather than discouraging viewers provoked more interest, and as some participants confirmed, some sort of enjoyment too. As Mittel informs, this is because the temporary disorientation, allows viewers to build up their 'comprehension skills' and get pleasure from the process active engagement (Mittel, 2015). Likewise, Fulton posits that instability of meaning in temporally unconventional narratives encourage deeper engagement since they demand more attention and cognitive work from viewers in the process of interpretation (Fulton, 2005: 300).

Human identity crisis and posthumanism

The answer to the second research question is that via the poetic narrative element of point of view, audience members aligned with android characters but paradoxically, their emotional connection to fictional non-human others, only propagated the existing ideals of human identity. Counter to posthuman perspective, the dialectics between artificial and natural was further reinforced. Besides, the critical reflection of research participants on the super technologies of artificial intelligence, unveiled fear, mistrust, and lack of confidence towards what human, as a collective entity is at present. As to how this is explained through research findings below.

The storytelling device which was employed to orient viewers affectively (Corner, 2011) and spur their conversations to moral and ethical issues, was the point of view. As participant accounts have illuminated, viewers sympathized with android characters more than humans because their interiority was accessible and observable. Through placing the focus on the perspectives of the androids who were abused by human characters for sport, participants detached from the latter. Interviewees not only criticized human behavior but perceived them as others who defied established moral and ethical standards that human subjects usually abide by. While such trajectory is important for critical reflection in the process of identity formation for viewers, the finding suggests that affinity with androids was the outcome of distinctly anthropomorphic, or strongly human-like representations of these creatures which was even further reinforced by the use of point of view in

storytelling. Hence, androids evoked sympathy in viewers not despite their otherness but because of extreme similarity. Such anthropomorphizing only strengthens human-centered mindset (Braidotti, 2013) which is actively criticized by posthumanist thinkers for its tendency to deepen binaries of us versus others. In the given case, the extension of moral equivalence to non-humans was conditioned by resemblance. This led the thesis to argue that viewers' compassion towards androids was in fact, sympathy for the representations of human ideals and human suffering, rather than essentially different creatures who may or may not have been similar but showed signs of being such.

Westworld with its unconventional, multilayered and emotionally evocative portrayal of the theme park with its human and non-human subjects, inspired interviewees to reflect on their own being in the world. Several research participants articulated quite similar insights about parallels between programmed androids on *Westworld* and 'conditioned' human subjects in socio-cultural environment. On the one hand, meanings that *Westworld* generated made them aware of limitations of their own being as dependent on broader context, but on the other hand, because of this realization, their sense of the self was exposed to them as fragile and contingent. So, as much as *Westworld* prompted some of the interviewed viewers to shape the idea of their subjectivity through reflection, the show also destabilized it.

In their contemplations about robots becoming conscious on *Westworld*, participants drew many connections to ongoing technological advances in the real world. In the meantime, some interviewees pointed out that *Westworld* was not offering a new perspective with its narrative development but recycling well-trying myth of machines turning against humans. While all of them were convinced that humanity would create artificial consciousness in the future, some participants maintained that this technology would pose danger because of its lack of emotions, as well as ethical and moral standards that humans ideally abide by. Those who thought artificial intelligence would be modeled on humans, envisioned it as very similar, even in terms of emotional sensitivity, but still implied to the necessity of keeping it under control. The notion of control was justified by the need of restraining other sentient beings from any potential retribution towards humans. Underneath it all,

the main source of risk in this version of future was humanity itself. Other interviewees criticized the idea of creating human replicas and underscored that humanity had better chances of reaching its most potential if artificial intelligence was kept in its machinic boundaries and filled those gaps where humans are inefficient. Another didn't perceive artificial intelligence plausible within foreseeable future but expressed worries about corporations who would reinforce already existing inequalities and cause human suffering by owning super technologies. In this scenario too, humanity was turning against itself.

In sum, whether interviewees argued about differences or similarities between human and artificial intelligence, their reasoning was rooted in robust anthropocentrism. The imagined entity was measured against or within frames of what humans are, and what those entities should be or cannot be. Hence, in their reasoning, interviewees were reinstating and cementing existing conceptions about human identity which once again, has been criticised for its exclusionary nature, rigidity, antagonism to others, as well as fear of fluidity and multiplicity (Haraway, 1985). On the other hand, with their implicit fear of uncertainty, and their disbelief in humankind, interviewees pointed to the crisis in self-identity which could be understood as the reflection of undergoing volatilities at structural scale. As Frosh explains, 'everything that happens resonates on the subjective level' (Frosh, 1991: 73) and what viewers witness happen around is the ambivalence of discourses around technological advances that are 'both exhilarating and disturbing, both enrapturing and unsettling, both exciting and threatening, both the source of gratification and of persecution' (Frosh, 1991: 149).

Against such background, were those few who brought up other themes apart from humans in their consideration of techno future. They shifted focus on animal suffering in the real world and connected it to representations of android abuse on *Westworld*. By asking what makes humans distinguished species and why artificial intelligence or animals could not be seen as equal, they demonstrated the type of thinking which scholars label as the posthuman turn (Braidotti, 2013; Pepperrell: 2003). Such mindset perceives the self, as tied to 'multiple others' by expanded ethical principles and 'breaks up the fantasy of unity, totality, and oneness' of human identity (Braidotti, 2013). However, it must be highlighted

that those who had posthuman arguments were in the minority which implies that new understandings about what it means to be human in the world of posthuman technologies (Pepperell, 2003) were barely present amongst research participants.

In conclusion, what this case has illuminated is that *Westworld*, as narratively complex TV drama, did indeed manage to engage viewers with great cognitive and emotional intensity but the reality it plugged audience members into through fiction, looked neither confident nor optimistic about future or present, for that matter. The research demonstrated that *Westworld*, as a symptomatic entertainment media text of its times, was not about escapism but about the rigorous internal dialogue of audience members, who tried and made sense of their own identities, their realities and their place in the face of current seismic technological changes. The mirror *Westworld* held up to viewers, however, reflected their own mistrust towards human shortcomings and moral inadequacy. The future that the most interviewed audience members predicted was hazy and precarious in which humans were still the measure of all things but more vulnerable against powerful technologies.

In more general terms, what this thesis has demonstrated is that artifacts of popular culture such as television entertainment and more specifically, narratively complex, immersive dramas provide critical space for reflection to their audiences. They enable intensive internal and external dialogue about the most pressing issues of the day, the process in which reformation of identity and subjectivity is possible. This argument resonates with Hermes's understanding of popular culture as 'a domain in which we may practice the reinvention of who we are' (Hermes, 2005: 4). The practice that takes place by engaging us 'with both our hearts and minds-in many questions having to do with how we should live' (Dahlgren, 2009: 141-142).

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Appendix

Appendix A

Interview guide

Conditions of watching

1. Can you describe your typical way of watching Westworld?
Atmosphere
Company
Binge-watching vs episode by episode?

Engagement

Genre

2. What is your opinion about Westworld as sci-fi?
3. What are other sci-fi films, TV series you like?

Narrative

4. How would you recall the beginning of the show?
5. What was the most memorable moment for you from the drama?
6. What do you think of the ending of the show?
7. What is your opinion about:
Characters
Music
Settings
8. What emotions does watching WW evoke in you?
9. What is your opinion of the plot? Manipulation with time?

Artificial Intelligence

7. How is AI represented in WW?
8. Which humanoid robot is your favorite character?
9. How has the show (if at all) inspired you to think about AI?

10. What are your thoughts about violence against AI in the show?

Identity

11. In what ways are humans and humanoid robots similar or dissimilar in the show?

12. What are your thoughts about moral issues addressed in the drama?

Paratexts

13. Do you ever check wikies, Reddit or other online discussion platforms to learn more about the story?

14. Do you discuss Westworld with your texts and what do these talks focus on if you can recall?

Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix B

Interview transcript

Warm-up conversation: Fear for me is the most interesting part of it. The way they cultivate the atmosphere of fear about AI. And this suspense, there was this kind of the relationship between the AI and real humans. There was a cultivated feeling of fear in the audience. I could only ever watch an episode at a time and when I watch TV series I tend to binge-watch them. So, I watch all of them in two days and with Westworld I had to stop after each episode. I could only watch an episode a day because it left me with...like a strange sensation about my own sense of identity what it actually means to be a human because interaction between the characters...there were some characters that made me doubt their own humanity or what it meant to be human and that creates a feeling of fear in the audience...what it actually is to be human and whether there is any distinction because you want to believe, I find as a human, you want to believe that you are something special... something, kind of transcendent about being human. That you mean something more than just being a collection of body parts and impressions and ideas. And then WW brought me close to that question and it brought me closer in an emotive way as opposed to academic way. So, I could read a lot of that type of content and not be affected by it but their use of image and use of physical violence as well, just developed that fear. The physical violence is not necessarily connected but it heightens feeling of fear and then you can relate that again to your own sense of humanity. Bernard for example, him questioning the fact that he was not a human do you know? When he exhibited all the characteristics of what you'd think it means to be human and then the twist half way through the series was really disturbing. The feeling of fear he created in the managing director, the Danish actress, the one whom he killed, the feeling of fear in her that all the relationships have been a lie and you want to believe that your interactions are genuine. The killing scene was truly traumatic. This calling into questions all of your interactions, how can you be sure? I put a lot of story in my interactions of people and seek out genuine connections with people, beyond something that is superficial, I want to connect with people at a deeper level and then what it does actually mean the superficiality or the genuineness of your connections with people? Are they real? So, I saw this being very symbolic in this character had had an intimate relationship with each other and then finding out he was artificial destroyed their previous relationship and then he destroyed her physically. So this destruction of you as a human is real around you, it's very metaphysical, it calls into question the nature of the reality around you. Then it calls into question the society you live in because we live in a very risk-orientated, capitalistic society which is very fearful, insecure, what's going to happen to us. Like what is our future as people? And it just really seems that series like

Westworld feeds into the culture of fear that already exists and playing off something that doesn't necessarily need to be negative. Why would artificial intelligence have to be portrayed in negative way? But this motif is evident not just in Westworld but I would say, nearly all media that I have seen.

Q. As I can see, you think that artificial intelligence is portrayed in a negative way in WW? Is that correct?

A. Yeah, because of this violence and it seemed to me as a threat. It does hurt you in the final episode. They work against the constraints that had been given to them by humans in order to claim their own independence and agency and claiming their independence and agency is done in a violent manner, like revolution as opposed to true non-conflict orientated type of...Come on, that's also a lot about what people want to see. People don't want to fucking see talking about you know, 'so how are we gonna manage our relationships in the future?'. They want action, they want to see something stimulating. For me, who is incredibly stimulated by the world, that's why I find it very intense and I could only watch only one episode at a time because it really triggered a lot of other feelings and also academic impulses I have, for someone who is interested in these ideas by post-human and metaphysics and what the nature of our reality is, a lot of connected thoughts happen, playing on very base emotions.

Q. How did you discover WW?

A. I only watched it a few months ago. It was recommended to me by a few people, by a female friend and a male friend of mine. I was looking for something to watch. It was through personal recommendations. They didn't tell me what would happen, just they were like, yeah, you will like this. People who knew me thought it would interest me.

Q. How would you watch WW typically?

A. Most of the time, at home, sitting in the couch, in the evenings which is when I normally watch series...hmm, I also used it as a distraction from the real world, I would say because it's also how I tend to watch series. For me it's very much like 'Oh, I don't want to deal with my reality right now'. Like a lot like home-based. It wasn't something I watched with friends, it was something that I watched individually. It was very much contained in my home environment, very much individual watching experience. Not something I wanted to share with people. I would watch it on my laptop.

Q. What is your opinion of WW as a sci-fi?

A. Production wise it was very well made and the cast was very well selected, very suitable for the characters. I also thought colours were very rich and created feeling of reality as opposed to other sci-fi or dystopian series where they tend to like, augment the colours, they have less saturation, I guess. For example, the OA which I watched recently which really struck me because it was far less saturated. That was definitely filming an unreality,

irreality and from the way it was made. With WW it was also the colours that they used the world that they created it was made to seem very real. I thought the structure was very clever. It left the audience always kind of hanging at the end of each episode and I liked that they did multiple twists, so it was very complicated in a way to watch because there were twists not just between characters themselves but you would be left doubting whether characters are real humans or artificial intelligence. They also put twists in the type of relationships between characters and also in the attitudes and values of the humans themselves. It really kind of contorted what it is to be created and I thought that was very interesting and also characters were very confused. The main female AI character, she was always confused, she didn't know what was happening which also left me feeling as a watcher also being confused. I empathized quite strongly with characters and I was also confused for her. I could feel the shock when she realized what her reality actually was what her relationships actually were inside that reality, it was really traumatic which I thought was very well done. Can also be replicated in real life, how is your relationships always changing, always confused, you don't really know who the person is. So, I thought it was interesting how paralleled themes were to real life and the complexity of it, it had many, many layers. I thought all the pace was good actually, like I find a lot of HBO series to be very fast. Of course there's a lot of violence and sex in WW but it seems to have purpose rather than being gratuitous itself.

Q. What other sci-fi works come to your mind?

A. The first one was the X-machina, also about a relationship with AI character, and Her also about relationship with AI. For me that was one of the main themes that I took from it, relationships between humans and non-humans. It made me think of that. Even though I watch a lot of sci-fi or dystopia, mostly how does a non-human and human interact and how does that make a human feel. When it comes to books, I think I am more familiar with counter-factuals, I guess it's a sub-genre. Like Philip K. Dick it's considered his brand of sci-fi. For example Star Trek is also sci-fi but for me Philip K. Dick does counter-factuals and he plays off the real world whereas Star Trek is something very other worldly. Whereas what Philip K. Dick writes could be about what is happening, slight distortion of the world. So, I like dystopian fiction that is based on real world, things like, I Burn Paris for example. For me dystopian element is what I would read lot. Even like the Plague. It's also a dystopian, slightly sci-fi work. Star Wars for example is a very different experience for me because I know it's not real however, if I'm reading something that is counterfactual or is embedded in real world, I'm far more emotionally affected by it and questions a lot more. That's why I'm affected by WW because it's a possible truth and near-possible truth.

Q. How do you remember the beginning of the story?

A. I remember watching the first episode and thinking 'God how the fuck are they going to progress this?'. I could imagine that to be very boring if they were just doing same narrative over and over again because I think they run the narrative more than three times

in the first episode. I wasn't convinced by the first episode, yeah, it was good but it didn't seem anything special, it didn't seem like they were going to be able to develop the plot in a way that could hold my attention. But Yeah. I remember specifically that, like the repetition. I found that tedious. I always remember the part where he gets off the train. Again the male AI, getting off that damn train with that damned music, this fucking music and the people having asking him if he wants to join for some adventure and you know, walking past the brothel and meeting Dolores.

Q. How about ending?

A. The ending was very apocalyptic. It was almost like a caricature of an apocalyptic zombie film. You know with AI waiting in the distance, in the dark, in the forest with the unsuspected audience who think that they are safe inside this reality and then William almost being surprised but in a positive way, like he finally achieved his end. I remember this very positive resignation of his-I wouldn't say joy, I can't pinpoint his emotion that I could sense-and the kind of sense of finality. The sense of ending was very well done but also played off a lot. Like apocalyptic horror films, like this is the end. That was very much driven into these human characters, sitting and waiting. Oh, also I found it very interesting, how the show made me doubt the human nature of the humans. So there was this young female member of the board who was talking a lot, and I was like, 'is she human, is she not human?' I really had that feeling during last two episodes but she was also in this collection of people and I thought OK she's human because she's going to be killed but we don't know. But I really had the sense that everyone is going to be killed. Maybe it's not actually going to happen and it probably won't because of the way they run but I very much felt that this is the end and everyone is going to die.

Q. What was the most memorable scene in the show for you?

A. Probably like the violence when William drags off to rape her even though it called into question the nature of rape because it was actually the character that she wanted but she couldn't...I would say it's rape but then again she's an artificial intelligence. So for me it also distorted a lot of those terms. Is something rape when it's happening to something that's a character programmed inside Virtual reality. Is that still a rape scene? For me it was a rape scene. Also the scene where one of the characters, those kind of off and he's standing with a big rock in his hands hitting himself on the head. That really stuck with me. The scene, it's actually really beautiful where the brothel owner is inside the lab with the lab technician and he's experimenting on a bird and he's trying to make it fly and the bird is flying around. For some reason that bird really stuck with me but I guess that's a lot to do with the bird's motif, freedom, flying, etc. Or this character in the last episode who's sitting in the train, gets off the train when she makes that decision, when she exhibits agency but you don't know if it's agency because all the stuff has been programmed into her to get out so yeah, the violence and those turning moments. The scene also when Dolores realizes

that she has reached the center of the maze and William explains to her who he is and she is traumatized by it.

Q. Let's go back to the music theme in the show. Can you tell me more about it?

A. I can only remember the music from the brothel on this automated machine. I was thinking about it, it's that music that's on that automated piano player that just goes over and over and over again that stops but is repeated and that repetition of those few lines, yeah, it's the start of every narrative. I guess there was other music because in TV shows there tend to be different type of music but that's the only one I remember and I also remember the scene where Maeve stops the music that irritates her and actually stops it. I can understand that because the music when it goes over and over and over, it gets into your head.

Q. What is your opinion about settings within the series?

A. You mean two different worlds? I was very confused at the start. I was like, do they shrink them down and put them in this tiny world because you see it in the control room, this tiny model and I was like, where are the people, where do they go? Because there's also a scene where they are getting ready, you know William and his companion getting ready to go into the world. I was like, what the fuck? Where do they go? They go through a door. I would be like, well, it's a sci-fi and maybe they shrink them down and put them in there and they're watching them. This confusion I do like the way they didn't give away that much because by the end you do understand that OK they do go up through these lifts into certain sections. It's divided into sections so it's real in the physical world but I really felt that the size is distorted in some way and I can't put my finger on it because the scale, the characters in the AI world travel did not for me seem to be representative of the scale of land they actually had in the real world because the characters could travel for days by horseback to the outer edges of the world. That's a fucking big amount of territory so I also found it a bit unrealistic in way but then again I'm European so I find it really difficult to visualize a landscape where there is actually that much free land. I know of course there are spaces in Russia or America where are these massive tracts of land that have no people but from the European perspective I just find it very difficult to connect with that how is there so much land available for WW. How do people get there by train and they go through this door onto a train and the train brings them into the WW? I found that very difficult. There's also lifts for staff members for different sectors but it means there must be some sort of network underneath the entire WW that's how they get into different sectors and humans that are playing in the game go in by train...how? It didn't make sense for me physically. It didn't need to. I wasn't totally disturbed by it but for me that was a flaw. It didn't make sense within the boundaries of space-time. I didn't reflect that much on it but now in discussion, I'm like, how did that work, how did they have lifts for every sector? I thought that it was interesting that they needed to use in a quite heightened technological reality, how they still needed to use traditional methods of building. It seemed like a

mixture between traditional and new world which also heightened the fact that it was very close to our reality. Surely it could all have been hologram, why not? I also liked a lot of trains in it, a lot of doors, a lot of lift. Like transport was really important if you want to talk about the relationship between two worlds. Transport and communication structures are really important at the moment, how they are changing...train as a method of accessing different world really stuck with me or these lifts that almost seemed out of tune with the technical reality. When they can program AI and you use very rudimentary transport system, it didn't seem to kind of fit, in a way so I guess, there's some symbolism behind it. The way the guests arrive by train, the way they go into the world is also by train. And the contrast between this high tech in the real world was very clean, very silver...but actually it wasn't that high-tech if you look at the structures around, apart from what they can do with AI. They still have escalators, they still have a receptionist.

Q. What would you expect instead?

A. I would expect more, because it seems that at that level of a validity to replicate a human being and this type of technology they used for those seems to imply a world which is technologically more advanced than ours, however they're still using the systems that we have now. It wasn't cohesive for me. For example, in the real world, in the scientific center, working space of AI, the fact that there were basements where people had never gone into that had these old computers and filing systems and broken lights...how did they have broken lights when upstairs they have shortage for technicians for maintenance men. How could you have such control over WW, knowing where everyone is all the time but not have so much control over your own space. But it's the illusion of control over WW. It was almost such a fucking trope, you know. The dark space in the basement with all of the old equipment where all of the bad things happen. I found that little bit contrived.

Q. How do you remember emotions that would come up while watching these episodes?

A. That's a difficult question. I guess I found it quite absorbing so, I then must have experienced emotions while watching it but I guess a surprise a lot, at every twist that happened because they kind of revealed plot twists quite regularly after the first few episodes. So surprise. I felt a kind of disgust at how a lot of the human characters could treat other people that looked human but they knew they weren't and I thought, 'God we're so easily convinced' as species that if we're told something is not human than we're going to treat it like an animal, basically. I felt kind of disgusted by that. I was like, what does that say for us as a species. How can people be so callous? How can people experience so many negative emotions that they need a place to get them out? These negative emotions also involved destroying other humans. People need wars or people need to kill? I also didn't like a lot William's companion. This other male character would say a lot like, because William at the start would show a lot of empathy and sympathy towards the

characters and not want to harm or engage negatively. And then , his companion being like, 'what's wrong with you, they're not human, get over it'. An then, also made me think of animal rights issues. I'm a vegetarian an for me it had a very strong parallel to how we treat animals. It was very strongly articulated by human guests that they are not human, we can do what we want with them. That made me think about, like I'm vegetarian because I'm not into factory farming. I think we need to kill animals sometimes to eat but I really don't like this production of animals and the food cycle. Maybe sometimes you need to kill a person but production of humanlike figures for the exploitation and use by the humans themselves. They only existed as objects of gratification and objects to be harmed or used in whatever way humans wanted which kind of is disgusting. I would be like, 'what the fuck is wrong with us' and how we can go into someone else's world and do that as well which is also a lot of stuff related to anthropology and colonization of another world and how western societies can go in whether with hard of soft power into another society and take them 'yeah, these people are not anything, they're like animals, they're not human, they're not the same as us, they're lower than us so therefore we can do whatever we want with them'. For me that lacks a basic dignity. I was kind of disgusted by real humans, actually, the guests. The thing that such a park can exist, yeah, why not? But just the fact that it was so manufactured also stressed a lot of its demand that guests want violence, they want bloodshed, they want sex, they want to do what they want to do and that involves these things. and I was like, 'wow! We're such basic creatures'. I thought it was also funny that maybe HBO didn't know themselves but it made me draw parallels with the media that people want because there's also such demand for the media which is violent or sexually explicit. That for me was done on purpose. It thematized certain issues in our society. However, I don't know if HBO producers think like that. They were showing people who needed to get out their rage and explore the part of themselves which is not allowed to be explored in the real world. The emotional aspect is probably why I could watch one episode at a time because for me it wasn't a brain-fluff in a way that a lot of TV series are. It called on some heavy themes.

I can remember the instantaneous emotional reactions "Ew! How do you do that? I don't want to know people like that".

Q. What about manipulation with time in storytelling? How did you perceive dual timeline?

A. It definitely didn't help. In terms of distinguishing between two world, even then it was still like distortion with timeline. It's like Bernard AI being a physical recreation of Arnold who worked on the actual world, very fucked up concept. I found the timelines to be very difficult to keep track of. Obviously it added to the attraction of the series obviously for me, because it kept me engaged and interested and slightly confused and wanting to find out more and wondering who's doing what when where? Who's this character? What's going on? But I don't think it helped in any way for me to understand. It left me confused which I guess was also the point. I think it was the repetition of the timelines which was

good for establishing the center of the world because you get off the train, into this time and you can kind of go out. those are really clear starting points for time, like time starts when you go off the train. I found it very confusing but I liked it. I did find it disturbing how much it affected Dolores when she realized that her version of time was completely distorted from the real world perception of time. I found it very unpleasant to watch. I didn't necessarily understand it to the fullest but how did they run so many narrative in parallel and ensure the it ended at certain time. Because if everyone was undergoing a different narrative and when all the characters get killed, they have to come in and clean the scene, so that means all narratives must end at a certain time in order for them to be able to come in but I felt really confused by that. If I was a guest, how does my narrative finish at the same time as that person's narrative? How do they separate out 50 narratives in that space?

Q. How is artificial intelligence represented in the show?

A. I think it's quite negative. I don't think it was positive at all. A threat towards humanity. Calling into question nature of one's relationships, self, what it is to be human? I think it can also be positive if you call into question what it is to be human but for me it was very negatively introduced. The AI was something that had to be repressed and controlled. It was implied that they couldn't be allowed agency because then they would...something that should be feared, controlled, manipulated but should be harmed.

Q. If you would take out violence from the equation, do you think AI would still be envisioned as a threat in the show?

A. Maybe I could see more positive elements, like people having relationships. This Danish woman and Bernard seem to have good relationship. So why not? Why couldn't you have a wholesome very human relationship with AI if you didn't know. I guess that's positive but for me, the idea that they had to be controlled made me think that they were something that...having to delete their memories, there as like a fear from humans about what would happen if we didn't control the AI. We can't give them agency, we have to retain power. A lot of issues around power because if we give up power, something bad will happen. You can see it in the society, if monarchy gave up power, the people would revolt and kill them all which they did which is also what happened in WW. It kind of showed that if you tried to hold on to power something negative will happen. It made almost historical parallel which was also funny because it was WW, Western, older historical period.

Q. Is there any humanoid character that you found interesting in any way?

A. The problem is that I found the brothel owner interesting until I realized that she'd been programmed to have agency. I found human characters more interesting because of their motivations whereas for me humanoid characters were trapped, created.

Q. What about human characters?

A. Anthony Hopkins's character was interesting because I was so unsure about his motivations, all throughout, even to the end. That's what I found interesting, wondering about their motivations while humanoid characters were stripped of motivation. I also wondered at the motivation of the other characters who were working there. Is this their job? Blah, blah, blah. But in terms of the creator, I found him the most interesting. I kind of wished that they had looked at him a bit more. For me it also blurred the line between someone having positive motivation or negative motivation. Why did he want to do this? Why did he want to continue? Did he want to give the humanoid characters agency, was he just looking for some type of retribution, sometimes I wondered for corporate players who were coming in, was he resentful? Did he feel abandoned by the partner? I was unable to really discern what pushed him forward.

Q. Has the show inspired you to think about technology in a different way?

A. I don't think so because I would seek out the themes I am interested and also in my own life, like metaphysics, what is the world, what is a genuine relationship, time and how it works. It made me think more about, I don't know why not see AI on the same level as a human? What makes us so special as humans? It didn't inspire me but brought back things that I had already thought about, like why should humans be so distinguished as species, but this again is related to the theme of animals. What makes it so right for the Western world to have entire authority and power over people from different places. For me it was kind of the exact same in terms of power. What makes humans to think that they have the right of power over non-human life-form? It did disturb me that humans create the life however when it maybe gets to the stage when the humanoid would create the humanoid, then it would be different. That's probably one of the fundamental that's different for me. When you as a human create something, in terms of property, your ownership: do I own this humanoid and have a right to do what I want because I made it? Do I have right to do with this cow because I bred it? Is it property or is it something more? Or even, am I my husband's property. Going back only a fucking hundred years ago when I would've had as a woman, no rights. I would've been a piece of property. Or if I was from a different ethnic background to go back a hundred years, less... If I was black... a piece of fucking property. So these issues of property and ownership have been replayed in our society over and over and over again. This is another dimension which we would have to call into question when the thing that we create and the thing that we own starts to exhibit something more or requests something more.

Q. Have you looked into any online discussions?

A. Nope. Oh! one thing that relates, maybe this is very odd coincidence, I have started writing a narrative about the fourth dimension with a friend of mine, actually,

ironically around the same time as I was watching the WW about the relationship between the time and space so I was thinking about the nature of time in WW. I actually was looking at quite a lot of other stuff about time and duration because of this writing of a fictional narrative of my own. So maybe that's kind of related. I didn't even realize it at that time.

Q. What were the themes you discussed with your friends in relation to WW?

A. Probably we talked more about the actual characters in a very sensationalist point of view. I think that not everyone wants to watch a TV show and talk about it academically afterwards and talk about the nature of one's reality and so on. I think themes in WW are so intense that I could have academic discussions with many people about sex and the city, about feminism, gender, representation of women because we know more about it. It's more widely discussed in the mainstream whereas a lot of the discussions I had with people where like, Oh my god, I can't believe what Bernard happened to be...very superficial discussions in a way. I think in WW a lot of the themes are quite relevant because they are very near future which makes people almost nervous to talk about or people maybe overwhelmed. I can see why. I was overwhelmed by the show. I also know people who didn't finish it because she thought it was so intense. I think that it's quite a complex show, therefore quite difficult to talk about with any substance with a lot of people. This is a really interesting way of expressing a lot of the things that were inside my head. Lot of people watch TV shows for escapism in my opinion, and therefore to draw connections between the television show and the real world is maybe not something everyone wants to do. I have friend who are interested in arthouse films but it's more established as a form of media which is meant to think about. Whereas TV shows, like series, it's quite new as having more substance.

End of conversation

Appendix C

Participant	Open Codes	Categories	Themes	
A. 28, female, Ireland, Project producer	1	Cultivating feeling of fear about AI in audience	Media representations	Fear (Affective orientation)
	2	Usually binge-watches. With WW could only watch 1 episode at a time	Viewing habits (binge-watch vs. slow-paced)	Pace, Narrative consumption
	3	The show left with strange sensation about her own identity and what it means to be human	Self-reflection	Identity
	4	Bernard revelation disturbing	Plot twist disturbing	Emotion, Narrative
	5	Wishes to believe that there's something transcendent about being human	Transcendence of human, exceptionalism	Identity, anthropocentrism
	6	WW brought to the question in emotive way	Emotional engagement	Emotional Engagement & (Affective orientation)
	7	Use of violence in WW heightens feeling of fear and it relates to the sense of humanity	Violence, fear, humanity	Fear (Affective orientation), Identity
	8	Relationships between Bernard and the Danish woman a lie. Wants to believe hers is genuine.	relationships, personal reflection, sense-making	Identity
	9	Killing scene traumatic	Representation of violence, emotions	Affective orientation, emotional Engagement

10	Calling into questions your interactions	Self-reflection	Identity, Subjectivity
11	Wanting to connect with people at deeper level. What does your relationship with other people mean?	Personal reflection, sense-making	Identity, Subjectivity
12	Calls into question the nature of the reality around you	Sense-making, reflection	Subjectivity
13	Calls into question the society you leave in. Risk-oriented, capitalistic, fearful, insecure society	Reflection on context and relations of subject to it	Subjectivity, Identity
14	WW feeds into the culture of fear	Affective orientation	Affective orientation
15	AI doesn't necessarily need to be negative	AI not negative	Posthuman
16	Fear motif evident in nearly all media	Affective orientation	Affective orientation
17	Violence seems a threat.	Violence	Affective orientation
18	AI work against human imposed constraints. Claiming independence through violence	AI rise through violence	Othering, Identity
19	People want to see action, want to be stimulated	Spectatorship	audience engagement
20	Finds it intense. Could watch one episode at a time	Emotion, paced viewing	Pace, emotional engagement
21	Interested in the ideas of posthuman, metaphysics, nature of reality	Posthuman	posthuman

22	A lot of thoughts playing on base emotions	Thoughts, emotions	Cognitive and affective work
23	Recommended by friends	Trust, taste	Trust, taste
24	Watch at home, in the evening	Domestic space	Domestic space
25	Used as a distraction	Escape	escape
26	Didn't watch with friends, didn't want to share the experience with others	Solo viewing	Solo viewing
27	Good production, good cast	Production quality	Quality TV
28	Rich colours, creating feeling of reality unlike other dystopian series	Production quality, genre unconventionality	Quality TV, genre unconventionality
29	Clever structure	Narrative	narrative
30	Audience left hanging at the end of each episode, multiple twists	Cliff hanger, twists	Narrative
31	Complicated to watch	Complexity	Complex narrative
32	Twists in relationships between characters and attitudes and values of humans	Character relationships, human values	Narrative, values
33	Characters were confused	Character development	Narrative
34	Main female AI character confused. She was left feeling confused for her too.	Character development, viewer compassion	Point of view, narrative
35	Could feel the shock when she realized her reality & relationships	Viewer compassion, character development	Point of view, narrative

36	Applies to reality: relationships changing, never know who the person really is	Personal reflection of context	Identity, Subjectivity
37	Paralleled themes to real life, complex, had many layers	Relatable, Complex narrative	Complex narrative
38	A lot of violence and sex but with purpose. Not gratuitous	Affective orientation, quality	Affective orientation, quality TV
39	Likes dystopian fiction, based on real world	Genre familiarity	Genre
40	Emotionally affected by WW because it's a near-possible truth	Emotional engagement	Emotional engagement
41	Narrative repetition in the first episode three times	Narrative	Narrative
42	Didn't seem like plot could develop due to tedious repetition	Narrative	Narrative
43	Male AI getting off the train, meeting Dolores	Narrative beginning	narrative
44	The ending apocalyptic	Narrative ending	Narrative
45	William's positive resignation and his sense of finality	Character development	narrative
46	Show made doubt human nature of humans	Morality	morality
47	Female board member's human identity suspicious	Character	Narrative
48	Sense that everyone is going to be killed and it is the end	Narrative end	Narrative

49	It won't happen because how they run shows	Industry conventions	Industry conventions
50	Rape scene calling into question the nature of rape	Rape, moral quandary	Morality
51	Is it rape if it is happening to virtual program?	Rape, moral quandary	Morality
52	For her, a rape scene	Rape scene	Morality
53	Maeve gets off the train, exhibits agency	Character agency, character development	narrative
54	Dolores reaches maze center. Gets traumatized by learning who William is	Character development	Narrative
55	Can only remember music on the automated machine	Music, Narrative	Music, Narrative
56	Music repeats, start of every narrative	Music, Narrative	Music, Narrative
57	Remembers how Maeve stops the music	Character, music	Narrative
58	Size in WW seemed distorted	Size distortion in the show, storyworld	Narrative
59	Characters could travel for days	Space distortion in the show, storyworld	Narrative
60	WW territory unrealistically big	Size distortion in the show, storyworld	Narrative
61	She is European and finds it difficult to visualize that much free land	Personal experience, viewpoint	Subjectivity
62	WW settings didn't make sense within the	Time-space distortion, storyworld	Narrative

	boundaries of space-time		
63	Mixture between traditional and new world heightened the fact that it was close to our reality	Making sense of story world	Narrative
64	Transport important in connecting two worlds	Storyworld	Narrative
65	Lifts out of tune with WW technological reality	Making sense of storyworld	Narrative
66	Contrast between two worlds	Storyworld	Narrative
67	Actually not that high tech if you look at the structure around	Storyworld	Narrative
68	To replicate human being imply technologically more advanced world than ours but still use systems that we have now. Not cohesive	Making sense of storyworld	Narrative
69	Broken lights, shortage in maintenance man, old computers and filing systems	Storyworld	Narrative
70	How can you control WW when you can't control your own space?	Making sense of storyworld	Narrative
71	Dark space where bad things happen is a trope.	Storyworld	Narrative
72	Episodes absorbing	Engagement	Engagement
73	A lot of surprise at plot twists	Plot twist	Narrative

74	Disgusted at humans that mistreated those who looked like human but knew weren't	Emotional engagement, characters	Emotional engagement, narrative
75	What does that say about us as species?	Reflection on human species	Collective identity
76	People callous who experience negative emotions and need a place to get them out	Reflection on character's morals	Morality
77	Negative emotions involved destroying other humans	Reflection on character's morals	Morality
78	Animal rights	Animal rights	posthuman
79	As a vegetarian saw strong parallels to how animals are treated	Comparing to animal treatment, identity	Posthuman, identity
80	Not into factory farming, production of animals	Disapproval of animal animals	Posthuman, identity
81	Humanlike figures existed as objects of gratification. disgusting	Emotion, characterisation, moral judgement	Emotional engagement, morality
82	What the fuck is wrong with us?	Reflective practice, moral judgement	Morality
83	Western society going into another society and taking them because they are different	Intrusion of West, difference	Morality, identity
84	Disgusted by guests	Emotional engagement	Emotional engagement
85	One episode at a time because emotionally demanding, heavy themes	Emotions, pace, narrative consumption	narrative, pace

86	Distortion with timeline	Time in narrative	Time, narrative
87	Timelines difficult to keep track of	Time, confusion	Time, narrative
88	Kept her engaged, interested, slightly confused	Engagement, confusion	Engagement
89	Dolores's discovery of time distortion disturbing. Unpleasant to watch	Character development, emotional engagement	Character, engagement
90	AI representation negative, threat to humanity	Affective orientation	Affective orientation
91	What it means to be human, negatively introduced	Negative representation of human	Human Identity
92	AI had to be repressed and controlled, feared, manipulated	AI vs. human representation, difference	Identity
93	Could have wholesome relationship with AI if you didn't know	Relationship with AI, Expanding circle, hidden difference	Posthuman, identity
94	A lot of power issues in WW, retain it, if given up something bad will happen	Clinging to power, fear	Power
95	Revolt against monarchy analogous to WW uprising	Making sense of the real world, historical parallel	Cognitive engagement
96	Maeve interesting until revealed programmed	Change in Character allegiance	Disengagement, narrative
97	Human characters interesting due to motivations, androids trapped and created.	Differentiating characters	Narrative, engagement

98	Curious about AH character's motivations	Engagement with Character	Engagement, narrative
99	Humanoids stripped of motivation	Differentiating characters	Engagement, narrative
100	Creator most interesting	Engagement with Character	Engagement, narrative
101	Not enough focus on him	Evaluating characterisation	narrative
102	Seeked out themes: metaphysics, time genuine relationship	Making sense of the world	Engagement
103	Made her think of AI as equal to human	Equalling AI	posthuman
104	What makes humans special?	Revising human position	posthuman
105	Why should be human distinguished? Relates to animals	Reconsidering human position	posthuman
106	West's authority over others	West vs. others	Identity, power
107	Humans' power over other life forms	Human power over others	Human Identity, power, posthuman
108	Women husband's property? rights Black in the past-a property	Critical reflection, questions of power	posthuman
108	Discussed characters with friends	Discussing with friends	paratext
110	Superficial discussions about WW with friends	Discussion with friends	paratext
111	Themes in WW relevant, makes people nervous and overwhelmed	Relevant themes make people nervous	Emotional and cognitive engagement

112	Overwhelmed by the show herself	Emotional engagement	Emotional engagement
113	Complex show, difficult to talk about with others	Complex TV drama	Complex TV drama
114	People watch TV for escapism, not everyone wants to draw connections to real world.	Escape	Engagement
115	TV series with substance something new	Quality on television	Quality TV

Appendix D





Let's talk about Westworld

Fellow Student

Do you watch TV drama Westworld and are eager to share your thoughts about it?

You are welcome to participate in the interview session as part of a research which focuses on cultural conversations about artificial intelligence.

Duration: 30-45 minutes.

Contact:

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