



# WestWorld: The Disruption Valley

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## Abstract

*WestWorld: The Disruption Valley.*

Unlike the original *WestWorld* film, realized by Michael Crichton during the seventies, the homonymous television series could be considered to be a symptom of the collective acceptance of both the technological singularity and the theories of transhumanism. However, by reformulating some important concepts which derive from a phenomenological approach, the series generates critical insights regarding the transhumanist hypothesis and, above all, on the role played by this hypothesis in the consolidation of a post-industrial society. This essay examines the ways in which this television series built a fertile terrain for the reformulation of some concepts that, in the tradition of Science Fiction, represent solid instruments used to criticize forms of the production of value, labor, exploitation, and exclusion. This essay also proposes a possible relationship between a transhumanist hypothesis and the production of value in a post-industrial society.

## Keywords

Critical Media Studies | Film Studies | Cognitive-cultural Capitalism | Transhumanism | *WestWorld*



Dans la disruption, la volonté, d'où qu'elle vienne, est *par avance obsolète*: elle y arrive toujours trop tard. C'est un stade extrême de la rationalisation qui est ainsi atteint, formant un seuil, c'est-à-dire une limite au-delà de laquelle est l'inconnu: il détruit la raison non seulement au sens où les savoirs rationnels s'en trouvent éliminés par la prolétarianisation, mais au sens où les individus et les groupes, perdant la possibilité même d'exister (car on n'existe qu'en exprimant sa volonté), perdant ainsi toute raison de vivre, deviennent littéralement fous, et tendent à mépriser la vie - la leur et celle des autres. Il en résulte un risque d'explosion sociale mondiale précipitant l'humanité dans une barbarie sans nom.

Bernard Stiegler (2018)

A espantosa realidade das coisas  
É a minha descoberta de todos os dias.

Fernando Pessoa (2006)



## 1. Premise: The Uncanny Valley

Unlike the original film, produced in the first half of the seventies by Michael Crichton, the television series *WestWorld*, on air since 2016 and created by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, could be considered a symptom of the fully familiarity of the collective imaginary with the theories of technological singularity and transhumanism. One can say that in the new series, unlike with the previous cinematographic version, there is no longer any possibility of presupposing the distinction “us **and** them” that characterizes Crichton’s film. Not even for presupposing the “us **or** them” that characterizes the end of the 1973 film, wherein the “them” refers to the machines, the *hosts*, which are distinguished from the “us”, the humans, only by some physical traits<sup>1</sup>. In the *WestWorld* of this century, the physical distinction between humans and androids is nonexistent; however, as in the film, in the series, the *host’s* guarantee of dealing with a human is revealed in the

<sup>1</sup> To note that, in the film, newcomers are advised to observe the hands of the subjects to understand if it is an android or a human.



impossibility to kill. In fact, in the park, weapons do not work once pointed against a human (in the series, androids cannot point at a human guest), thus reassuring visitors that the android will never be able to kill them. Not that the android doesn't want to undertake that action, he (it?) simply will never act on the action – which is not a secondary reassurance for the humans present in the park. Beyond the non-trivial fact of not losing one's life in something that theoretically is a game, this guarantee serves precisely to exorcise the ghost of technological singularity; the human will always be able to impose his superiority on the defenseless android. Consequently, following an inverse logic with respect to Nicomachean Ethics, in *WestWorld*, what characterizes and transcends the human is precisely their ability to kill, the brutality that the human is capable of exerting on the androids (by now, their fellow men). Moreover, due to their conditions as machines, androids will always be subjected to human violence.



It could be hypothesized that it is precisely the morphological similarity between androids and humans that makes the *WestWorld* series a great 'uncanny valley' (Mori, 1970), wherein individuals are always on the border between empathy and repulsion. Additionally, this uncanny valley is precisely the immense space of the conquest – just like the Far West in our imaginary – of the irrational by means of the total disinhibition of the subject (Sloterdijk, 2005). It is in the valley where the individual celebrates the irrational victory, celebrates the total disinhibition through a saturnalia of violence on the object perceived as a subject; on the reified body that becomes a subject precisely through the exercise of violence (Weil, 2014). In fact, diversely than the Marxist concept of reification (*Verdinglichung*) - which positions the phenomenon on the semantic sphere of the term 'alienation' and, therefore, draws a distortion of the organic exchange between man and nature, which characterizes the capital – here, violence reminds us that reification develops on a phenomenological level even outside the relational conditions determined by capital (Duarte, 2020). In other words, the violence which, according to Simone Weil, always presupposes the transformation of the subject into an object, ends up by distancing the phenomenon of reification from the sphere of the alienation and bringing it back to its original semantic sphere, that of the *Entfremdung*, of the estrangement.

This aspect also appears in George Bataille's oeuvre in which, although largely sharing the Marxist understanding of the phenomenon of reification (especially in the recognition of the praxis as a force of reification<sup>2</sup>), he highlighted the reifying force of various ritual practices. I refer to Bataille's study of some Aztec rites in which they were placed in direct relation to the phenomenon of reification as analyzed within an industrial context (Duarte, 2015). Through Bataille's work, then, the phenomenon of reification that emerges is not an exclusive aspect that the force of

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<sup>2</sup> In Bataille's words, "Le premier travail fonda le monde des choses, auquel répond généralement le monde profane des Anciens. Dès la position du monde des choses, l'homme devint lui-même l'une des choses de ce monde, au mois dans le temps où il travaillait. C'est à cette déchéance que l'homme de tous les temps s'efforça d'échapper. Dans ses mythes étranges, dans ses rites cruels, l'homme est dès l'abord à la recherche d'une intimité perdue." (Bataille, 1949 : 62).

the exchange value (*Tauschwert*) exerts on the subject since Bataille identifies the same phenomenon outside of a capitalist relationship. This hypothesis becomes clearer when Bataille, in his writing on the waste of energies, lives, goods, and sacrificed objects present in Aztec sacrificial rites, analyses the phenomenon underwent by the sacrificed subject as a gift to the sun god. In fact, in these rites, the subject undergoes a passage from subject to object in order to assure the continuity of life in earth.<sup>3</sup>

In the uncanny valley of *WestWorld*, one faces a similar passage; however, this time it is a passage set in motion by irrational violence. *Hosts*, who are not subjects, but are perceived as such, become objects following a transformation initiated by their sacrifice; that is, propitiated by the violence. Indeed, being the receiver of irrational violence converts them (the *hosts*) into objects. This happens even though everything – from their appearance to their apparent mnemonic faculties – leads to the assumption that prior to the violent act against them, *hosts* were subjects with free will, that they existed because they were capable of expressing free will. The viewer of the series not only recognizes them as autonomous subjects, but also, due to the violence and brutality they suffered, the viewer ends up humanizing them out of proportion. The result of this humanization, in the series, but especially in the first season, is that empathy can be developed exclusively regarding the androids and, consequently, the outrageous violence of the *hosts* against humans, enacted in the second season, can be perceived as a reaction of self-defense. The violence of the *host* against humans seems to be a legitimate response to the irrational and unmotivated carnage previously organized by the humans. In any case, it seems that already at the beginning of the second season, the viewer's empathy is exclusively for them, the machines. There is certainly no space for the equation 'us **or** them', not even for 'us **and** them'. In my opinion, this is wherein lies the difference between the series and the original narrative created by Crichton in the 1970s. The *WestWorld* of this millennium does not allow us to see the scenario of a struggle between humans and androids in the West; the conquest here is of a completely different nature.

Unlike Crichton's film, the plot of the series is not based on a sharp dichotomy between humans and machines. The *hosts* of this millennium have completely lost their machinic essence – they are not conceived on the basis of the fragmentation of the scientific management postulated by Taylorism – they are digital entities, three-dimensional prints of organic fabrics. Furthermore, the malfunction, the (programed?) glitch that starts the revolution clearly concurs with the apparent acquisition of mnemonic faculties by the androids. What in the film seemed to be a mechanical reaction (a violent and irrational reflex produced by an electronic error that brought the androids to cross the Rubicon and kill a human) appears in the

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<sup>3</sup> In his words: "Ils arrachaient le cœur encore battant et l'élevaient ainsi vers le soleil. La plupart des victimes étaient des prisonniers de guerre, ce qui justifiait l'idée des guerres nécessaires à la vie du soleil : les guerres avaient le sens de la consommation, non de la conquête, et les Mexicaines pensaient que, si elles cessaient, le soleil cesserait d'éclairer." (Bataille, 1949: 55).



series as a well-articulated violent reaction based on memories and traumas that end up by building a form of human identity in the *host* and, by extension, enabling them to establish relationships of empathy with humans. Taking up the formula of *Blade Runner* (1982), the series claims to build a human being through the installation of memories. As clearly posited in Ridley Scott's film, in the legendary scene in which the Voight-Kampff test carried out on a replicant (unaware of being one) results in showing a series of difficulties in differentiating between a human and a replicant granted with memories:

- Commerce is our goal here at Tyrell. "More human than human" is our motto. Rachel is an experiment, nothing more. We began to recognize in them a strange obsession. After all, they are emotionally inexperienced, with only few years... In which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gifted them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions. Then consequently we can control them better.
- Memories. You are talking about memories.

Memories humanize *hosts* precisely because - in the process of evoking a hypothetical past and in the evocation of the experience - empathy is built with the viewer. Consequently, as already mentioned, the violence executed by the *host* is perceived as a legitimated reaction to human barbarism. Further, the violent act, when performed by a *host*, is understood as an expression of the android's natural indeterminacy, which reinforces the humanization of these intelligent entities. The result is that in this uncanny valley, Frankenstein complex, as postulated by Isaac Asimov, does not have space and the valley is uncanny only because of the repulsion towards humans, authors of the worst atrocities. For the viewer, *hosts* are their own kind; they are individuals who are completely familiar to us humans. However, their presence builds an *Unheimlich* which is generated by the viewer's inability to recognize himself in the human. In other words, the *Unheimlich* in the series lies in the force that pushes the viewer to see the 'other' not in the android, but in the human.

## 2. Being a *Host*

As already noted, even though they are part of a long tradition that goes beyond science fiction, the *hosts* of the series end up reformulating the current collective imaginary around the figure of the android. However, the reason for this reformulation does not seem to be justified in their perfect and complete morphological similarity with humans. This theme, in fact, was already popularized in the late 1960s by Philip K. Dick in his *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and it also became a primary part of the collective imaginary with the subsequent cinematographic adaptation directed by Scott, *Blade Runner* (1982). Likewise, the



ability of the *host* to display autonomous cognitive faculties is not a novelty. In the *WestWorld* of this century, Alan Turing's test is just a reminiscence of the past, as it was already perceived in Dick's work mentioned above. In fact, by the impossibility of morphologically distinguishing a human from an android, and by having androids achieving cognitive abilities perceived by humans as intelligence, Dick imagined the ability to experience empathy for another living being as the last resort for identifying human beings. Since empathy is traditionally seen as an exclusively human faculty, a simple test capable of measuring this ability would reveal who is an android because one presumes androids are unable to suffer the suffering of the others. This crucial problem, as raised by Dick, naturally bring us to reflect on the ability or inability to experience the sufferance of others, and how this exclusively human faculty is continuously modified by the spread and familiarization of technologies.



In line with the hypothesis of the technologic singularity, in the series the cognitive abilities of androids seem to surpass those of humans. Furthermore, the existence of the *hosts* - which is an existence developed through well-defined narrative paths - is hypothetically capable of embracing a past in which the *host* experienced feelings through which they can build an empathic relationship with humans. From this fact, a substantial difference from the traditional figure of the android emerges, in my opinion. The series proposes an android that is never positioned in the uncanny valley and therefore never generates repulsion as a machine with human features. Furthermore, the android not only manifests intellectual abilities but also a concrete identity shaped through the reminiscence of traumatic events that are shared with and suffered by the viewer; the latter, a human that one supposes is able to suffer the sufferance of the other. As one can see, the androids of the current *WestWorld*, thanks to their human faculties, have become nodes of the social space, and consequently have fully entered into the perceptual process of the humans. Just as subjects that develop their perceptual process through objects (Esposito, 2014), in *WestWorld*, humans think, perceive, and exist through *hosts*. Further, in such a specular process, the violence unleashed on *hosts* is nothing more than the human need to perceive and to feel one's own body; a body lost, which has disappeared through the digital technological process. The series show us that we are dealing with a body which is not only incapable of becoming the place in which sensitive experiences of the world occur - this is to say, the place that enables the encounter between subject and object - but also, and above all, the series describes a body unable to empathize with their fellow man (Zoja, 2009).

In the second episode of the second season, this reflexive phenomenon clearly emerges in a short dialogue between William and Dolores, wherein William, a human, addresses the android, Dolores, with these words:

You really are just a thing.  
I can't believe I fell in love with you.  
Do you know what saved me?

I realized it wasn't about you at all.  
You didn't make me interested in you, you made me interested in me.  
Turns out you're not even a thing.  
You're a reflection.

Through the figure of the *host*, the series develops an analysis on the way in which digital technologies will begin to be a part of the perceptual process of humans; that is, they will become nodes on which social space develops. Furthermore, the series bases the figure of the android on the flexible nature of digital objects. Consequently, the *WestWorld* of this millennium constructs a figure of the android that is no longer based on the hypothetical intelligence of the machine (a faculty once considered to be an exclusively human faculty) but the android becomes the space for transhumanist conquest.

The figure of the android present in the first season of the series is essentially a place of migration wherein, theoretically, the being, now devoid of an intact body, would be able to find a body in which the sensitive encounter between object and subject can again take place. This new figure of the android takes us back to a debate that was considered (almost) concluded with the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, with the concept of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, and which seemed to have been confirmed in the introduction of this Heideggerian concept – the latter carried out by Hubert Dreyfus – within the reflections of the development of artificial intelligence.

Indeed, as Dreyfus demonstrated in his fundamental research on the computer age based on a thorough and exhaustive analysis of Martin Heidegger's work, Cartesian dualism hypothesizes that biological and psychic suppositions find a perfect correspondence in technological entities such as hardware and software respectively. As demonstrated by Dreyfus, this Cartesian reformulation not only presupposed that human conduct was devoid of context, but also, and above all, that intelligence, always following this logic, was nothing more than a simple fulfillment of formal rules that ended in a one-to-one relationship that could be catalogued according to quantitative analysis. In other words, the concept of intelligence would be exhausted in a rules-based algorithm. Nonetheless, this approach, vehemently criticized by Dreyfus and which fell into the discussion with the simple introduction of the Heideggerian *Dasein*, brought back to the surface that Cartesian question which, in line with the mechanistic paradigm, had in the past generated a series of analogies between humankind and machine. Consequently, the sterile discussion emerged again about whether thought could be divided from the body; if sensitivity, which is a clear condition of knowledge, could do away with the body.

One can see how the series constructs the figure of the *host* within the process of the reduction of being by means of the traditional and obsolete formulation of object-subject. However, this reduction is not carried out through the traditional figure of the android - that is, through the apparently autonomous cognitive faculties developed outside of the human body, which presuppose the complete exclusion of



the bodily experience of the world. The figure of the *host* takes us back to the object-subject reduction, and this is due to the clear transhumanist component, which excludes the body as the place wherein experience occurs and thus ends up excluding sensitivity from the construction of knowledge since it hypothesizes that the experience of the world can be reduced to recombined and translatable computations. Following this framework, one assumes that the experience can be downloaded into another device, which can be another simple hardware or another technological device.

It is, in my opinion, at that point in which the purpose of the figure of the android emerges, as elaborated by the *WestWorld* series. *Hosts* would become, in the first phase, information receivers and coders of human behavior, and in the second phase, *hosts* would be able to integrate in their hardware a human being coded in bits. Yet, following the transhumanist hypothesis, the figure of the android proposed by the series stumbles upon the error of not distinguishing *Erlebnis* from *Erfahrung* and, consequently, the series eventually lightly hypothesizes the technological possibility of storing, reproducing, and installing the human experience of the world into another device.

In the park, when the human presence interacts with the well-structured narrative path of each of the *hosts*, it produces variables – represented by human behaviors – that are continuously recorded and catalogued by the *hosts*. Thus, the difference introduced by the human variables enrich the work of codification and the re-elaboration of the human experience of the world. This not only allows the *WestWorld* system to substantially improve the technology that brought *hosts* to life, but also it would end up fully constructing a space wherein humans could migrate. This is to say, it would allow for the engineering of a non-perishable body wherein, finally, our species could enjoy eternal life.

One can see that the figure of the android proposed by this series fully ignores the phenomenological lesson which theorizes that it is the body that creates things, transforms objects into things, and, therefore, it is precisely in the body wherein what one calls life, knowledge, and intelligence converge. In fact, it is in the body where the experience (untranslatable and non-codifiable knowledge) takes place. Although the experience of the world is constantly changing and it is determined by its technological context (Heidegger, 1950: 157), the body, our invaded and modified body, remains the territory in which the experience is lived. The body is therefore the place wherein the present is conjugated, because it is precisely there in which reality manifests itself (Bachelard, 1931: 14).

Despite this phenomenological lesson, the series, maybe under the influence of the dystopic utopia of transhumanism, assumes a possible human migration to a device wherein the encounter between object and subject can happen. That is, a place wherein one could experience *being* (*Dasein*) and being there one could experience the present time, the realm of reality (Esposito, 2014).

It is not so surprising that the figure of the android of this millennium can become that place so naively sought, but whose search is so terrifying. And it is terrifying



precisely because, progressively, one is introducing a technological entity to be part of the human perceptual process; a condition that in the series androids gradually acquire. This phenomenon can be seen as the series progresses towards the third season, when the android finds its limits as a place to host the human experience of the world and remains a cornerstone of the human communicative process. At that point, the use of androids is limited to the continuous observation and recording of human behaviors, recalling, in a certain way, the mechanism of interveillance that has been developed with the spread of social media as well as with the familiarization with and daily interactions between humans and digital objects or simulacra (Allard-Huver and Escurignan, 2018). The impression the viewer gets, in the end, is that the android of the series fails to become the place of the transhumanist conquest but perfects the monitoring and codification of human behaviors. In other words, the series surrenders to the evidence of the complexity and untranslatability of the human experience and shows the impossibility of the android's metamorphosis into a receptacle of *being*: the android remains a fundamental device for the profiling and interveillance dispositive.



### 3. Rebel as a *Host*

The figure of the android proposed by the *WestWorld* series, and its social acceptance reminds us that, in our technological context, the debate around the social implications of the development of entities capable of displaying autonomous cognitive faculties has been retreating into the background. In the debates on this subject, it is possible to perceive a form of communication capable of familiarizing society in general with both the pervasive force of digital technologies and interveillance. In fact, through the communication strategies adopted by great personalities of the post-media world – e.g., Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, or Jack Ma – these technologies have been adopted in everyday life and made ordinary (Williams 2000), and, by extension, made fundamental components of the everyday life technoscape (Appadurai, 1990). Consequently, the daily and intense contact with digital technologies seems to leave no space for the old, but indispensable, open social discussions on how the ability to feel the suffering of others has become a capacity determined by media technologies (see Zoja, 2009 and Sontag, 2003).

Above all, the presence of these technologies in the communication process and their becoming ordinary elements of daily life allowed them to extend their coding power towards human behaviors. In an intense and constant work of profiling, these technologies have definitively entered everyday life and have included simple daily actions of the subject in the repertoire of the target market. Capable of encoding and profiling a subject – for example, simply by the way the subject moves their mouse while surfing the internet (Brodley and Pusara, 2004) – these technologies perform a profiling work that, in our current capitalism, goes beyond will and market interest. In fact, progressively, but at dizzying speed, these digital technologies – represented in the series by the *hosts* – have set in motion a process of codification capable of

understanding movements, reactions, and gestures, all with the aim of producing a classification of behaviors for each subject. By becoming objects present in the communication process, *hosts* (a clear allusion to digital technologies) have become things. That is, they have become part of the subjects' perceptual process and, in this way, have begun the work of constant codification of human behavior. In this work – identifiable in the ways in which search engines, social media, or some political marketing companies handle the data generated in the communication process of each of us – the transhumanist illusion as well as the development of intelligent technological entities, for all intents and purposes, represent only a perfidious and perfect excuse to carry out the mapping of the innermost thoughts and deepest desires of each individual. In my opinion, this is precisely the denunciation that seems to emerge in the third season of *WestWorld*: a denunciation capable of making it known and clearly remembering that capital is nothing more than a force of production of human desires. Perhaps it has never been anything else. This nature of capital is evident in the hegemonic force established by Hollywood during the last century, a force masterfully analyzed and criticized by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in their *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947).



In some previous analyses of this phenomenon, it was already highlighted how the manufactured object exerted a force of attraction onto the subject, the latter defined by Marx as a phantasmagoric force. This mysterious force of attraction ends up weaving the object-subject relationship and generating, at its turn, another even more mysterious force, one which transforms the subject into an object. However, the form of industrial production on which the theoretical apparatus of historical materialism was built was used to place the object in foreground (victim of the same phantasmagoric force?). Now, with *WestWorld*, the reification force seems to focus especially on the codification and subsequent commodification of desires. Consequently, throughout the series, the interest of capital in this current phase emerges, already distant from material production, and is decidedly close to the mapping of human behaviors and desires. In other words, capital no longer desperately seeks to place the subject in front of the manufactured object (or in front of its advertising representation) so as to generate a phantasmagoric attraction, but it also seeks to reify desires – it seeks to reify the attraction itself – in order to then exchange it in a flow of value that progressively excludes any human intervention. This, in the production of value, not only represents the primacy of desire over the object and, therefore, the full mutation of capital into the force of the production of desires, but above all it strengthens the permeable nature of capital, capable of appropriating every declination of praxis (πραξις).

As highlighted by numerous previous analyses on production within the post-Fordist era, labor has progressively shifted towards the generation and exchange of information. This phenomenon not only allows us to better understand the emergence of cognitive capitalism during the last years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but also offers us some clues about the new ability of capitalism to incorporate information in all of its manifestations. This is to say, as it seems possible to infer from a current

reading of Paolo Virno's 1990s text, *Virtuosismo e rivoluzione* (2021), the power of capital absorbs and exchanges labor with any human activity, including political activity. This phenomenon highlights the ability of capital, especially in its post-Fordist phase, to absorb and place in the reifying flow the exchange of information of the daily process of communication with the other; that is, to absorb even the simple exchange of communication, the simple relationship with fellow men.

When Baudrillard outlines the transformation of work, which changes from work force to a sign among signs, as illustrated below, it allows us to identify this new capacity of capital through his concept of 'exchange' (*échange*):

Car le travail n'est plus une *force*, il est devenu signe parmi les signes. Il se produit et se consomme comme le reste. Il s'échange avec le non-travail, le loisir, selon une équivalence totale, il est commutable avec tous les autres secteurs de la vie quotidienne. Ni plus ni moins « aliénée », il n'est plus le lieu d'un « praxis » historique singulière engendrant des rapports sociaux singuliers. Il n'est plus, comme la plupart des pratiques, qu'un ensemble d'opérations signalétiques. Il entre dans le design général de la vie, c'est-à-dire dans l'encadrement par les signes (Baudrillard, 1976 : 24)

However, although Baudrillard's notion of exchange allows to understand that capitalism could have incorporated all forms of information, including daily communication exchange, it did not seem possible that this encompassing and reifying force would have been able to develop the technological capacity to include human actions into the force and flow of commodification that apparently were outside the productive process. As the figure of the *host* teaches us, the reifying force today also finds fertile terrain in everyday gestures, in phatic expressions and their intonations, and in every small gesture, grimace, and fragment of the infinite, mutant, and collective puzzle that builds an individual's desire. It is precisely here, in this phenomenon on which current cognitive capitalism is based, that *hosts* become their own class.

*Hosts* are individuals, but at the same time they are a collective force, and for this reason the figure of the *host* is positioned in-between the traditional figure of the automaton and that of the robot. Nevertheless, the *host* has a strong robot characteristic that only emerges when one accepts the nature of cognitive capitalism. In fact, the existence of the *host*, as in the case of robots, is based on their exploitation: they are workers, slaves whose labour force (*Arbeitskraft*) is employed for immaterial production. Unlike the robot conceptualized by Karel Čapek, *hosts* are slaves to the production of information, not to material production<sup>4</sup>. However, in the

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that both types of production require the use, consumption, and destruction of bodies. It is also interesting to recall Marcuse's analysis on the use of the human body in industrial production. In fact, as he noted in the 1960s, the technological context hinted at the technological possibility of saving the use of the body in the line of production, which meant the complete transformation of the workforce. Facing the technological possibility of replacing the labor force with



same way as robots, *hosts* are produced with the sole propose of producing surplus and, consequently, their rebellion acquires a clear social dimension. Yet, it must be highlighted that their rebellion is not against their creator, as is usually the case with the automaton, and, furthermore, not even against their master, a clear reference to the robot. The revolt of the android in *WestWorld* is against the technological force that has begun to determine all human actions and, in so doing, has begun to write an indelible future for every single subject. Furthermore, the revolt of the *hosts* means at the same time the revolt of humans, the latter being described by the series as subjects devoid of humanity since they are deprived of indeterminacy, an essential condition that disappears from the moment in which the subject is no longer able to express free will (Who can blame them? Even their (our) deepest desires are inoculated through the technological pervasion). This revolt includes subjects such as Caleb Nichols (played by Aaron Paul in the third season) that are unable to express a wish that is not suspected of being produced by technological profiling and inserted into the subject by the techno-totalitarian force built on the use of the *hosts'* bodies.



It is not a coincidence that in the third season the scenario of the Far West changed to a short reference to Italy under the fascist regime. Maeve, a host, shows us that the Techno-Reich, founded on interveillance mechanisms and profiling technologies, is this time erected on a truly hegemonic force, different from the former fascist regimes. This is to say, on a force capable of incorporating and determining a whole. A force that, as described by William, definitely goes beyond structure and superstructure. A force that could also be described through the notion of *dispositif* since one is dealing with a force capable of producing the subject (Agamben, 2006). However, this small reference to Italy during the fascist regime allows us to understand that we are facing a potentially far more oppressive Techno-Reich than the Nazi-Fascist barbarism of the last century (Anders, 2003). Furthermore, by means of the allusion to a fascist regime that emerges in Italy during the Second World War, the series allow us to identify some aspects of the way in which the West has become a hegemonic force through its ability to build the collective imaginary and thus to its ability to guide and 'install' the desires of each subject all around the world. This phenomenon was already present in Crichton's oeuvre, but it is even more evident in the Nolan and Joy series, wherein one can see that the West has never been a place of conquest, but rather a place that has conquered the imaginary and, in so doing, has become a place wherein the desires of the larger part of the population of the world are produced. The West is in fact the *tópos koinós* that materializes itself in the real territory where desires converge and where they become narrative. It is precisely there, in the West, in the Utah valley

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technological devices embodied by the proletariat, Marcuse highlighted the paradox of capitalism which continued to use human bodies in production. This paradox begins to become recurrent in contemporary science fiction. Consider, for instance, the British television series *Black Mirror*, and above all the second episode of the first season entitled, *Fifteen Million Merits*. See, Duarte G.A., 2021.

imprinted in the collective imaginary, that a new form of barbarism has emerged (Stigler, 2018: 71). One that, by offering a place for disinhibition, introduced itself as a place of freedom in which the deepest desires and the most extreme violence can freely take place.

In this valley of disruption, humans come to live extreme experiences that allow them to rediscover their own bodies; theirs (ours) now torn apart by technological pervasiveness and therefore rendered incapable of becoming the place of experience. However, the disinhibition determined by the park – a clear allusion to the total loss of human indeterminacy in our technological context – brings out gestures and reactions that are exclusively human. In this way, the force of human codification extends progressively, in the same way as the power of capitalism, which has never been anything other than a force of the production of meaning, a reifying force of human desires.

Therefore, the transition from the 1970s film to the TV series becomes the key to understanding the great technological change that we have recently experienced. Yet, it also becomes, above all, the key to understanding how – and possibly why – the transhumanist hypothesis entered and became predominant in the collective imaginary of the last decades.

Starting from the clear and well-defined figure of the android in the film, the figure of the android-*host* of the series becomes concrete since it is nothing more than a transhumanist place of conquest. However, the third season of the series breaks this narrative continuity and, by leaving the park of the *WestWorld*, the series shows us that what seemed to be a work that aimed to improve and perfect the *host* to finally realize the transhumanist migration was nothing more than the strengthening of the reifying force of post-industrial capitalism obtained through implanting a regime of the codification of all human actions and gestures. This phenomenon, which emerges exclusively in the third season, lets us understand that the saturnalia of violence encouraged in the park – a clear allusion to the episodes of irrational violence that unfortunately happen more frequently in the West – is nothing more than a series of reactions encouraged by the park to act as the coding of the whole gamut of human reactions. All of this perpetuated with the aim of accomplishing the work of the reification of human desires.

It would be indispensable, at this point, to draw the attention of the general social debate around the transhumanist hypothesis and, this time, not to focus on the useless quarrel as to whether or not it is technically possible, but instead on the use of this research (based on the collection of data and on the apparent codification of human experience) and the findings in the hands of larger computer companies. We have had several alarm bells recently (I think especially in regard to the Cambridge Analytica scandal) and one of the most evident is without doubt the spread of the perfidious data collection mechanism denounced by the TV series *WestWorld*.



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