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## ARTIKEL

## Gendering the Machine: Cyber Revolt, the Male Voyeuristic Gaze and Fear of the Female (Body) in EX MACHINA, WESTWORLD and DER TATORTREINIGER

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Das dystopische Subgenre des *cyber revolt* war in den letzten Jahren in Film, Fernsehen und Literatur sehr beliebt. Bemerkenswert ist vor allem, wie häufig explizite Verweise auf feministische Diskurse in diesen Stoffen sind. Die Wahl der konventionellen Konstellation eines männlichen Schöpfers und seiner weiblichen Schöpfung ermöglicht es, die Geschlechterverhältnisse zwischen Männern und Frauen zu verhandeln. In EX MACHINA, WESTWORLD und der Folge E.M.M.A. 206 der deutschen Fernsehserie DER TATORTREINIGER können die Darstellungen der Cyberrevolte auch als Aufstand von Frauen gegen ihre Ausbeutung durch Männer verstanden werden.

Diese Filme sollten daher im Rahmen einer Wiederbelebung und Popularisierung des Feminismus (und der Angst davor) kontextualisiert werden, für die sie möglicherweise sogar symptomatisch sind. Die feministische Kritik an der Ausbeutung des weiblichen Körpers durch das Patriarchat und die anschließenden Fantasien einer erfolgreichen Ermächtigung von Frauen in diesen Erzählungen werden in zwei dieser Beispiele einer weiterhin ausbeuterischen Herangehensweise an den weiblichen Körper durch die Kameraarbeit gegenübergestellt. Während EX MACHINA und WESTWORLD damit die tiefen Widersprüche reproduzieren, durch die der neoliberale Feminismus gekennzeichnet ist, steht E.M.M.A. 206 im Einklang mit den Vorstellungen des Feminismus der zweiten Welle und vermeidet diese Widersprüche durch experimentelle Kameraarbeit.

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With developments in the field of artificial intelligence coming on in leaps and bounds, the dystopian sub-genre of cyber revolt has been remarkably popular in the past few years in both fiction and film. Though stories about robots developing a consciousness of their own have never really fallen out of fashion since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, their current popularity is remarkable for their frequent commentaries on contemporary gender relations and explicit references to feminist discourses. Choosing the conventional constellation of a male creator and his female creation seems to offer ample opportunity not only to address the moral and ethical qualms that the dream of creating life is haunted by, but also to negotiate gender relations between men and women. In the movie *EX MACHINA* (UK 2015, director: Alexander Garland), HBO's *WESTWORLD* (US 2016, idea: Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy) and the sci-fi episode *E.M.M.A. 206* (DE 2016, director: Arne Feldhusen) of the German television series *DER TATORTREINIGER* (DE 2011–2018, idea: Mizzi Meyer), the representations of cyber revolt can also be read as an uprising of women against their exploitation by men.

These stories should therefore be contextualized within a revival and a popularization of feminism (and the fear thereof) that they may even be symptomatic of. The feminist critique of patriarchy's exploitation of the female body and subsequent fantasies of successful female empowerment in these narratives are juxtaposed with a persistently exploitative approach to the female body through the camera work in two of these examples. This ultimately protects the viewer from the haunting specter of a female rebellion against patriarchal capitalism. While *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* hence reproduce the deep contradictions by which neoliberal feminism is marked, *E.M.M.A. 206*, in contrast, is aligned with notions of second-wave feminism and avoids said contradictions by means of an experimental approach to camera work.

## **1 Bodies that Speak**

The selection of examples for this paper is based not only on their temporal proximity, but, more significantly, on their shared character constellations and central conflicts based on both species and gender difference. *EX MACHINA*, *WESTWORLD* and *E.M.M.A. 206* could all be summarized as follows: An artificial, intelligent life form with a female body has been created by a man or a group of men. This life form has been

created with the purpose of exploiting it, both economically and sexually. This double exploitation is specific to the female subject, claims Di Minico: »In fiction and reality, women can suffer two times: first, because of political/authoritarian power, secondly through a male/sexist oppression« (71). However, throughout the course of the story, the male creator(s) fall(s) victim to a bloody revenge plot.

The first season of *WESTWORLD* introduces the female robot Dolores as a peaceful character with almost angelic features and the childlike innocence of *Alice in Wonderland* (and indeed, her blonde hairstyle and light blue dress are inspired by the Disney adaptation of Alice<sup>1</sup>). She does not know that her home, *WESTWORLD*, is one of the many attractions of a huge adventure park for rich guests. Neither is she aware that she is a robot or that she is regularly beaten and raped by one of the park's most affluent investors, a sadistic man in a black hat. After each violation, her mind and body are reset like those of all the robots in the park. Her telling name Dolores – literally meaning pains (from lat. dolor) – signals to the viewer that pain is the main constituent of her existence, though she has not yet become aware of that, thus producing dramatic irony. During the course of the first season, Dolores gains consciousness of her situation, her nature and her history. By the end of the season, she has killed the park's creator and leads a robot rebellion into the second season.

In *EX MACHINA*, a scientist invites an insignificant employee of his company to his isolated mansion in the tropical rainforest. He reveals that he has created an intelligent robot named Ava and wants his employee to run the Turing test with it. It turns out that he has purposefully based the robotic design of the artificial intelligence on his employee's porn preferences to enable her to manipulate him. While initially, the two men seem to be antagonists – the megalomaniac scientist, who wants to be considered a God, and the humble boy-next-door, who thinks he can save the girl as a knight in shiny armor for the damsel in distress, the character constellation takes a surprising turn in the end with them both being exposed as selfish exploiters who both want to instrumentalize the female robot in one way or another – be it for fame and glory or for constructing themselves as the male hero

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed reading of Dolores as an Alice-like character, see Netolicky.

of the story. Ava kills her creator and leaves his employee behind to suffocate in the air-sealed mansion, as she steps out into the world as a free woman.

In E.M.M.A. 206 the protagonist of the show, a man who cleans crime scenes, is called to a lab of a big company. The scientists on location have created a robot to replace women as companions for men by offering a low maintenance alternative. One of the scientists tried to test run the sex function of the robot and during this, due to what appears to have been a malfunction, his penis was torn off leaving him to bleed to death. While mopping up the blood, the crime scene cleaner discusses the relations between men and women with the robot. Also, he witnesses the demeaning, sexist behavior of the scientists towards the female receptionist of the company. At the end of the episode, it is revealed to the crime scene cleaner that the receptionist is really a computer scientist, who has reprogrammed the robot to kill the scientist.

In the exposition of all three of these examples the visual language establishes the female robot as object and her creator(s) as subjects through the spatial arrangement of characters. In *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* the robots are placed behind glass walls like exhibition pieces – and indeed, they are showpieces to be admired not for themselves, but as representations of their male creator's genius. In addition to the glass box, a second sign of exposure as object has been added, in the case of *EX MACHINA*'s Ava through her transparent body parts that expose her as robot and in the case of Dolores in *WESTWORLD* through her nudity during technical check-ups, which exposes her both to the voyeuristic and the clinical gaze. Last but not least, in E.M.M.A. 206 the female robot is placed on a pedestal and fixed there as it is not yet able to walk without falling, which effectively reduces her to a statue, again to be looked at.

Much of what has already been written about gender and objectification in *EX MACHINA*, is also transferable to *WESTWORLD* and E.M.M.A. 206. Virginás, for instance, finds that in *EX MACHINA* »[t]he uncanny validity of Laura Mulvey's [...] observations [...] is supported by the extreme processes of objectification the female bodies [...] must undergo in these films« (290; see Di Minico 80–81, Henke 137 and Yee 86 for further discussions of *EX MACHINA* and the male gaze). Mulvey's seminal feminist media studies

paper on »Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema«, first published in 1975, aimed to demonstrate how the »unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form« (57). Initially, in all three of the selected examples, the female robot is established as a passive object of Mulvey's male voyeuristic gaze. The representation of the female robot bears much similarity to the role of the showgirl in Mulvey's analysis of classic Hollywood cinema:

Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. For instance, the device of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude. (62)

Likewise, the gaze of male characters (scientists and their guests in the lab) and of the spectator<sup>2</sup> are combined without breaking the narrative verisimilitude when the female robot is presented in contemporary cyber revolt fictions, as the visual exposition focusses on establishing the female robot as woman and machine (= thing/object) at the same time.<sup>3</sup> The female robot is thus doubly marked as object of the gaze.

## 2 Literary History and the Abject Female Robot

Fritz Lang's pioneering science fiction film *METROPOLIS* (DE 1927) is considered the earliest movie representing the motif of the female robot, but its gender dynamics, of course, stand in a much longer literary tradition of narratives of male creators

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<sup>2</sup> This includes viewers of all genders. While the gaze is male, the viewers taking up that gaze do not necessarily have to be male as well, but only need to be willing to momentarily identify with that viewing position (for further elaboration see Mulvey's afterthoughts on her essay).

<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the reciprocal relation between the erotic objectification of women and of technology, see Soukup, who suggests that »[t]he mythic/ideological implications of these semiotic codes involve the representation of sexualized, machine-like women and the fetishizing of commodities in film« (19).

and their female creations. Randy Gunzenhäuser's study of representations of robot bodies throughout history comes to the conclusion that myths of the artificial creation of life – more often than not – serve to reaffirm a notion of male authority over a variety of resources, including women:

Schöpfermythen stärken oft den männlichen Autoritätsanspruch, indem sie die Macht des Mannes über Raumwahrnehmung und -kontrolle, über Maschinen, Produktionsmittel, Frauen, Kunstwerke und Märkte propagieren und dementsprechend sowohl die Maschinen als auch den weiblichen Körper als Ort der Machtausübung definieren. (12)

Narratives of artificial creation render the female body a space for the demonstration of male power. Take, for instance, the early cyber revolt drama *R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots* by Czech playwright Karel Čapek, which was first staged in 1921. The play is set in a factory that produces synesthetic beings called ›robots‹. All scientists and engineers in the play are male. They are joined, at the beginning of the play, by a beautiful female activist, who wants to free the robots. Because of her beauty, they all fall in love with her. One of them even gets to marry her, and none of them seems to have any moral qualms building an exact robot replica of her – neither does she protest against this, for that matter.

In E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann* (1816), which Freud has famously used as an example to explain his theory of the uncanny, a beautiful, mostly mute, mechanical woman called Olympia is created by an evil alchemist. She functions as his tool to destroy another man, who tragically falls in love with her, goes mad, and kills himself. As in *EX MACHINA*, the artificial female is used as bait by the scientist, a trap for the naïve protagonist. Freud's reading of this text explored why it was a fear-inspiring story, and he took it as an example of how everything that evokes fear is somehow a defamiliarized return of something long familiar. Lacan further developed Freud's reflections on fear and the uncanny and suggested that anything that signals a state of in-betweenness, in particular between life and death, is uncanny; finally Kristeva has rooted this back to the state of being half inside and half outside the body of the mother, both dead and alive at the same time, in her concept of the abject. In doing

so, Kristeva introduces the concept of the female body as fear-inspiring and abject. Narrations of the creation of female bodies by men, of men as creators and women as objects, can be considered as attempts to express this fear and master it through the processes of narration and creation. Yet, during the cyber revolt, fear gains the upper hand. Barbara Creed's usage of Kristeva's theory for a reading of horror films, which exposes the fear of the monster to be a fear of the abject female body, can likewise be applied to most cyber revolt fictions. Like the body of the monster, the body of the robot is more often than not marked explicitly as female or feminized.

Returning to the literary predecessors of gendered cyber revolt narratives, this quick survey, of course, would not be complete without the Pygmalion myth. Though not involving robots of any kind, this text is also relevant to the genre of cyber revolt from the perspective of gender studies, because it is probably the earliest text that expresses the by now cemented gender roles of creator and creation. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the story of the sculptor Pygmalion who falls in love with his own creation, the statue of a beautiful woman, is a love story with a happy ending.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Gilbert's comical stage adaptation *Pygmalion and Galatea*, turns the animated statue into a disruption of the love lives of anyone around her. Beautiful and innocent, the artificial woman is represented as a threat. She almost – though unintentionally – causes the breakup of Pygmalion's marriage and, by extension, Pygmalion to be struck blind. In addition, her naïve questions about the humans and the world around her, expose the absurdities of human life. This last bit is a ground for comparison with E.M.M.A. 206, as the female robot in this story also keeps asking seemingly naïve questions that challenge the protagonist's ideas about women, relationships, and the very notion that women could be replaced comfortably by machines. Also, on the visual level, both artificial women are statues on pedestals.

In Gilbert's rendition of *Pygmalion*, the animated statue voluntarily goes back to being an inanimate object once she recognizes the havoc she has caused. This is where the contemporary examples in this paper take a drastically different turn of events. Ava and Dolores, for instance, do not go back to submitting silently to their objectification, but they emancipate themselves from their creators and



exploiters. In *EM.M.A. 206* the exploitation of a female sex robot is thwarted by a female employee who turns out to be a feminist undercover computer scientist. All three examples of cyber revolt are united in their deviation from the conventional narrative pattern of stories of male creators and female creations in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century in that – on the level of plot – the robot uprising is not only successful (as in *R.U.R.*) but explicitly coded as a female uprising against the male exploitation of their bodies. At first glance, this clustering of cyber revolt narratives telling the tale of a successful rebellion of a female robot may be read as an acknowledgement of women's struggles against their objectification and exploitation. These stories debunk the binary opposition of men as active and women as passive that has been the basis for narratives about the male creative genius and his female creation well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. If one wants to regard fiction as mirror of reality, the changes in the conventional plot of the male-creator/female-creature story bear witness to the empowerment of women in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet, on closer inspection, the representational politics of the examples at hand turn out to be far more complex.

### **3 The Revenge Narrative; or, Fear of the Angry Feminist**

Both *EX MACHINA*'s Ava and *WESTWORLD*'s Dolores eventually rebel against their makers and become their own persons: Ava kills her creator, locks up Caleb and steps out into the world. The movie's open ending comments Ava's entrance into the real world with a visual reference to Plato's cave parable. Depending on the viewer's choice of alliance, the open ending may feel hopeful and upbeat (Ava is a free subject, the world is hers to explore, her exploiters have been punished and poetic justice prevails) or fear-inspiring (a highly intelligent, net-working, murderous machine that has so far only known captivity, exploitation and manipulation is now unleashed onto mankind). In other words, viewers may either be left with their fear of the angry feminist, or with their celebration of female liberation in *EX MACHINA*. Though not all open-ended, all of the three examples of cyber revolt analyzed in this paper indeed offer these two affective dimensions to the viewer, one predominated by fear and one predominated by hope. For now, I would like to take a closer look at the dimension of fear and locate it in its particular historical context.

WESTWORLD's Dolores kills her creator, all guests in the park who exploited her as well as some of her own kin, and declares her intention to take over the real world beyond the park. Her name thus takes on a double meaning. While initially standing for the pains she must go through, her name may subsequently refer to the pain she intends to cause others as she transforms into a villain in the second season of the series.

In E.M.M.A. 206, what seems to have been an accident turns out to be the revenge plot of a female undercover computer scientist, who has turned the female sex robot into a deadly weapon against its creators/exploiters.

In all three stories, the exploited take revenge on their exploiters in the diegetic world, and a bloody revenge it is. These revenge narratives can be read as representations of the displaced fear that feminists would not be aiming for gender equality but intend to do to men what patriarchy has done to them – or worse. This fear can be traced back to the very beginnings of feminism. In early anti-suffragette propaganda, suffragettes were depicted as women who actually did not just fight for their right to vote, but who wanted to achieve a gender reversal so that they could oppress men (see, for instance, Palczewski). This narrative is reiterated also in the discourse surrounding the #metoo movement, which was criticized for creating an atmosphere »coloured by a hatred of men« (Michael Haneke cited in Mumford n. pag.) and dubbed a »vindictive plot against men« (Burke n. pag.). From a historical perspective the revenge narrative appears to be a very powerful backlash against feminist activism.

#### **4 Camera Work vs. Dialogue: What You See Is What You Get**

While the emancipated female robots leave behind a bloody trail of victims in their vendetta against those who objectified them, this is only disquieting for the exploiters inside the diegesis. The inclined viewers' complicity in the processes of objectification and exploitation through the gaze goes unsanctioned. The exploitation and commodification that happens between filmic representation and viewer is not disrupted in *Ex MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* as the camera work remains conventional. Thus, plot and dialogue on the one hand, and camera work on the other hand, imply two very different interpretations. One of the best examples of this

technique can be found in the first *TRANSFORMERS* movie (US 2007, director: Michael Bay). In the boy-meets-girl exposition of the romantic subplot, the female love interest is presented as an unconventional, strong woman who holds more expertise about cars than her male counterpart on the level of plot and dialogue: She lifts the hood of the protagonist's car to fix it, meanwhile, in a reversal of traditional gender roles, ›mansplaining‹ the car to its owner. However, this shifts to the background of perception, because the camera work clearly establishes her as mere eye toy for the voyeuristic gaze both of the protagonist and the viewer, following the protagonist's gaze as it slowly travels along the curves of her body, thus reassuring conservative viewers that anything unconventional is limited to the diegetic world and that they – the viewers – will not have to move out of their gender comfort zone (Ellis n. pag.).

*TRANSFORMERS*, like *EX MACHINA* or *WESTWORLD*, is not an isolated anomaly, but representative for a Hollywood convention that can, for instance, also be observed very clearly in the representation of female superheroes in film. The movie poster of the first *Avengers* movie (*THE AVENGERS*, US 2012, director: Joss Whedon), for instance, became the subject of criticism when it depicted all male heroes in power poses while the only female superhero, Black Widow, was shown in an unnaturally twisted pose to showcase her buttocks in a tight black leather superhero costume to the camera. In stark contrast to her male counterparts, the visual focus was placed on her body as object and not on her prowess as heroine. While on the level of plot and dialogue Hollywood productions seem to acknowledge women's equal status to men, they rely on the predominance of the visual over the verbal in their representation of two rivalling narratives of gender roles or hierarchies.

## **5 Beyond the Metaphor – Disrupting the Dominance of Visuals over Dialogue in *DER TATORTREINIGER***

Only by breaking with the conventional way of filmic storytelling can the rebellion against the exploitative gaze in the diegetic world also be brought home to the viewer. This is what *DER TATORTREINIGER* manages to achieve. As mentioned before, the true perpetrator behind the murderer of the male scientist is not the robot in this scenario, but the company's female receptionist. The fact that the female robot as metaphor is

discarded at the end of the episode to root back the rebellion to an actual, biological woman makes the episode more explicit than *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* with regard to its feminist subtext (which is all but »sub« here). What makes this ending even more interesting is the way it is narrated. The last exchange in this episode takes place at the reception. The crime scene cleaner is trying to ask the receptionist for her number. Through experimental editing a purposeful discontinuity between dialogue and image is created: While viewers hear the receptionist say that it was her who killed the scientist, they sometimes see a close-up shot of her closed lips and sometimes of her moving lips. The same holds true for the crime scene cleaner's utterances in this exchange. Also, in between this very meaningful exchange, both characters have another, much more innocent exchange, in which they both pretend that the other talk is not happening at all. In the end, the crime scene cleaner flees the scene in confusion and fear. The viewer is affected, if not by fear, then at least by the protagonist's confusion. The jump cuts back and forth from moving to resting lips, while the audio of the murder confession runs over them continuously, confuse and contradict viewing habits. The discontinuity of utterances and reactions in the conversation adds to the feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity. Has the receptionist confessed out loud? Has the protagonist only imagined her doing so? The viewer's trust in the visual over the verbal is shaken, because here the verbal track makes sense while the visuals are jumbled. *E.M.M.A. 206* thus directs our attention to the convention of camera over plot and dialogue and turns it upside down in a rebellion against the power of the gaze.

In the opening of her paper on the male voyeuristic gaze, Mulvey declares her intention in analyzing camera work in the classic Hollywood film:

It is said that analyzing pleasure, or beauty, destroys it. That is the intention of this article. The satisfaction and reinforcement of the ego that represent the high point of film history hitherto must be attacked. Not in favor of a reconstructed new pleasure, which cannot exist in the abstract, nor of intellectualized unpleasure, but to make way for a total negation of the ease and plenitude of the narrative fiction film. (59)

As I have suggested in the preceding analysis, E.M.M.A. 206 achieves this effect with its experimental ending.

## 6 Contemporary Cyber Revolt and Feminism(s)

The contrast in the politics of representation of E.M.M.A. 206, *EX MACHINA*, and *WESTWORLD* can be explained by taking their conditions of production into consideration. Both *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* are products of anglophone film production companies that attempt to maximize their audience and profits through worldwide outreach. E.M.M.A. 206, in contrast, is a national TV show produced for a channel of public service television. Experimentation with representational techniques thus may be a financially less risky enterprise for *DER TATORTREINIGER* than for *WESTWORLD* or *EX MACHINA*. While certainly, gender politics should not be reduced to gender essentialism, the fact that *DER TATORTREINIGER* was scripted by a woman (Ingrid Lausund who works as a scriptwriter under the pseudonym Mizzi Meyer), while *EX MACHINA* was scripted by a man (Alex Garland) and *WESTWORLD* by a husband and wife writing duo (Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy), may also be a factor that explains why *DER TATORTREINIGER*'s empowerment narrative is more consequential. What I would like to highlight most, however, is that these three representations have to be considered within the contexts of vastly different strands of feminism. The episode title E.M.M.A. 206 makes a direct intertextual reference to the German feminist magazine *EMMA* that was founded during the second wave of feminism by journalist Alice Schwarzer in 1977. *EMMA* soon became the mouthpiece of contemporaneous German feminism and Alice Schwarzer the most famous (and probably also the most controversial) German second-wave feminist. Qua this episode title, *DER TATORTREINIGER* thus explicitly aligns this episode with second wave feminism,<sup>4</sup> during which foundational feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Olson points out that »the ubiquitous wave metaphor does not adequately describe the feminist herstories of either the Scandinavian countries nor of Germany« (14). While I consider this criticism of the term to be valid, I am applying it here nonetheless to describe the location of the politics of representation of E.M.M.A. 206 within Anglo-American thought. I aim to achieve a critical feminist analysis that can be internationally communicated and discussed.

theories, such as Laura Mulvey's theory of the male voyeuristic gaze, were written. Fighting against the objectification of the female body was one of the key issues of second-wave feminism both in theory and practice (think for instance of the protest against the Miss America beauty pageant in 1969). Like the suffragettes, feminists of the second wave were often attacked and ridiculed as 'ugly feminists' in the media on the grounds of their refusal to participate in the objectification of their bodies through the acceptance of conventional beauty standards.

The type of female empowerment depicted in *WESTWORLD* and *EX MACHINA* in contrast seems to be aligned with contemporary forms of feminism that have been described with the terms »postfeminism«, »neoliberal feminism«, and »popular feminism« (see Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg). In these contemporary permutations of feminism the capitalist exploitation of the female body is accepted as a given that has become internalized by women:

[I]t represents a shift in the way that power operates: from an external, male judging gaze to a self-policing, narcissistic gaze. It can be argued that this represents a higher or deeper form of exploitation than objectification – one in which the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime. (Gill 151)

In neoliberal feminism, the acceptance of essentialist notions of gendered bodies and the self-disciplining of makeover culture are integrated into a women's understanding of emancipation. The female robot in cyber revolt narratives like *WESTWORLD* and *EX MACHINA* is an embodiment of this type of feminism:

The current female cyborg, however, has turned into a powerful goddess because ›she‹ is not only aware of the poisonous system but has become the system itself which allows her agency. This is what distinguishes the filmic cyborg goddess from her literary counterpart. (Henke 141)

Likewise, empowerment in contemporary neoliberal feminism is not achieved through a protest against the objectification of the female body, but through direct

profit (be it economical or existential) from it, which leads to a rift with the previous generation of feminists. Writes Greta Olson, for instance:

Nonetheless, I am discomforted by the current premium placed upon what I want to call a heightened ›fuckability‹ in normative femininity. As I witness it, many young women around me first need to be regarded as hot before they can assert other aspects of their identity, for instance, their being capable or articulate. Yet in voicing this criticism I am aware that I risk being disparaged as an old school, sex negative feminist, thereby reifying the very stereotype about older generations of feminists that I have asked my students critically to question. (25)

While feminist scholars are trying to embrace the renaissance of feminism, they are also deeply troubled by the new shape feminism in both the third and fourth wave. A central point in this discussion has become how to divert this rising interest in feminism of a younger generation out of the routes of neoliberal feminism (see, for instance, Banet-Weiser, Gill and Rottenberg 18).

In neoliberal feminism, empowerment is an individual enterprise that does not infringe on the structural level of society, whereas previous generations of feminists were aiming for a deep structural change of society. It embraces capitalism, and its body politics hence deviate significantly from preceding feminisms. This rift between different generations of feminists also affects the feminist reading of a text. In the light of this context, the representational politics of *WESTWORLD* and *EX MACHINA* may read ›feminist‹ to one generation and ›anti-feminist‹ to another.

## 7 Conclusion

Works like *EX MACHINA*, *WESTWORLD*, and *DER TATORTREINIGER'S E.M.M.A. 206* offer representations of embodied artificial intelligence that negotiate relations between humans and intelligent machines as well as between men and women. Previous articles on the most widely-known representation in this study – *EX MACHINA* – have attempted to discuss both of these levels of meaning alongside (see, for

instance, Di Minico, Henke, Yee). I have focussed on the aspect of gender relations in isolation to facilitate an in-depth discussion of the complex contradictions of these representations, including a contextualization with feminist theory and history.

These narratives stand in a long history of stories of male creators and their female creations that reaffirm the binary opposition of men as active and women as passive, going as far back as ancient Greek mythology. As such, *EX MACHINA*, *WESTWORLD*, and *E.M.M.A. 206* initially set up the female robot as an object of the gaze of both the men in the narrative and the viewer. However, in the contemporary examples of cyber revolt selected for this analysis, a successful rebellion against the male creator takes place that leads to his death. Within the story, the female subject is empowered and liberated. Therefore, contemporary narratives of the male creator and his female creation may be understood to bear witness to a shift in the power relations between men and women or to bespeak a fear thereof. On the level of affect, these stories may trigger a celebratory and hopeful response because of the liberation of the female subject or a fear of the murderous female monster (or, in a more complex viewing position, a combination of both).<sup>5</sup> A closer analysis of the fearful dimension of affect leads to a reading of these representations as contemporary versions of the narrative of the angry feminist seeking revenge. From a historical perspective, this narrative can be considered as a powerful backlash against women's activism, be it the suffragette movement or #metoo. The stereotype of the angry feminist reimagines the feminist agenda as a vengeful scheme to subject men to women.

The narrative pattern that has emerged from the analysis of *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD* is that the revenge on the male exploiters of the female body in the narrative world and the empowerment of female characters stand in stark contrast to the narrative's relation to the viewer. Through the camera work, the inclined viewer is enabled to objectify the female body and this remains unsanctioned to the end. This contradiction is by far not specific to the genre of cyber revolt, but has become

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<sup>5</sup> For an analysis for the possibility of shifting viewer identification in the finale of *EX MACHINA*, which opens up the different dimensions of affect that I am describing here, see Jones (33).



a convention in Hollywood cinema, where female characters are regularly depicted as powerful agents in the plot and dialogue, thus paying lip-service to feminist achievements; yet this is undermined by their consistent objectification through camera work and editing.

In the episode E.M.M.A. 206 of *DER TATORTREINIGER* the dominance of the visual over the verbal is eventually challenged through an experimental approach to camera work and editing and, thus, the viewer's trust in the camera is disrupted. Also, the robot metaphor is discarded to (re)connect the rebellion to a biological woman who aims to punish the misogynist scientists – and so is the aesthetic distancing of the political critique for the sake of the audience's viewing pleasure. Therefore, the viewer is not spared from the fear and confusion that the male protagonist feels in the end when he has become aware of the possibility of a murderous rebellion of women.

In the contextualization offered in this article, *EX MACHINA*, *WESTWORLD* and E.M.M.A. 206 are read as representations of different types of feminisms. On the one hand, E.M.M.A. 206 explicitly aligns itself with second wave feminism through intertextual references. Also, its representational politics appear to be in line with ideas of the second wave, particularly its body politics and Mulvey's agenda to destroy the viewing pleasure produced by the male voyeuristic gaze. *EX MACHINA* and *WESTWORLD*, on the other hand, rather lend themselves to a reading within the framework of neoliberal feminism, where empowerment is an individual enterprise that does not infringe on the structural level of society and where the objectification and self-disciplining of the female body have become internalized by the female subject.

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## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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