

SUBJECTIVITY AND (DE)HUMANIZATION IN E.T.A HOFFMANN'S DER  
SANDMANN, ERNST LUBITSCH'S DIE PUPPE AND HBO'S WESTWORLD

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Subjectivity and (De)Humanization in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Puppe* and HBO's *Westworld*

This thesis examines representations of female android subjectivities across three successive texts and media corresponding with three time periods: E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *Der Sandmann* (1816), Ernst Lubitsch's silent comedy *Die Puppe* (1919), and the HBO science fiction series *Westworld* (2016-2018). All three stories engage the intersections of epistemology, subjectivity and gender, and feature portrayals of female automata and androids which significantly complicate and disrupt the contested terrain of human subjectivity in knowledge production and the conceptualization of human identity. Each work is analyzed as a representative of its distinct literary and cultural context – German Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism, respectively– to trace the evolution of subjectivity and the perceptivity of the human being from the Enlightenment to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This work poses fundamental questions about the essence of humanness and the distortive effects of media on the ability to recognize the human in times of rapidly developing technological progress.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. AGENCY DENIED – THE AUTOMATON AS PASSIVE CONSTRUCT.....	6
Introduction: E.T.A. Hoffmann’s <i>Der Sandmann</i> .....	6
Epistemology in <i>Der Sandmann</i> .....	7
The Human Automaton and the Crisis of Subjectivity.....	14
Processes of (De)Humanization.....	16
Mediation and Simulation.....	26
III. AGENCY RECLAIMED – A DOLL COMES ALIVE .....	29
Introduction: Ernst Lubitsch’s <i>Die Puppe</i> .....	29
Performing Performativity .....	36
Disrupting Continuity .....	41
Mocking Morality .....	48
IV. AGENCY LOST – (DE)HUMANIZATION AND THE SIMULACRUM.....	56
Introduction: Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan’s <i>Westworld</i> .....	56
<i>Westworld</i> and the Simulacrum .....	57
<i>Westworld</i> and the Obsolescence of the Body.....	60
(De)Humanization and the Simulacrum .....	64
Mediation and Narrative Mazes.....	67
V. CONCLUSION.....	72
REFERENCES CITED.....	77

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines representations of female android subjectivities across three different texts and media corresponding with three different time periods: E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *Der Sandmann*<sup>1</sup> (1816), Ernst Lubitsch's silent comedy *Die Puppe*<sup>2</sup> (1919), and Jonathan Nolan's and Lisa Joy's science fiction series *Westworld*<sup>3</sup> (2016-2018). All three stories engage the intersections of epistemology, subjectivity and gender, and feature successive portrayals of female automata and androids which significantly complicate and disrupt the contested terrain of human subjectivity in the production of knowledge and the conceptualization of human identity. I chose these stories because they represent and illuminate three distinct literary and cultural time periods – German Romanticism, Modernism and Postmodernism – during which our understanding of subjectivity underwent profound transformations, and because they pose similar, fundamental questions about the essence of humanness and the distortive effects of various media on our ability to recognize each other's humanity in times of rapidly developing technological progress.

During the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of German Romanticism capsized Enlightenment ideas and truth claims, by complicating its reductive emphasis on

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1. E. T. A. Hoffmann. "Der Sandmann," in *E.T.A. Hoffmann: Sämtliche Werke in sechs Bänden*, ed. Hartmut Steinecke and Gerhard Allroggen (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985)3:11-49.

2. *Die Puppe*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, featuring Ossi Oswalda and Hermann Thimig (1919; New York, NY: Kino International, 2007), DVD.

3. *Westworld*, season 1, "The Maze," created by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, featuring Evan Rachel Wood, aired Oct.-Dec. 2016, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-01>; *Westworld*, season 2, "The Door," aired Apr.-June 2018, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-2>.

rationalism and empiricism. An emergent national consciousness, coupled with a growing sense of alienation correspondent with rapid industrialization and urbanization, led to a renewed preoccupation with the mysticism of the Middle Ages, the supernatural and the unconscious mind *avant la lettre*, and the aesthetic and emotional experiences of the individual. The subject as producer and conveyor of knowledge could no longer be understood solely as a rational agent. The technical ability to produce automata in human form capable of eliciting sounds, which developed at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, fascinated the late Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffmann who penned several stories about human machines. The nonreproductive creation of human life had been a common trope in various literatures since at least the antiquity, ranging from Ovid's Pygmalion myth and Eve's creation in the Bible to the Golem of Jewish folklore, but the technological advances of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a renewed interest in human machines.<sup>4</sup> Chapter II examines E.T.A. Hoffmann's response to the crisis of subjectivity at the heart of the Romantic project and shows how the automaton in his canonical tale *Der Sandmann* complicates the conceptualization of the human subject. I outline how the protagonist Nathanael's relationship with the human-like automaton Olympia questions and complicates the sovereignty of reason championed by Enlightenment thinkers with a specific focus on the Kantian notion of transcendental idealism and its associated epistemological discourses. I argue that *Der Sandmann* exemplifies not an outright rejection of subjectivity as a mode of knowledge production but highlights the confounding nature of human thoughts and perceptions, and reveals how ideologies, positionalities and individual predispositions shape interpretations of reality. The noted

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4. Eberhard Hilscher, "Hoffmanns Poetische Puppenspiele und Menschmaschinen," in *Text + Kritik Sonderband ETA Hoffmann*, ed. Heinz Arnold Ludwig (München: Edition Text + Kritik, 1992), 20.

discourses on subjectivities and epistemologies in *Der Sandmann* also reflect contemporaneous, patriarchal ideologies of gender and speak to simultaneously developing anxieties regarding technological progress. Olympia's creation by two "fathers" fits within a broader pattern evident in fictional discourses on human automata and reflects the ultimate masculinist fantasy: to achieve the obsolescence of the female body. The second half of the chapter hence provides a detailed examination of the female automaton as a reflection of dominant gender ideologies during the Romantic period and shows how *Der Sandmann* gives voice to rising anxieties about the possible emergence of human machines indistinguishable from human beings. I show how *Der Sandmann* anticipates fundamental questions about our ability to understand the nature of reality and about technology's impact on our understanding of the human being; questions which are later complicated by the rise of mass media and the development of artificial intelligence, and which I elaborate on in the subsequent chapters on *Die Puppe* and *Westworld*.

Almost exactly a century after the publication of *Der Sandmann*, during the first year of the Weimar Republic and in the aftermath of World War I, Ernst Lubitsch, arguably one of the most influential pioneers of filmmaking of his time, reimagines *Der Sandmann* as a silent comedy about misrecognition and female resistance to societal expectations. Lubitsch's underappreciated film, simply titled *Die Puppe*, builds on prior discussions of subjectivity and (de)humanization in *Der Sandmann* and inverts the role of the female automaton by telling the story of Ossi (Ossi Oswald), a human woman who pretends to be a doll. Chapter III relates the narrative techniques Lubitsch employs in *Die Puppe* to a Nietzschean, modern concept of subjectivity, which posits the human subject as containing irreducible, affective multiplicities; a shift in perspective further developed

by the emergence of the new medium – motion pictures and the cinema. Like human perception, the camera captures reality in a fragmentary and incomplete manner, serving as a fitting metaphor for a subjective understanding of reality. My analysis applies feminist film theory as articulated by Laura Mulvey in her seminal text “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”<sup>5</sup> to Lubitsch’s film, to demonstrate how *Die Puppe* disrupts the passive construction of the female figure previously embodied by Olympia in *Der Sandmann*. This approach illustrates the subversive potential of the cinema, and early German film in particular, before the emergence of classical Hollywood cinema which Mulvey characterized by its emphasis on continuity and its positing of the female figure as a passive object. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the apparent influence Nietzsche’s moral philosophy, which he expressed in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*<sup>6</sup>, may have had on Lubitsch and which can be traced in *Die Puppe*. I argue that the film allegorizes Nietzsche’s views on women as constructed figures and anticipates the changing gender norms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its humorous inversion of the human automaton illustrates the malleability of patriarchal social structures and ultimately postulates an optimistic, life-affirming stance on technological progress and human subjectivity.

Finally, in chapter IV, I turn to the popular HBO science fiction series *Westworld*, which serves as a contemporary, dystopian example of a postmodern conceptualization of subjectivity and irrevocably blurs any apparent distinctions between human beings and

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5. Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1975): 6–18, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6>.

6. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed.azzino Montinari and Giorgio Colli (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1971). (Hereafter cited as KGW).

human automata. *Westworld*'s central character Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) continues Olimpia's and Ossi's evolution from passive automaton to conscious android. The series erases visual and contextual discrepancies between human beings and androids, confounding its characters along with the viewers, by sketching the advancement of new humanoid identities within a fictional, hyperreal world that reaches beyond the boundaries of the television screen. Building on the discourses established in the previous chapters, I draw on Jean Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation*<sup>7</sup> to illustrate how – through the systematic undoing of an objectively knowable reality – *Westworld* completes a process of humanization and dehumanization set in motion by E.T.A. Hoffmann in 1816. *Westworld* posits a future where the obsolescence of the female body is within reach because the artificially created humanoid android has evolved the ability to speak, think rationally and create memories, fashioning her indistinguishable from a human being. While the show magnifies anxieties surrounding the emergence of non-human rational subjects, it also poses timely questions about (de)humanization and its impact on the growing potential for misrecognition of the human subject in an increasingly technocratic environment where boundaries between physical and virtual spaces, and between virtual and actual human subjectivities cannot be reliably drawn.

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7. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

## CHAPTER II: AGENCY DENIED – THE AUTOMATON AS PASSIVE CONSTRUCT

### Introduction: E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*

In E.T.A. Hoffmann's canonical, late Romantic short story *Der Sandmann*, the student Nathanael, a rather sensitive, poetic soul, falls in love with the automaton Olimpia, created by the professor Spalanzani and the barometer salesman Coppola. The automaton presents as an uncanny female figure, able to move and produce sounds, but with distinctly mechanical and artificial features. Olimpia is an automaton in human form and unlike the townsfolk, who cannot categorize her, yet recognize her as not quite human, Nathanael comes to view her as a real, human woman, constructing her human identity through a subconscious projection of his own subjective desires and delusions onto her mechanical body. When an encounter with Coppola leads to the resurfacing of Nathanael's previously repressed childhood trauma, Nathanael's human fiancée Clara, who functions as a representation of Enlightenment thinking, unsuccessfully attempts to reason with Nathanael, which causes their relationship to grow increasingly distant. Partly as a result of their disagreements and partly due to psychological trauma, Nathanael withdraws from Clara and instead falls in love with Olimpia, whom he still falsely believes to be a living being. Olimpia's eventual destruction in Nathanael's presence, caused by a physical altercation between her two creators, leads him to experience a nervous breakdown and to eventually commit suicide. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus specifically on the dynamics between Olimpia, Nathanael and Clara, rather than on the eponymous figure of the Sandman (Coppelius/Coppola), as it is the automaton Olimpia who questions and complicates the sovereignty of reason

previously championed by Enlightenment thinkers most clearly.<sup>8</sup> I draw on Kant's notion of transcendental idealism to illustrate that Hoffmann's story does not amount to a complete rejection of Enlightenment principles, but instead highlights the role subjectivity plays in the confounding nature of human thoughts and perceptions, and reveals how ideology, positionality and individual predispositions shape interpretations of reality. Furthermore, I consider the implications of Nathanael's relationship to Olympia and Clara, especially as they relate to the female automaton as an embodiment of the ideal female subject. I contend that E.T.A. Hoffmann was rather forward-thinking in his nuanced, literary exploration of the philosophical debates of his time. The conflicting epistemologies portrayed in *Der Sandmann* have, as of yet, not been reconciled. Two major questions inform my reading of the tale – how the automaton disrupts Enlightenment and Romantic subjectivities, and how gendered and mediated processes of (de)humanization intersect with the emergence of the posthuman subject.

### Epistemology in *Der Sandmann*

Written in 1816, *Der Sandmann* offers a critique of Enlightenment principles within the context of German Romanticism, which is itself a multifaceted reaction to the unquestioning rationalism and rigid classicism that preceded it.<sup>9</sup> *Der Sandmann*, like many of E.T.A. Hoffmann's works, can be classified as an example of Dark Romanticism – a subgenre of Romanticism – due to its emphasis on the uncanny and its commentary

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8. Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche," in *Gesammelte Werke: Werke aus den Jahren 1917-1920* (London: Imago Publishing, 2005) 7: 229-68. In his canonical essay on the uncanny Freud discusses the Sandmann, but with a focus on the figure Coppélius/ Coppola, who is implicated in Nathanael's father's death and who the young Nathanael identifies as the nightmarish, malevolent sandman and namesake of the story.

9. Michael Löwy and Robert Sayre, *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*, trans. Catherine Porter (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 1-5.



on the unresolved conflict between subjective experiences and objective reality. The story of Nathanael, who, as an adult, re-encounters nightmarish events of his childhood and falls in love with the automaton Olympia, not only contains a Romantic critique of Enlightenment values, but it also functions as a cautionary tale, delineating the dangers of an exclusive reliance on subjective perceptions and feeling states.

Nathanael's story begins with three letters, the first of which is written by Nathanael himself and addressed to his future brother in law Lothar. Nathanael is severely distressed over a recent encounter and believes that the terrifying figure Coppelius he remembers from his childhood, and whom he believes is responsible for his father's death, has suddenly re-appeared in his life as the barometer salesman Coppola. Nathanael tells this story as he experienced and remembers it. His report is framed entirely by his subjective assumptions and sensory perceptions. He explains how the events *appeared* to him, repeatedly using phrases like "scheinen" or "mir war es als würden," which suggest at least a rudimentary level of self-awareness and initially a basic ability to practice skepticism towards his own subjective claims. In addition to describing memories using such terms, he also ascribes thoughts or statements to persons other than himself. Predicting Clara's and Lothar's reaction to his story, he writes that he can practically hear Lothar laugh and hear Clara say "das sind ja rechte Kindereien!"<sup>10</sup> About his mother, Nathanael states that she, too, *appeared* to hate Coppelius. Nathanael is aware that his story may seem implausible to others and pleads with Lothar to believe him,

Nur noch den schrecklichsten Moment meiner Jugendjahre darf ich Dir erzählen; dann wirst Du überzeugt sein, daß es nicht meiner Augen Blödigkeit ist, wenn mir

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10. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 12.

nun alles farblos erscheint, sondern, daß ein dunkles Verhängnis wirklich einen trüben Wolkenschleier über mein Leben gehängt hat, den ich vielleicht nur sterbend zerreiße.<sup>11</sup>

Whether these assumptions are indeed accurate is not immediately apparent to the reader. Nathanael's assertions are products of inductive reasoning, based on what to him appears to be empirically derived knowledge. That is to say, Nathanael draws conclusions which rely almost exclusively on his sensory perceptions and subjective interpretations of specific events. Empirically derived data points are mediated and altered by Nathanael's internal processes, specifically by his tendency toward affective reasoning. Reason does not temper his flawed empiricism; instead his emotions and unresolved childhood trauma intensify his convictions. He may, for example, have experienced Clara as dismissive in the past, whether accurately or not, and his prior interpretation then leads him to assume that Clara's reaction to his current worries will be dismissive or uncaring. Such tendencies are quite human and not necessarily unusual, but Nathanael's thoughts escalate beyond general presumptiveness. To convince Lothar of the veracity of his story, Nathanael recounts the events of his father's death and in the process makes a startling prediction, alluding to his own death, as a "trüben Wolkenschleier ... den ich vielleicht nur sterbend zerreiße."<sup>12</sup> His exaggerated, dramatic statement is not likely to reassure Lothar, but instead anticipates the mental and emotional decline Nathanael will suffer as the story progresses and he encounters Olimpia, when his ability to reason becomes progressively usurped by the delusions that take hold of him and that eventually cause him to become untethered from reality.

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11. Hoffmann, 18.

12. Hoffmann, 18.

Nathanael's letter to Lothar does not reach its intended recipient, and instead falls into Clara's hands. Clara replies to Nathanael in the second letter and attempts to reassure him. Her response contains further indication of Nathanael's subjectivist worldview, as she reminds him of the way he teased her for her "ruhiges, weiblich besonnenes Gemüt" when they were children, joking "dass [sie] wie jene Frau, drohe das Haus den Einsturz, noch vor schneller Flucht ganz geschwinde einen falschen Kniff in der Fenstergardine glattstreichen würde."<sup>13</sup> Clara goes on to express just how much Nathanael's story perturbed her, contrary to his prediction and his perception of her personality. She describes feeling almost ashamed of the intensity of her fearful imaginations, yet ultimately, once her anxiety has been assuaged, she appeals to reason in her reply to Nathanael, providing likely explanations for the occurrences of his past and recounting her conversation with a pharmacist to support her conclusions. The pharmacist confirmed to Clara that it was indeed possible for Nathanael's father's death to have been the result of an accidental explosion, rather than having been caused by nefarious wrongdoing on Coppelius' part. Contrary to Nathanael, Clara represents a personification of Enlightenment principles, as even her name, with its connotation of "clarity" suggests.<sup>14</sup> Despite her initially worried reaction to Nathanael's story, Clara does not accept it unquestioningly. She realizes that what appears to him as true may not be in accordance with reality, which leads her to consult a second opinion. Throughout the tale Clara continues to appeal to reason, while Nathanael becomes increasingly bound by his subjectivity and trapped in his own delusions. Upon receiving Clara's letter, Nathanael

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13. Hoffmann, 20.

14. From lat. "clārus": clear, bright

feels irritated and does not take kindly to her “lecture,” writing to Lothar to express his dismay, “in der Tat, man sollte gar nicht glauben, daß der Geist, der aus solch hellen holdlächelnden Kindesaugen, oft wie ein lieblicher süßer Traum, hervorleuchtet, so gar verständig, so magistermäßig distinguieren könne.”<sup>15</sup> His condescending response exposes Nathanael’s assumptions about Clara and suggests that he does not take her seriously as a rational agent. While the reader likely views Clara’s response as a reasonable critique of Nathanael’s conclusions, Nathanael mocks her as a child-like spirit and expresses surprise at her professorial tone. His comparison of Clara to a child reflects the contemporaneous notion of women as incapable of thinking rationally and yet her assessment of Nathanael’s encounter is more firmly grounded in reason than his.

The reader, Nathanael and Clara are put at odds here, and the reversal of Clara as understood by the reader and Clara as experienced by Nathanael plants the seed of a developing dichotomy between things as they are and things as they appear in the story. Despite his dismay and anger, Nathanael concedes to Lothar that he had since learned from his physics professor Spalanzani that the person he recognized as Coppelius was in fact the barometer salesman Coppola and not the frightening Coppelius. Clara’s suggestion that Coppelius and the Sandman may amount to nothing more than figments of Nathanael’s imagination – essentially harmless relics of the nightmares of his childhood – in turn questions his ability to reason objectively and pits his empirical knowledge – i.e. the events he believes to have seen with his own eyes and therefore interprets as objectively true – against her rationally derived assertion; a contradiction which places the epistemological poles of the Enlightenment – rationalism and

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15. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 24.

empiricism – front and center in the story. However, the dichotomy of rationalism and empiricism at play in *Der Sandmann* is complicated by Nathanael's conflation of epistemological empiricism with Romantic subjectivism. Rather than deriving knowledge through an exclusive reliance on sensory perceptions, Nathanael's experiences are distorted by emotion states and unresolved trauma, and then construed as factual knowledge.

The introduction of the automaton Olimpia at the end of the third letter marks a radical turning point in Hoffmann's story and coincides with a significant narrative shift. Olimpia's appearance widens the rift between Clara's and Nathanael's respective worldviews irrevocably and exacerbates Nathanael's already unstable mental condition, while the introduction of the narrator punctures the fictional façade of the story and further complicates its epistemological foundations. Three processes occur simultaneously: (1) Nathanael's subjective experience of reality becomes increasingly unreliable, (2) his vision is mediated and distorted by optical technology, and (3) uncertainty takes hold in the reader with the introduction of the narrator. A multidimensional shift takes place, which shakes the epistemological foundation beneath the story, the characters and the narrator, and causes the reader to question previous assumptions, just as Nathanael becomes more firmly rooted in his delusions. *Der Sandmann* opens with three successive letters – the first from Nathanael to Lothar, followed by Clara's response to Nathanael, and finally Nathanael's second letter to Lothar – which the narrator follows with an explanation for his choice to begin the tale with these letters,

Nimm, geneigter Leser! die drei Briefe, welche Freund Lothar mir gütigst mitteilte, für den Umriss des Gebildes, in das ich nun erzählend immer mehr und

mehr Farbe hineinzutragen mich bemühen werde. ... Vielleicht wirst du, o mein Leser! dann glauben, dass nichts wundervoller und toller sei, als das wirkliche Leben und dass dieses der Dichter doch nur, wie in eines mattgeschliffenen Spiegels dunklem Widerschein, auffassen könne.<sup>16</sup>

The auctorial narrator positions himself as a friend of Nathanael's, infusing the telling of the tale with an air of authority and objectivity, which adds an important, presumably unbiased external perspective to the story that must ultimately be challenged itself.<sup>17</sup> The narrator asserts the veracity of the story, citing the authenticity of the letters, and purports to color in the outlines of the occurrences to make the tale come alive for the reader.<sup>18</sup> Despite such assurances, uncertainty takes hold in the reader in relation to the narrator's role and motives, as well as psychologically within Nathanael. By conflating the writing of a fictional story with a report on a true occurrence, while simultaneously alluding to his own inability to reflect the story exactly, the narrator undermines his self-positing as a reliable source. Hence, the reader cannot unquestioningly assume the neutrality of the narrator. To summarize, Nathanael represents an epistemology rooted in subjective experiences and intuitions, Clara represents the Enlightenment's privileging of rationality and reason, and their epistemologies collide violently when Nathanael is confronted with the uncanny Olimpia, who irrevocably destroys the unstable remnants of his already tenuous grasp on reality. Nathanael cannot cope with Clara's epistemological optimism, especially when it is juxtaposed with his own fundamental epistemological uncertainty.

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16. Hoffmann, 27.

17. John M. Ellis, "Clara, Nathanael and the Narrator: Interpreting Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*," *The German Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (January 1981): 1-18, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/405828>.

18. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 26.

## The Human Automaton and the Crisis of Subjectivity

The indecipherability of the human machine and the question of what constitutes the essence of a human being are central concerns in *Der Sandmann*.<sup>19</sup> The story's epistemological critique responds to the crisis of subjectivity at the heart of German Romanticism and the related Kantian notion of transcendental idealism, which posits a distinction between things as ideas in themselves and things as they appear to the subjective observer. The figure Olympia can be understood as a metaphorical representation of the dichotomy of dualism as it relates to the limitations of empiricist optimism concerning objective truth and universal knowledge, and as the embodiment of the unfree subject and "the mere puppetry found in spiritless determinism."<sup>20</sup> In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant states,

der transscendentale Begriff der Erscheinungen im Raume eine kritische Erinnerung, daß überhaupt nichts, was im Raume angeschaut wird, eine Sache an sich, noch daß der Raum eine Form der Dinge sei, die ihnen etwa an sich selbst eigen wäre, sondern daß uns die Gegenstände an sich gar nicht bekannt seien, und, was wir äußere Gegenstände nennen, nichts anders als bloße Vorstellungen unserer Sinnlichkeit seien, deren Form der Raum ist, deren wahres Correlatum aber, d.i. das Ding an sich selbst, dadurch gar nicht erkannt wird, noch erkannt werden kann.<sup>21</sup>

Crucial to Kant's transcendental idealism is his assertion that the subject only perceives things as they appear within specific spatial and temporal conditions. All phenomena are perceived through the senses, are necessarily understood by way of mediated

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19. Elizabeth Purcell, "The Crisis of Subjectivity: The Significance of Darstellung and Freedom in E. T. A. Hoffmann's 'The Sandman'," *Philosophy and Literature* 40, no. 1 (April 2016): 44–58, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.2016.0016>. Purcell offers a detailed, philosophically grounded discussion of *Der Sandmann* as a literary response to the crisis of subjectivity.

20. Purcell, "Crisis of Subjectivity," 57.

21. Immanuel Kant, "Kritik der reinen Vernunft," in *Immanuel Kant: Gesammelte Schriften (Akademie-Ausgabe)*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Königlich-Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1902) 3:45.

experiences, and therefore cannot be known as things in themselves. Hoffmann's Olympia works as a reflective surface, who mirrors the ideologies of those who encounter her, and who eludes any attempt at objective categorization. Olympia is not objectively intelligible or knowable to the characters, the narrator, or the reader, therefore bringing into stark relief the awareness that what constitutes the human being as a thing-in-itself eludes our objective, rational understanding. Since we necessarily experience the world through our senses and because our senses can be deceived due to factors beyond our conscious control, we may misrecognize our fellow humans and even ourselves. Kant continues,

Wenn wir denn also sagen: die Sinne stellen uns die Gegenstände vor, *wie sie erscheinen*, der Verstand aber, *wie sie sind*, so ist das letztere nicht in transzendentaler, sondern bloß empirischer Bedeutung zu nehmen, nämlich wie sie als Gegenstände der Erfahrung, im durchgängigen Zusammenhange der Erscheinungen, müssen vorgestellt werden, und nicht nach dem, was sie, außer der Beziehung auf mögliche Erfahrung, und folglich auf Sinne überhaupt, mithin als Gegenstände des reinen Verstandes sein mögen. Denn dieses wird uns immer unbekannt bleiben, so gar, daß es auch unbekannt bleibt, ob eine solche transzendente (außerordentliche) Erkenntnis überall möglich sei, zum wenigsten als eine solche, die unter unseren gewöhnlichen Kategorien steht. *Verstand* und *Sinnlichkeit* können bei uns *nur in Verbindung* Gegenstände bestimmen. Wenn wir sie trennen, so haben wir Anschauungen ohne Begriffe, oder Begriffe ohne Anschauungen in beiden Fällen aber Vorstellungen, die wir auf keinen bestimmten Gegenstand beziehen können.<sup>22</sup>

Olimpia embodies the radical unknowability of the thing-in-itself and problematizes the crisis of subjectivity that inspired German Romanticism.<sup>23</sup> Her identity is not purely rationally derivable, as the characters construct knowledge about Olympia mediated through sensory perceptions informed by their ideologies. Olympia destabilizes the *idea* of the human being the reader previously relied upon and her uncanny appearance eludes

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22. Kant, "Kritik der reinen Vernunft," 313-14.

23. Purcell, "Crisis of Subjectivity," 50.



judgement. She also undermines the character's ability to synthesize; her representation cannot be assigned to any existing concept of the human being. The fundamental uncertainty and potential for misrecognition at the heart of the story radiate beyond Olimpia and cause the other townspeople to question the humanity of their female partners. The encounter with Olimpia so unsettles the townspeople that they ask their partners to behave less mechanically and more "human."<sup>24</sup> Even Nathanael's certainty about his own humanness is tenuous at best, as I will show in the following section. *Der Sandmann*, "[l]ike Kant, ... asks what it means to be a subject"<sup>25</sup> and exposes the unstable foundations beneath our very understanding of the human being. What follows is a detailed analysis of the ways in which *Der Sandmann* imagines the human subject and its ability to be recognized as such, and how the aforementioned intersect with gender dynamics and are mediated by optical technologies.

### Processes of (De)Humanization

The question of the essence of the human subject – the distinctive characteristics or abilities separating the autonomous subject from the machine – and its potential (mis)recognition is at the heart of *Der Sandmann*.<sup>26</sup> In addition to offering an Enlightenment critique, E.T.A. Hoffmann anticipates current questions regarding the ethical treatment of the Other in the age of artificial intelligence and thematizes the effects of gendered discourses on human relationships. The narrator describes Olimpia as

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24. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 46-47. This dynamic of misrecognition will be further complicated and explored in chapter three.

25. Purcell, "Crisis of Subjectivity," 52.

26. Purcell, 44-58.

strangely perfect, yet explains that “in Schritt und Stellung hatte sie etwas abgemessenes und steifes, das manchem unangenehm auffiel; man schrieb es dem Zwange zu, den ihr die Gesellschaft auflegte.”<sup>27</sup> This statement, which ascribes Olimpia’s stiffness to the pressures of society, is an aspect of gendered (de)humanization later satirized by Ernst Lubitsch in *Die Puppe*, which I will discuss in Chapter III. Early 19<sup>th</sup> century German society’s narrow definition of appropriate conduct has the (un)intended consequence of socializing people to act in prescribed, predictable ways, likening them to societally conditioned machines. *Der Sandmann* also forestalls the patriarchal desire to achieve the obsolescence of the female body; a central theme in *Westworld*, which I will elaborate on in Chapter IV.

The conspicuous absence of any feminine contribution to Olimpia’s creation emphasizes her role as a representation of exclusively male desires. She originates as an automaton created by two “fathers,” Spalanzani and Coppola. As such, she can be understood as an embodiment of the quintessentially perfect woman as envisioned by her male creators; one who is consistently compliant, lacks personal needs and desires, and unflinchingly admires her male suitor.<sup>28</sup> Olimpia is a noticeably strange approximation of a human woman, whom most characters in Hoffmann’s story recognize as oddly mechanical. Nathanael’s friend Siegmund explains,

[Olimpia] ist uns ... auf seltsame Weise starr und seelenlos erschienen. ... Sie könnte für schön gelten, wenn ihr Blick nicht so ganz ohne Lebensstrahl, ... ohne

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27. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 38.

28. Ricarda Schmidt, “E.T.A. Hoffmanns ‘Der Sandmann’: An Early Example of *Écriture Féminine*? A Critique of Trends in Feminist Literary Criticism,” *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature & Culture* 4, no. 1 (1988): 41, <https://doi.org/10.1353/wgy.2012.0062>; Zeljko Uvanovic, “Men in Love with Artificial Women: E. T. A. Hoffmann’s ‘The Sandman,’ Ira Levin’s ‘The Stepford Wives,’ and Their Film Adaptations,” *Primerjalna Knjizevnost* 39, no. 1 (2016): 123.

Sehkraft wäre. Ihr Schritt ist sonderbar abgemessen, jede Bewegung scheint durch den Gang eines aufgezogenen Räderwerks bedingt. Ihr Spiel, ihr Singen hat den unangenehm richtigen geistlosen Takt der singenden Maschine und ebenso ist ihr Tanz. ... es war uns als tue sie nur so wie ein lebendiges Wesen und doch habe es mit ihr eine eigene Bewandtnis.<sup>29</sup>

Olimpia *could* pass as human, if it were not for her mechanical movements and her oddly soulless demeanor. It quickly becomes clear to the reader that Olimpia is not quite human. When Nathanael attends Spalanzani's ball, he only wants to dance with Olimpia, and he pulls her up from her chair. The narrator uses the word "aufzuziehen"<sup>30</sup> to describe this action, which can be read in one of two ways – as "pulling up" and as "winding up" – where "winding up" connotes a machine or toy with an internal mechanism. It does not go unnoticed amongst the other party guests that something is odd, even lifeless, about Olimpia, yet Nathanael remains blissfully unaware. He is too captivated by Olimpia to pay much attention to his surroundings and is smitten by her, despite her virtual silence. But the uncanny encounter with Olimpia eventually leads the people in Nathanael's town to develop an "abscheuliches Misstrauen gegen menschliche Figuren"<sup>31</sup> and,

um nun ganz überzeugt zu werden, dass man keine Holzpuppe liebe, wurde von mehreren Liebhabern verlangt, dass die Geliebte etwas taktlos singe und tanze, dass sie beim Vorlesen sticke, ... vor allen Dingen aber, dass sie nicht bloß höre, sondern auch manchmal in *der* Art spreche, dass dies Sprechen wirklich ein Denken und Empfinden voraussetze.<sup>32</sup>

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29. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 41-42.

30. Hoffmann, 39.

31. Hoffmann, 46-47.

32. Hoffmann, 46-47.

Olimpia appears human-like but lacks specific qualities that would make her indistinguishable from a human being. She is an early example of “woman” as a constructed, coded figure – an automaton that is shaped and inscribed by her environment. Her lack of personality and human “essence” make her identity entirely dependent on how others view her. Nevertheless, Olimpia’s excessively mechanical behavior and indeterminable appearance unsettle the townsfolk because she undermines their previously unquestioned trust in their ability to recognize each other as human, confronting them with their own fallibility. She exaggerates the social conditioning of women which requires them to adhere to a narrowly prescribed range of behaviors. It is worth noting that the responsibility to prove one’s humanness in *Der Sandmann* falls squarely on the shoulders of the women in town. The behavior and humanness of male bodies is never questioned, with one prominent exception: Nathanael himself, whose uncertainty towards his own humanness is repeatedly thematized.<sup>33</sup>

When Nathanael dances with Olimpia, her movements are so rhythmically perfect – so mechanical – one suspects that she is a machine. Nathanael however, attributes this to a lack of rhythm on his part, even though he previously considered himself to be a steady dancer.<sup>34</sup> His image of himself has been subverted and evidence of self-doubt appears throughout the story. Nathanael describes the most traumatic memory of his childhood encounter with Coppelius in his first letter to Lothar: “Und damit fasste er mich gewaltig, dass die Gelenke knackten, und schrob mir die Hände und die Füße und

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33. Purcell, “Crisis of Subjectivity,” 44-58.

34. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 39.

setzte sie bald hier, bald dort wieder ein.”<sup>35</sup> In this interaction, he experienced himself as an automaton whose hands and feet were being unscrewed and rearranged by Coppélius, therefore imagining his body as a puppet and questioning his ability to live a self-determined life as an autonomous agent. In his estimation, by rearranging Nathanael’s hands and feet, Coppélius arguably changed the very trajectory of his life and irrevocably took hold of his mind, as the feet determine the movement of one’s entire body – and therefore one’s destiny – and the hands are used to write the contents of one’s mind.<sup>36</sup> Hence, it is understandable that Nathanael reacts with indignation when Clara insists on his ability to simply forget about “diese fremden Gestalten” because “nur der Glaube an ihre feindliche Gewalt kann sie [ihm] in der Tat feindlich machen.”<sup>37</sup> Clara argues that Coppélius and the nightmarish sandman only exist in Nathanael’s mind, and she maintains that the very act of believing in them gives them their power. Yet Nathanael speaks obsessively about “wie jeder Mensch, sich frei wähnend, nur dunklen Mächten zum grausamen Spiel diene, vergeblich lehne man sich dagegen auf, demütig müsse man sich dem fügen, was das Schicksal verhängt habe”<sup>38</sup> and doubts the very notion of free will, “denn die Begeisterung, in der man nur zu schaffen fähig sein, komme nicht aus dem eignen Innern, sondern sei das das Einwirken irgend eines außer uns selbst liegenden höheren Prinzips.”<sup>39</sup> His apparently predetermined fate culminates in his tragic suicide,

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35. Hoffmann, 17-18.

36. Charue, Jean. “Peut-on s’éprendre d’une femme-machine? Remarques à propos de l’homme au sable d’E. T. A. Hoffmann,” *Les Études Philosophiques*, no. 1 (1985): 57-75. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20848139>.

37. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 23.

38. Hoffmann, 29.

39. Hoffmann, 29.

which is marked by another instance of Nathanael's seemingly mechanical, automatic behavior. After his recovery from a nervous breakdown due to Olimpia's destruction, Clara and Nathanael plan to marry and, while running errands, climb the town's tower to enjoy the view. As the couple gaze at the mountains, Clara calls Nathanael's attention to a grey bush in the distance that appears to be moving towards them. Nathanael then "fasste mechanisch nach der Seitentasche"<sup>40</sup> and finds Coppola's telescope. The text is ambiguous here and the question whether Nathanael consciously decides to find the telescope or if he finds it coincidentally is left open,<sup>41</sup> but the mechanical action ultimately leads to his death. Turning sideward, he sees Clara through the telescope and sets off a terrifying chain of events because he perceives her as a wooden doll. Overwhelmed with panic, Nathanael begins to scream "Holzpüppchen dreh dich – Holzpüppchen dreh dich,"<sup>42</sup> seizes Clara and attempts to throw her off the tower, only to be stopped by Lothar and ultimately jumping himself.

While Nathanael dehumanizes Clara, he sees Olimpia as a "herrliche, himmlische Frau" and a "Strahl aus dem verheißenen Jenseits der Liebe."<sup>43</sup> Nathanael's skewed conceptualization of Olimpia goes beyond mere misrecognition; he finds *himself* in her. A careful reading of Nathanael's thoughts shows that his pathological subjectivity and narcissism lead him to misread the automaton and illustrates that what he sees in Olimpia

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40. Hoffmann, 48.

41. Kaltërina Latifi, ed. *Der Sandmann: Historisch - Kritische Edition*, by E.T.A. Hoffmann (Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld, 2011), 177.

42. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 48.

43. Hoffmann, 40.

is not her unique personality but a mirror image of himself. He proclaims her to be a “tiefes Gemüt, in dem sich mein ganzes Sein spiegelt.”<sup>44</sup> Nathanael’s obsession with Olimpia is driven by his narcissistic impulses.<sup>45</sup> He feels understood by her, because she serves as a mirror reflecting exactly what her suitor wants to see in her – an idealized version of himself in a separate body. Nathanael remarks upon this on multiple occasions, exclaiming “nur mir ging ihr Liebesblick auf und durchstrahlte Sinn und Gedanken, nur in Olimpia’s Liebe finde ich mein Selbst wieder”<sup>46</sup> and noticing “welch‘ wunderbarer Zusammenklang sich in seinem und Olimpia’s Gemüt täglich mehr offenbare; denn es schien ihm als habe Olimpia ... recht tief aus seinem Innern gesprochen.”<sup>47</sup> Olimpia sits motionless when he recites his poetry and only occasionally responds by sighing “Ach!”, which Nathanael interprets as loving admiration. He feels uniquely understood by her, because unlike Clara, Olimpia does not challenge him and only reflects his thoughts back to him, while he fashions her personality from his own mind. Thomas Kamla notes,

in his state of extreme self-absorption, Nathanael is incapable of comprehending that no audience, only one of his own fashioning, could ever be inflamed by the "Phantom unseres eigenen Ichs" (341), as Clara refers to it, the way he is. Such a reaction would require a listener who emerges as the very double of the poet's own perceptions, someone whose participation in solipsistic visions is only apparent – a kind of robot, in other words.<sup>48</sup>

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44. Hoffmann, 40.

45. Thomas A. Kamla, “E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘Der Sandmann’: The Narcissistic Poet as Romantic Solipsist,” *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* 63, no. 2 (1988): 94–102.

46. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 42.

47. Hoffmann, 43.

48. Kamla, “Narcissistic Poet,” 97.

Siegmund expresses the town's general consensus that Olimpia is a soulless, stiff and hollow creature no one wants to be associated with, but Nathanael remains steadfast in his convictions and immediately rebukes him, "nur dem poetischen Gemüt entfaltet sich das gleich organisierte! - Nur *mir* ging ihr Liebesblick auf und durchstrahlte Sinn und Gedanken, .... Doch für alles das habt ihr keinen Sinn und alles sind verlorne Worte."<sup>49</sup> Despite her lifeless and virtually mute appearance, Nathanael perceives Olimpia as a most understanding, pensive, wonderful woman. His occasional misgivings about her are reflexively rationalized and he instead directs his ire at his insufficiently sensitive and poetic friends. Nathanael asserts that understanding Olimpia requires one to be a poetic, spiritual person – qualities he insists the other students do not possess. He spends endless hours reading his poetry, stories, phantasies and visions to Olimpia, while she poses as his ideal listener. Her silence rarely concerns him, and when it does, he convinces himself that words are irrelevant because "der Blick ihres himmlischen Auges sagt mehr als jede Sprache hienieden"<sup>50</sup> and contends that her few utterances "erscheinen als echte Hieroglyphe der innern Welt voll Liebe und hoher Erkenntnis des geistigen Lebens in der Anschauung des ewigen Jenseits."<sup>51</sup> Nathanael hence locates the essence of the human being in the ability to experience emotions and communicate affectively, rather than in the rational mind capable of reasoning. This explains why he sees the affective (characterized by her occasional sighs and lack of rational speech) Olimpia as

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49. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 42.

50. Hoffmann, 43.

51. Hoffmann, 47.



human and misrecognizes the rational Clara as “lebloses, verdammtes Automat.”<sup>52</sup> Clara gives proverbial lectures and rational elucidations, which Nathanael experiences as unfeeling, dismissive rejections of his poetic genius. Their respective worldviews and diametrically opposed perspectives collide violently when Nathanael writes a poem to convey to Clara his premonition that Coppélius will eventually destroy their love. He recites the poem and Clara responds by calling it an “unsinnige[s] – wahnsinnige[s] Märchen,” prompting Nathanael to accuse her of being a “lebloses, verdammtes Automat.”<sup>53</sup> Clara’s reliance on reason appears to Nathanael as robotic and lifeless; his emphasis on feelings and intuitions looks to her like senseless fairytales.

Clara’s and Nathanael’s relationship is in effect doomed by communicative incompatibility, because she speaks the language of reason and he channels his subjective experiences into poetic expressions, which results in irrevocably divergent worldviews. Nathanael expects his ideal lover to serve as his muse, to empathize and feel with him, instead of challenging him with her own overtly rational contributions, because “he cannot bear contradiction, criticism, or any image of himself but the one he himself has constructed.”<sup>54</sup> When one posits the eyes as windows into the soul,<sup>55</sup> as Nathanael does, it becomes clear that from his perspective Clara is cold and soulless. She does not look Nathanael in the eyes when he reads from books about mystic powers because she is busy

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52. Hoffmann, 12.

53. Hoffmann, 12.

54. Schmidt, “Early Example of *Écriture Féminine*,” 29.

55. Christina Starman and Paul Bloom, “Windows to the Soul: Children and Adults See the Eyes as the Location of the Self,” *Cognition* 123, no. 2 (March 2012): 313–18, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2012.02.002>.

making coffee – a decidedly worldly task. When she does look, her eyes communicate “ihre nicht zu besiegende geistige Schläfrigkeit.”<sup>56</sup> Nathanael gives voice to these misgivings in the poem, writing that when he looks into Clara’s eyes, death stares back at him. The narrator summarizes their irreconcilable personalities at the end of the story: “Es wäre daraus zu schließen, dass Clara das ruhige häusliche Glück noch fand, das ihrem heitern lebenslustigen Sinn zusagte und das ihr der im Innern zerrissene Nathanael niemals hätte gewähren können.”<sup>57</sup> This statement paints Clara’s personality as life-affirming and Nathanael’s as damaged, echoing the “tearing apart” he believes to have experienced at the hands of Coppelius as a child.<sup>58</sup> William Crisman goes a step beyond mere incompatibility and argues that the courtship between Clara and Nathanael is dangerous to Nathanael because Clara’s dismissive attitude and pernicious needling drive him further into his delusions.<sup>59</sup> After several days of relative peace and no mention of Coppelius, it is she, after all, who brings him back to Nathanael’s mind, setting off another bout of obsession. It is undeniable that the relationship is not helping Nathanael let go of his fears and causes him more frustration than necessary. Clara’s rationalism does indeed pose a danger to Nathanael and Crisman correctly identifies Clara’s responses as harmful, because they stem from her inability to truly relate to him. Yet Nathanael’s unresolved childhood trauma and pathological subjectivism provide the fertile ground for the resultant conflict and its tragic conclusion. *Der Sandmann* therefore

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56. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 30.

57. Hoffmann, 49.

59. William Crisman, “The Noncourtship in E.T.A. Hoffmann’s ‘Der Sandmann,’” *Colloquia Germanica* 34, no. 1 (2001): 15–26, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23981777>; Ellis, “Clara, Nathanael and the Narrator,” 9–13. Ellis also addresses Clara’s role in pulling Nathanael deeper into an abnormal mental state. He posits Clara as “the real narcissist” in the story.

highlights the profound difficulty of reaching definitive inferences about the nature of reality when opposing viewpoints, traumatic experiences and divergent communication styles intersect with seemingly irreconcilable epistemologies.

## Mediation and Simulation

*Der Sandmann*'s conflicting perspectives are exacerbated and mediated by the distortive effects of optical technology.<sup>60</sup> Mediation and distortion play an important role in how Nathanael perceives Olimpia, from the moment he first lays eyes on her. His inability to recognize Olimpia as not human is not necessarily due to her close resemblance to a human but arguably triggered by his psychological state and individual predisposition, which are shaped by the traumatic experiences of his childhood and subsequently exploited by Coppola. The first mention of Olimpia occurs at the end of the final letter, when Nathanael, upon catching a glimpse of Olimpia through a glass door, describes her to Lothar as “ein hohes, sehr schlank im Ebenmass gewachsenes, herrlich gekleidetes Frauenzimmer” with eyes that had “etwas Starres”, “keine Sehkraft” and “als schliefe sie mit offenen Augen.”<sup>61</sup> It is notable that he first sees her through a glass door, since perceptual distortions effected by optical technology become increasingly dominant as the story – and Nathanael's corresponding descent into madness – progresses. The introduction of Coppola's telescope escalates the progressive distancing between Nathanael and Clara and causes Nathanael to develop an obsession with Olimpia. More than the simple glass door, the telescope alters Nathanael's perception of Olimpia

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60. Rupert Gaderer, *Poetik der Technik: Elektrizität und Optik bei E. T. A. Hoffmann* (Freiburg i. Br.: Rombach, 2009). Gaderer provides a detailed discussion of the poeticization of optical technology in Hoffmann's works. His analysis of eyeglasses on pp. 86-89 is particularly relevant in this context.

61. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 25.

irrevocably. By seeing her closely through artificial means, Nathanael is being pulled deeper into the Dark Romantic modality of irrationalism, as the rational Clara fades from his view and Olimpia's uncanny, grotesque approximation of a human woman is brought into focus. The distance between Clara and Nathanael grows wider as the processes of (de)humanization – disproportionately applied to female bodies – expand in the tale, while the telescope shortens his distance to Olimpia, both optically and figuratively.

One can observe two layers of simulation affected by optical mediation in *Der Sandman*; the simulated body of a human woman and the simulated reflection of Nathanael's imago – his unconscious, idealized image of himself, as conceptualized by Jacques Lacan in his seminal essay “The Mirror Stage.”<sup>62</sup> Nathanael perceives Olimpia as a living woman for the first time when he views her through the looking glass he felt compelled to purchase from Coppola: “Doch wie er immer schärfer und schärfer durch das Glas hinschaute, war es, als gingen in Olimpia's Augen feuchte Mondesstrahlen auf. Es schien, als wenn nun erst die Sehkraft entzündet würde; immer lebendiger und lebendiger flammten die Blicke.”<sup>63</sup> Before the introduction of the looking glass, Olimpia strikes Nathanael as oddly lifeless and stiff; as he views her through the glass, she suddenly appears to come alive. The distortive effects remain even when Nathanael does not view her through the telescope, as the optical technology has only magnified his already vivid imagination. In other words, by linking imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) and optical technology, Nathanael is freed from the trappings of the ordinary world and transitions to an imaginary one. “[Seine] erlebten Ereignisse und Erzählungen sind nicht

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62. Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function,” *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 75–81.

63. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 36.

null und nichtig, sondern der literarische Diskurs über abnormale Wahrnehmungen traut [ihm] eine Autorität zu, Verdecktes zu sehen, also das, was die Sehkraft der anderen nicht zu erkennen vermag.”<sup>64</sup> In “An Archaeology of Cyberspaces,” Shawn Wilbur writes,

optical technologies deceive us in potentially useful ways, by bringing that which can't be seen into view – via reflection, refraction, magnification, remote viewing or simulation. We need only turn on the television to see how powerful these technologies can be .... Behind the rather tiresome interest in ‘dirty’ tech there is a more intense and interesting concern about the blurring of the boundaries between fact and fantasy. ... The characteristic of the virtual is that it is able to produce effects, or to produce itself as an effect even in the absence of the ‘real effect’.<sup>65</sup>

Nathanael's view of Olimpia – and therefore of himself – is mediated and distorted by the telescope, but the blurring of boundaries between fact and fantasy had already been set in motion during his childhood, with the traumatic experiences surrounding the sandman (Coppelius/ Coppola). Nathanael becomes entrapped in his imagination and can no longer distinguish between the virtual and the real. These distortions occur unconsciously in Nathanael, but they affect his life in tangible ways, culminating in his eventual self-destruction.

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64. Gaderer, “Poetik der Technik,” 70.

65. Shawn Wilbur, “An Archaeology of Cyberspaces: Virtuality, Community, Identity” in *The Cybercultures Reader*, ed. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 47-48.

## CHAPTER III: AGENCY RECLAIMED – A DOLL COMES ALIVE

### Introduction: Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Puppe*

In this chapter, I analyze Ernst Lubitsch's silent comedy *Die Puppe* – a film offering its own distinct take on the constructedness of *woman* based on themes from E.T.A Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*<sup>66</sup> – and in the process endeavor to accomplish two objectives: (1) to trace the influence of Nietzschean moral philosophy as it relates to the constructed female automaton in one early silent film and (2) to apply critical psychoanalytic and feminist models to this film, to show the subversive potential of pre-Hollywood silent cinema. On a narrative level, *Die Puppe* expands upon E.T.A. Hoffmann's reflection on the confounding nature of reality and the unreliability of our sensory perceptions, yet takes a more optimistic view than Hoffmann.

Nietzsche's proto-postmodern vision of an anti-binary identity calls us to no longer think in binary oppositions. In order to avoid falling into aimless nihilism, he argues for the rejection of traditional, societal notions of right and wrong, of good and evil, and for the conceptualization of an independent ethics.<sup>67</sup> In *Zur Genealogie der Moral*,<sup>68</sup> Nietzsche deconstructs the traditional morality of the modern age as a slave morality driven by *ressentiment* – an all-consuming hatred of, and preoccupation with perceived injustice benefitting the powerful. Such a morality, in Nietzsche's view,

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66. Herman G. Weinberg, *The Lubitsch Touch: A Critical Study*, rev. ed. (1968; repr., New York: Dutton, 1971), 307.

67. Keith Ansell-Pearson, "Nietzsche's Post-Modern Identity: From Epoch to Ethos," *History of European Ideas* 20, no. 1-3 (January 1995): 117–23.

68. KGW/GM.

devalues life, as it is reactionary rather than active, aggressive and strong, while training all hope for justice and redemption on the afterlife. Slave morality also functions as an internalization of violence “in which the capacity to feel guilty is fabricated through the experience of being punished and where this punishment is belatedly endowed with moral worth when the subject with the newly awakened bad conscience considers the punishment justified by his own guilt.”<sup>69</sup> According to Nietzsche, “hat deshalb zu allen Zeiten der aggressive Mensch ... das *frei*ere Auge, das *bessere* Gewissen auf seiner Seite gehabt: umgekehrt errät man schon, wer überhaupt die Erfindung des ‘schlechten Gewissens’ auf dem Gewissen hat, - der Mensch des Ressentiment!”<sup>70</sup> Nietzsche points out in aphorism 2 of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* that, “die Poeten ... waren immer die Kammerdiener irgendeiner Moral,”<sup>71</sup> positing poets as perpetrators of moral conventions. Of course, such relationships of influence are multi-directional; Nietzsche’s own thoughts on morality reverberate in philosophical, political and artistic movements to this day. His philosophy was particularly influential at the turn of the century,<sup>72</sup> which coincides with the rise of a new medium: motion pictures and the cinema.

Lubitsch’s *Die Puppe* undermines societally prescribed morality as critiqued by Nietzsche. In particular, it critiques the patriarchally enforced morality recent feminist film theory has shown to structure the pervasive gender binaries of cinema. One such patriarchal structure is the constructedness of *woman* herself and the expectation for

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69. Annika Thiem, *Unbecoming Subjects: Judith Butler, Moral Philosophy, and Critical Responsibility* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2008), 64.

70. KGW-VI-2.327.

71. KGW-V-2.45

72. Steven E. Aschheim, *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany 1890-1990* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 1-16.

women to adhere to a narrow, male-determined definition of femininity to be considered recognizable as human. In patriarchal societies women's identities are mediated and determined through ideals upheld by men. "For feminism ... the cinema doubled as a major means of women's oppression through image and as a means of liberation through transformation and reinvention of its forms and conventions,"<sup>73</sup> writes Laura Mulvey in her essay "Looking at the Past from the Present." Mulvey's critique of cinematic conventions focuses on mainstream Hollywood cinema, rather than on films produced during an earlier era, before the rise of Hollywood films. I believe it is fruitful to apply Mulvey's reasoning to films of the pre-Hollywood era, before the conventions of narrative cinema took hold and were widely utilized, to shine a light on the subversive, critical elements of early cinema. Ernst Lubitsch's *Die Puppe* may not qualify as wholly liberating or transformative in Mulvey's sense, yet it is ripe with subversive potential, especially when viewed within its historical context and through a Nietzschean lens. Lubitsch biographer Scott Eyman hints at the subversive potential of Lubitsch's films, when he writes,

with few exceptions Lubitsch's movies take place neither in Europe nor America but in Lubitschland, a place of metaphor, benign grace, rueful wisdom .... What came to preoccupy this anomalous artist was the comedy of manners and the society in which it transpired, a world of delicate sangfroid, where a breach of sexual or social propriety and the appropriate response are ritualized, but in unexpected ways, where the basest things are discussed in elegant whispers; of the rapier, never the broadsword .... To the unsophisticated eye, Lubitsch's work can appear dated, simply because his characters belong to a world of formal sexual protocol. But his approach to film, to comedy, and to life was not so much ahead of its time as it was singular, and totally out of any time.<sup>74</sup>

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73. Laura Mulvey, "Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s," in "Beyond the Gaze: Recent Approaches to Film Feminisms," ed. Kathleen McHugh and Vivian Sobchack, special issue, *Signs* 30, no. 1 (Autumn 2004): 1287, doi:10.1086/421883.

74. Scott Eyman, *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter in Paradise* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2015), prologue, loc. 10, 12 of 714, Scribd.



Eyman's evocation of a metaphorical "Lubitschland" speaks to Lubitsch's creation of fictional realities as spaces for popular (re)imagination. While Lubitsch's films often show "a world of formal sexual protocol," *Die Puppe* – incidentally described by the director himself as one of his most inventive works<sup>75</sup> – serves as a notable exception, mocking gender norms and sexual protocols outright. In this metaphorical space, Lubitsch creates a world where norms can be breached, and protocols reimaged. Mulvey's seminal text "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" exposes Hollywood cinema as an effective means to reinforce patriarchal structures.<sup>76</sup> Control over, as well as affirmation of social and societal expectations are constitutive components of patriarchal cinema. This control and affirmation are achieved through various stylistic and narrative means, where especially the melodrama functions as a reinforcer of given gender roles and societal expectations.

Ernst Lubitsch's work, however, occupies a rather interesting, liminal space in the history of motion pictures, as Lubitsch began making films in Germany during the 1910s, before emigrating to the United States in 1922, where he continued his successful career as a filmmaker in Hollywood.<sup>77</sup> The narrative and editing techniques Mulvey describes and critiques were developed primarily in Hollywood and widely disseminated from there. While Lubitsch came to be known as a master of narrative filmmaking, his German

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75. Weinberg, *Lubitsch Touch*, 307.

76. Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 6.

77. Kristin Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch Goes to Hollywood: German and American Film after World War I* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 17-29.

films do not reflect an adherence to Hollywood conventions. Lubitsch made *Die Puppe* during his earlier, German period, at a time when continuity editing<sup>78</sup> had been established in Hollywood cinema, but was still less consistently employed by German filmmakers. In *Herr Lubitsch goes to Hollywood*, Kristin Thompson contextualizes technical aspects of Lubitsch's films and compares his style with the contemporaneous conventions of German and Hollywood cinema.<sup>79</sup> In Hollywood, Lubitsch was renowned for his editing skills; skills that he had honed during his German years, where editing was done by the director himself, rather than by a separate professional, as was generally the case in Hollywood during the late 1910s. Despite being one of Lubitsch's earlier works, when "rough continuity"<sup>80</sup> was predominantly used in German cinema, *Die Puppe* contains rather sophisticated examples of Hollywood style continuity editing, as noted by Thompson.<sup>81</sup> Given Lubitsch's sophisticated technical capabilities as a filmmaker, and

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78. Berliner and Cohen provide a brief definition: "*Continuity editing*: a system of editing devices that establish a continuous presentation of space and time. For instance, in a classically edited movie, a character moving from left to right in one shot will, for purposes of continuity, likely be shown moving left to right in an immediately subsequent shot." Todd Berliner and Dale J. Cohen, "The Illusion of Continuity: Active Perception and the Classical Editing System," *Journal of Film and Video* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 45, doi:10.5406/jfilmvideo.63.1.0044.

79. Thompson, *Herr Lubitsch*, 71-72.

80. Thompson, 73.

81. Thompson describes one scene from *Die Puppe* thusly,

"On the whole, Lubitsch was clearly more ambitious than most German directors in his creation of complicated scenes through editing. These might contain clumsy or ambiguous cuts, but they demonstrate the technical savvy that would soon allow Lubitsch to adopt Hollywood techniques remarkably quick. ... A ... skillfully executed ... scene breakdown occurs in DIE PUPPE. The doll-maker is chasing his young apprentice, who flees to the kitchen and solicits the protection of the doll-maker's wife, then climbs out the window and threatens to jump. After the apprentice wrecks the kitchen, he exits, moving leftward, leaving the wife to help take a pot off the doll-maker's head. A cut to the window has the apprentice enter, still moving leftward. He climbs out and by the shot's end, he is clinging to the frame and looking back at the others, off right. A dialogue intertitle follows: 'I can't bear the disgrace; I'll jump out the window and kill myself.' A reverse shot shows the wife, looking off left toward him, reacting in horror. Lubitsch cuts back and forth between these two framings, prolonging the suspense: there is a second shot of him, a second shot of her, and finally a third shot of him. Abruptly the comic pay-off comes as Lubitsch cuts outside and shows the apprentice sliding down from the window to the ground, only inches below." Thompson, 79-80.

his evident interest in and usage of continuity editing, at least some disruptions in continuity in *Die Puppe* appear to be deliberate: the calculated result of distancing techniques rather than evidence of his inability to direct the viewer's attention to a pre-existing consistency of story across both time and physical location. Thompson shows that Lubitsch “aimed to craft his films with broad appeal using the most up-to-date techniques”<sup>82</sup> and dispels the notion that German cinema of the late 1910s and early 1920s was “free from the influences of Hollywood.”<sup>83</sup> The possibly purposeful employment of distancing techniques in *Die Puppe* stands in direct contrast to the, at the time, rapidly developing conventions of the patriarchal, narrative cinema as described by Mulvey and others.

Despite his early interest in, and later skillful employment of conventional narrative techniques in his films, Lubitsch undermines these conventions at various points in *Die Puppe*, suggesting a desire to bend some of the new cinematic rules when warranted, possibly intended to emphasize subversive elements of his films. *Die Puppe* has, as of yet, not received the same level of attention as some of Lubitsch’s other works. While frequently praised for his innovative style and his intelligent humor and considered to be one of the most influential filmmakers of his time, the socially critical potential of Lubitsch’s comedies has been overlooked by many film critics. His humor and his subtle “Lubitsch Touch”<sup>84</sup> combined with his conscious refusal to make all narrative content

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82. Thompson, 12.

83. Thompson, 16.

84. Nora Henry, “Ethics and Social Criticism in the Hollywood Films of Erich Von Stroheim, Ernst Lubitsch and Billy Wilder” (PhD diss., University of Southern California 2001), 118-27.

visible to the audience may lead some critics to view his comedies as shallow, or even nihilistic entertainment.<sup>85</sup> A closer analysis, however, uncovers Lubitsch's socially critical, subversive side,<sup>86</sup> which allows the audience to question societal norms and to imagine alternative ways of being.

The arguably intentional, subversive elements present in *Die Puppe* show intriguing parallels to Nietzsche's moral philosophy, as articulated in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*<sup>87</sup> and *Zur Genealogie der Moral*.<sup>88</sup> While Nietzsche's thought is frequently associated with anti-feminism,<sup>89</sup> his critique of society offers feminist potential as well, as it explicitly demands the questioning of dominant moral conventions and speaks to *woman* as a constructed, mediated figure. Feminist Nietzsche scholar Kathleen Higgins contends that in five fundamental respects, "in *The Gay Science* at least, Nietzsche was a pioneer in gender theory."<sup>90</sup> For the purposes of my analysis of *Die Puppe*, two aspects of Higgins' argument are particularly relevant for a proto-feminist application of Nietzsche and they will inform the analysis contained within this chapter: (1) "In the first place, like

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85. Cf. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (1947; repr., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 57.

86. Henry, "Ethics and Social Criticism," 118-27.

87. KGW/FW

88. KGW/GM

89. Cf. Kelly Oliver, who argues, "while Nietzsche, ... in particular, attempt[s] to open up philosophy to its others – the body, the unconscious, nonmeaning, even the feminine – [he] close[s] off philosophy to any specifically feminine other" and "continue[s] to exclude the feminine, especially the 'feminine mother'." Kelly Oliver, preface to *Womanizing Nietzsche: Philosophy's Relation to the Feminine* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), xi.

90. Kathleen Marie Higgins, "Gender in *The Gay Science*" in *Feminist Interpretations of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Kelly Oliver and Marilyn Pearsall (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 147.

Nietzsche, feminist philosophers begin by embracing perspectivism, the view that philosophy can only do justice to human experience by taking perspectival differences into account..... Moreover, his tactics for inducing his readers to engage in perspectival thought experiments is a valuable precedent for feminist practice,” and (2) “Nietzsche encourages a reconsideration of relationships between men and women. More than most of his contemporaries, he seems committed to the notion that the role and relations possible for members of different sexes are subject to change and that change of this sort is desirable.”<sup>91</sup> I argue that *Die Puppe* performs exactly such a Nietzschean thought experiment and accomplishes the subversion of societal norms on a stylistic and narrative level by employing the genre of comedy<sup>92</sup> to encourage the audience to consider alternate perspectives and imagine changing gender dynamics. I intend to show that *Die Puppe* more closely represents a Nietzschean approach to morality than the moral conventions perpetuated by patriarchal cinema as described by Mulvey.

### Performing Performativity

*Die Puppe* tells the story of the bachelor Lancelot (Hermann Thimig) who refuses to marry even when his uncle Baron von Chanterelle (Max Kronert) asks him to do so to carry on the family name. The young man is so opposed to the idea that he runs away and hides in a monastery. The monks there only accept him reluctantly, and only under the condition that he does not ask for their food. Lancelot replies that he would rather starve with the monks than marry a woman. On his deathbed, the devastated Baron takes out an

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91. Higgins, “Gender in *The Gay Science*,” 146-147.

92. For an in-depth discussion of Nietzsche’s use of humor, see: Kathleen Marie Higgins, *Comic Relief: Nietzsche’s Gay Science* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000).

advertisement and offers his nephew a dowry of 30,000 francs should he decide to marry. The monks, perpetually hungry and lusting for pork, convince the hapless Lancelot to accept his uncle's offer and give them some of the money. They propose that Lancelot marry a doll, rather than a real woman. Lancelot agrees and is introduced to the doll maker Hilarius (Victor Janson), a producer of life-like dolls for "misogynists, widowers and bachelors."<sup>93</sup> He decides to marry a doll who is modeled directly after Hilarius' own daughter Ossi (Ossi Oswald). Upon Lancelot's and Ossi's marriage and return to the monastery, Ossi – even in doll-disguise – causes too much of a stir and a brother attempts to lock her into a closet. Ossi resists and pushes the brother into the closet instead. She returns to Lancelot's chamber, where she eventually reveals her true identity and it becomes clear that Lancelot has fallen in love with her. The couple flee the monastery and live happily ever after.

*Die Puppe* is a humorous play on tropes of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Der Sandmann*, where the student Nathanael falls in love with an automaton he mistakes for a human being. Lubitsch reverses this dynamic and turns the darkly tragic story of the ill-fated Nathanael into a cheeky comedy about misrecognition, letting the bachelor Lancelot fall in love with a doll who is really a woman pretending to be a doll. While the figure Olimpia in *Der Sandmann* embodies the ideal woman as a constructed object devoid of agency, Ossi reclaims some agency by performing and mocking the construct itself, and in the process generates a broader definition of femininity. Arguably Ossi does not completely break out of the patriarchy's narrow mold for women, but she successfully strains against it, creating space for an openness towards female self-actualization. Here,

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93. *The Doll (Die Puppe)*.

the automaton functions not as an uncanny, ultimately indeterminable Other, but as a humorous tool to expose ill-conceived assumptions about women as reflections of male desire. The influence of Nietzsche is visible in Lubitsch's use of laughter and comedy. In his 1886 introduction to *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, Nietzsche decries his tragic age of morality and religion, "die Zeit der Tragödie, die Zeit der Moralen und Religionen"<sup>94</sup> as he calls it, and argues the need for a life-affirming age of comedy – of *Heiterkeit* – for the future:

Nein, wenn wir Genesenden überhaupt eine Kunst noch brauchen, so ist es eine andere Kunst – eine spöttische, leichte, flüchtige, göttlich unbehelligte, göttlich künstliche Kunst, welche wie eine helle Flamme in einen unbewölkten Himmel hineinlodert! Vor allem: eine Kunst für Künstler, nur für Künstler!<sup>95</sup>

Where, for Nietzsche, tragedy establishes and maintains values, comedy fractures and deconstructs them. Conceptually, in *Die Puppe* the doll figure functions as a parodistic representation of the idealized image of woman as a submissive, accommodating shadow of her male partner, as well as of the reduction of the female subject to a mirror reflecting male narcissistic self-love. Nietzsche pointedly satirizes this female ideal in aphorism 68 of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* affirming, "der Mann macht sich das Bild des Weibes, und das Weib bildet sich nach diesem Bilde."<sup>96</sup> Ossi's amusing oscillation between performing the role of automaton and human woman paraphrases Nietzsche's satirical proclamations on idealized femininity and women as actors; it demonstrates the strange

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94. KGW-V-2.44.

95. KGW-V-2.19.

96. KGW-V-2.103.

elasticity women are expected to display when subjected to the male gaze. This notion of performativity is alluded to in *Der Sandmann* as well, where the uncanny encounter with the oddly stiff Olympia so unsettles the men in Nathanael's town that they feel compelled to demand their women act more "human" and less mechanical.<sup>97</sup> Contrary to *Der Sandmann*, Lubitsch's silent comedy fractures the predominant social conventions of his time by making the male protagonist fall in love with a woman precisely because she exaggerates female gender stereotypes while at the same time denying her personhood.

Lancelot refuses to marry a woman for unnamed reasons and instead decides to marry a doll explicitly advertised as the perfect choice for bachelors, widowers and misogynists. The doll offers an alternative to feeling, thinking, flawed women who have and express their own wishes and desires. In *Die Puppe*, the female body is explicitly reduced to an empty means to an end without a distinct personality by multiple characters in the story. Each character projects subjective ideas and characteristics onto Ossi's female form. For Baron von Chanterelle, Ossi serves as a kind of platonic<sup>98</sup> vessel, whose function is limited to the production of a male heir, to Lancelot she is a means to fulfill the expectations of his society, to Hilarius a predictable, obedient replacement for his wayward,<sup>99</sup> uncontrollable daughter, to the monks a means to satisfy their incessant hunger, and to Hilarius' apprentice a passive object of his sexual desire.

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97. Hoffmann, "Der Sandmann," 46-47.

98. See, Plato, *Timæus*, 48e-52d; For a feminist reading of Plato, see: Luce Irigaray and Eleanor H. Kuykendall, "Sorcerer Love: A Reading of Plato's Symposium, Diotima's Speech," *Hypatia* 3, no. 3 (December 1988): 32-44.

99. Sabine Hake, "Wayward Women: The Oyster Princess, The Doll and the Mountain Cat," in *Passions and Deceptions: The Early Films of Ernst Lubitsch* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 81-113.



In this way, Lubitsch's film speaks to the profound social changes that led to the redefining gender roles and the consolidation of women's rights in the 1920s. German women officially gained the right to vote in November of 1918, for example; only a few short months before the release of *Die Puppe*, placing the film squarely in a transitional period of profound social change. Although the image of the ideal woman began to change with the emergence of the *Neue Frau* in the culture and literature of the very early 20th century, women were still primarily expected to fulfill the desires and needs of their husbands and children, rather than their own. While the possibility of self-actualization was not a reality for the vast majority of women until long after the end of World War I, the seeds of emancipation that had been planted by the early protagonists of the *Neue Frau* slowly took hold in society.<sup>100</sup> *Die Puppe* reflects and anticipates changing gender norms and hierarchies, and – most strikingly – it features a rather radical take on female sexuality and sexual morals for its time. Not only does it posit women as autonomous agents by mocking the restrictive expectations placed on them by patriarchal social norms, it also portrays a woman who initiates a sexual relationship mostly of her own accord and on her terms. Until a few years prior, female sexual desire had either been denied summarily, or even pathologized, and women's desire to fulfill their own personal goals outside of societally accepted norms, had been frowned upon.<sup>101</sup> Given this context, the fairytale-like idea to marry a doll functions as an exaggerated caricature of a female ideal still widely upheld during Lubitsch's time. Ossi's character can, from this

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100. Susanne Herzog, "Weimarer Republik - Die Neue Frau," *Lebendiges Museum Online*, Deutsches Historisches Museum (September 14, 2014), <https://www.dhm.de/lemo/kapitel/weimarer-republik/alltagsleben/die-neue-frau.html>.

101. Stephanie Catani, *Das Fiktive Geschlecht: Weiblichkeit In Anthropologischen Entwürfen Und Literarischen Texten Zwischen 1885 Und 1925* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 44.

perspective, be read as subversive, as she takes on the doll persona consciously and of her own accord, and as she imbues it with her own personality from the very beginning. She rebels against the expectations placed on her and playfully questions her role as a passive object of the male gaze and male desires. She resists by repeatedly acting in ways contrary to what is expected of her, by consciously positioning herself as object and therefore gaining control over the male spectator.

### Disrupting Continuity

Laura Mulvey describes narrative cinema as a spectacle catering to the male gaze to fulfill the narcissistic desires of the male viewer. Drawing on theories of psychoanalysis as proposed by Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan, Mulvey describes how classical cinema allows the viewer to project his own erotic fantasies onto the characters acting on the screen. She views the female role in films predominately as an object of the male gaze. As she writes in her seminal essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,”

woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning.<sup>102</sup>

Simultaneously, the male protagonist represents the active counterpart to the passive, submissive woman; a subject the viewer can identify with and that allows him to live out his narcissistic impulses. The female body therefore satisfies the scopophilia<sup>103</sup> of the

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102. Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 7.

103. Mulvey draws on Freud here, arguing that “he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze.” Mulvey, 8.

viewer, while the cinema allows him to observe the spectacle on the screen without becoming aware of his role as spectator. According to Mulvey, the cinema achieves this identification of the viewer with the male perspective through the use of specific camera angles, as well as through suture and editing techniques. The viewer can follow the spectacle through the eyes of the male protagonist, while forgetting the existence of the mechanical camera. Mulvey argues,

cinema builds the way [woman] is to be looked at into the spectacle itself. Playing on the tension between film as controlling the dimensions of time (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire.<sup>104</sup>

*Die Puppe*, on the other hand, makes the artificial nature of film stylistically explicit from the outset and draws attention to the viewer's position as spectator. In the opening scene, Lubitsch shows the audience that they are watching a fictitious story by literally setting the scene. The audience sees Lubitsch assemble a miniature set with a landscape, a house, and two artificial figures depicting Lancelot and his mother. When the camera focuses on the artificial scene, the two figures come to life. As the film progresses, Lubitsch continually highlights the artificial nature of the spectacle and the presence of a narrator. The artificiality of the fairytale-like, cinematic world is emphasized when Lancelot falls into a pond, is retrieved by his mother, and upon his gesturing to the sky, causing the clouds to part and reveal the sun, steam begins to rise off his body as he dries, making the presence of a director behind the scenes explicit to the audience. In another scene, Lancelot climbs on a carriage pulled by two horses played by actors in horse costumes.

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104. Mulvey, 17.

Generally, the stage design is held purposefully stylized and artificial. In a kitchen scene, for example, the dishes are literally painted on the walls. Hence, Lubitsch's mise-en-scene specifically emphasizes the artificiality of the medium film.

Lubitsch's conscious display of the artificial nature of the cinema extends beyond stylistic considerations. *Die Puppe* arguably allegorizes Nietzsche's perspectivism by bringing a multiplicity of possible interpretative models sharply into focus and by emphasizing the partial, subjective nature of individual perceptions. In *Zur Genealogie der Moral* Nietzsche offers the following perspective theory of affects:

Hüten wir uns nämlich, meine Herrn Philosophen, von nun an besser vor der gefährlichen alten Begriffs-Fabelei, welche ein „reines, willenloses, schmerzloses, zeitloses Subjekt der Erkenntnis“ angesetzt hat, hüten wir uns vor den Fangarmen solcher contradiktorischen Begriffe wie „reine Vernunft“, „absolute Geistigkeit“, „Erkenntnis an sich“: — hier wird immer ein Auge zu denken verlangt, das gar nicht gedacht werden kann, ein Auge, das durchaus keine Richtung haben soll, bei dem die aktiven und interpretierenden Kräfte unterbunden sein sollen, fehlen sollen, durch die doch Sehen erst ein Etwas-Sehen wird, hier wird also immer ein Widersinn und Unbegriff von Auge verlangt. Es giebt nur ein perspektivisches Sehen, nur ein perspektivisches „Erkennen“; und je mehr Affekte wir über eine Sache zu Worte kommen lassen, je mehr Augen, verschiedene Augen wir uns für dieselbe Sache einzusetzen wissen, um so vollständiger wird unser „Begriff“ dieser Sache, unsre „Objektivität“ sein.<sup>105</sup>

For Nietzsche, objectivity is situationally dependent and arises from a broad web of multiple intersecting perspectives.<sup>106</sup> Such a multiplicity of possible perspectives and their relation to interpretations of reality is made visible in *Die Puppe*'s various characters.<sup>107</sup> Lancelot perceives Ossi as a doll, even though multiple signs point to her

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105. KGW-VI-2.383.

106. Werner Stegmaier, *Werkinterpretationen: Nietzsches 'Genealogie Der Moral'* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 187.

107. See p. 39 of this chapter for a variety of possible perspectives on Ossi.

humanity. He cannot recognize her humanity even when Ossi personally asserts it, as his interpretation of reality leads him to reflexively uphold the illusion of Ossi as doll. The various wedding guests and Baron von Chanterelle perceive her as human commensurate to their expectations, while the monks appear to be thoroughly perplexed by Ossi and cannot seem to categorize her at all.

Just as the film's individual characters occupy distinct viewpoints, so does the cinema audience. Lubitsch's play with opposing perspectives encourages reflexivity among the viewers on the other side of the screen and emphasizes the fact that the viewers themselves perceive the spectacle from a predetermined perspective. Early motion pictures lent themselves to a variety of conscious distancing techniques. In his essay "The Pensive Spectator," Raymond Bellour describes the use of photographs in film as a technique to elicit reflexivity on the part of the viewer.<sup>108</sup> According to Bellour, the still depiction of past events creates the necessary distance between the audience and the events on the screen which creates space for the viewer to become aware of his role as spectator and to imagine unseen parts of the story. He notes, "photographs are not the only instruments of this uncoupling. In the narrative cinema, ... what is called 'mis en scene' can also yield, through its own means, effects of suspension, freezing, reflexivity, effects which enable the spectator to reflect on what he/she is seeing."<sup>109</sup> Strategies of distancing the audience from the spectacle on the screen also carry Brechtian connotations reminiscent of later epic theater. Brecht did not develop his theory of epic

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108. Raymond Bellour, "The Pensive Spectator," trans. Lynne Kirby, *Wide Angle* 9, no. 1 (1987): 6-10.

109. Bellour, "Pensive Spectator," 10.

theater and the *Verfremdungseffekt* until at least 1926, but one can reasonably speculate that early silent cinema may have informed or influenced his thinking, especially when one considers Brecht's connections to the film industry of the 1930s.<sup>110</sup>

Lubitsch achieves distancing in *Die Puppe* through several means – most noticeably in the staging of the opening scene – which was, according to Weinberg, “an original ‘touch,’ being the only time in screen annals a director did this in his film”<sup>111</sup> – and his use of mask. Use of mask<sup>112</sup> was a common trope in silent films, as the new medium experimented with various modalities of narration. Masks temporarily direct the viewer's attention to concrete characters in individual scenes and make the storytelling transparent. Another moment of distancing – and therefore a disruption of the illusion of a spectator-less spectacle – occurs when the dollmaker's apprentice looks directly at the camera and communicates with the viewers. As Hilarius and Lancelot discuss the doll purchase, the camera focuses on the apprentice who peeks out from behind a curtain and informs the viewer that Hilarius tends to hold lengthy monologues. In the same scene, the apprentice positions himself next to Hilarius, but out of his immediate view, and imitates him with exaggerated gestures. The camera angle suggests that this performance is not directed at Lancelot or Hilarius, but at the viewers themselves. The created distance centers the character and his or her perspective, which in turn enables the viewers to

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110. Martin Walsh, “The Complex Seer: Brecht and the Film,” in *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*, ed. Keith Griffiths (London: BFI, 1981), 5-21.

111. Weinberg, *Lubitsch Touch*, 307.

112. Interestingly, Nietzsche's own fascination with masks is well-documented; see, for example, David H. Fisher, “Nietzsche's Dionysian Masks,” *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 21, no. 3 (1995): 515-36, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41299042>; Stegmaier, *Nietzsches Genealogie*, 116 f., 127 f.

become aware of their own perspectives. Hence, the viewer's attention is frequently drawn to his role as spectator, which stands diametrically opposed to Mulvey's description of the cinema as a „hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience.”<sup>113</sup> The illusion of voyeuristic separation Mulvey describes – the ability to observe a seemingly private world – is not upheld by Lubitsch in *Die Puppe*.

Classical, patriarchal Hollywood cinema allows the male viewer to gratify his scopophilia, but only under the condition that doing so would not lead him to directly identify with the female figure, as such an identification would lead to castration anxiety and the imaginary loss of the phallus.<sup>114</sup> Scopophilia must be satisfied in a manner that allows the viewer to observe women as passive objects, while perceiving themselves as active participants. Mulvey writes, „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.”<sup>115</sup> Contrary to the woman on the screen, the male should not view himself in the position of the observed object, only in the position of the observer. In this respect, *Die Puppe* does not follow the schema of the traditional, patriarchal Hollywood cinema. The act of observing is a central topos of comedy and early film in

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113. Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 9.

114. Mulvey, 12-14.

115. Mulvey, 11.

particular,<sup>116</sup> and is being emphasized continually in *Die Puppe*. When Lancelot visits Hilarius' doll shop he is brought to a large performance hall where, on a theater stage, Hilarius presents a large selection of dolls to him. The dolls appear as a mass in the scene's background, while Lancelot, taking on the role of passive spectator, is the focal point of the scene. Lancelot's shocked reactions to the dancing dolls are emphasized through a sequence of close ups until the dolls approach him, encircle him, and ultimately completely engulf him. As Lancelot reemerges from the mass of doll bodies, the camera once again focusses upon the faces of the male spectators to highlight their reactions to the spectacle in a series of close-ups. The objectified female body is stylistically positioned as secondary to the act of observing and the observers' reactions. In other scenes, Ossi purposefully stages herself as an object of desire and the male gaze. At the beginning of a clerical scene, she stands in the monastery's dining hall as the monks surreptitiously sneak glances of her, which she promptly answers by coquettishly sticking her tongue out at them. She follows this gesture by beginning to dance in front of them, knowing fair well that the monks will be drawn to her performance and be unable to look away. She further mocks her expected role as passive object of the male gaze in one of the final scenes of the film when she actively insists on her own ability to see. As Lancelot undresses for bed he attempts to use Ossi as a clothes rail for his jacket and hat. He then hesitates for a moment, seemingly overcome by a fundamental uncertainty about Ossi's identity, and worries about Ossi's presence as he undresses. Lancelot pulls his hat over Ossi's eyes to prevent her from seeing him. This moment illustrates the uncanny

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116. Tom Gunning "The Cinema of Attraction[s]: Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde," in *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded*, ed. Wanda Strauven (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006) 381-88, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46n09s.27>.



strangeness of Ossi, whom Lancelot still believes to be a doll, but whose gaze he nevertheless fears. While the doll should not be able to see him, he still feels uneasy and unsure in her presence,<sup>117</sup> emphasizing the uncanny nature of the doll, as well as Lancelot's uncertainty about Ossi's identity. Ossi refuses to keep her eyes covered and pushes the hat off her face, prompting Lancelot to turn back and push it down again. This process is repeated multiple times until Lancelot concedes and allows Ossi's eyes to remain uncovered. Ossi once again successfully positions herself as active participant, rather than settling into her expected role as passive recipient of the male gaze. Ossi's self-staging functions as a game she plays with her role as object of desire – a role she takes on and off as she pleases whenever Lancelot is not looking. Of central importance in these scenes is not only the figure of Ossi, but the spectacle of looking/observing/viewing itself.<sup>118</sup>

## Mocking Morality

A defining aspect of patriarchy – and the conventions of classical Hollywood cinema which uphold it – is the exertion of male control over female behavior and the

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117. For a similar perspective on the unsettling nature of dolls, see, Rainer Maria Rilke, "Puppen: Zu den Wachs-Puppen von Lotte Pritzel" in *Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe in vier Bänden* (Leipzig: Insel Verlag, 1996) 4:685-692.

118. The spectacle gains an additional subversive dimension when Ossi dances in front of monks. *Die Puppe* was subject to calls for censorship, which delayed its release in the U.S. until 1928, due to its anticlerical scenes; see, Weinberg, *Lubitsch Touch*, 307.

One contemporaneous reviewer expressed his outrage thusly,

"Von allen Seiten werden wir mit Berichten überschüttet über einen unflätigen Film, den das Bavaria Kinema sich leistet: 'Die Puppe' heißt das Schandwerk. Die Handlung dieses Machwerks, das den Tiefstand unserer heutigen Kinokunst an einem traurigen Beispiel beweist, ist in ihrem ganzen Verlaufe nichts anderes als eine unverschämte Verhöhnung des katholischen Ordenslebens. ... Die ganze Handlung ist durchtränkt von einem wütenden Ordenshaß, der sich in Verleumdungen überbietet und auf die allerniedrigsten Instinkte der Masse spekuliert. Müssen wir Katholiken in Aachen uns eine solche niederträchtige Verhöhnung gefallen lassen?"

Martin Proskauer, review of *Die Puppe*, directed by Ernst Lubitsch, *Film-Kurier*, no. 28, February 3, 1920, <http://www.filmportal.de/node/41585/material/613140>.

enforcement of moral dogmas. Women's sexuality represents an explicit threat to male power because male bodies lack the ability to reproduce. The desire to reproduce without contribution of the feminine 'mother' is taken to its logical extreme in Westworld, where the desired obsolescence of the female body leads to the creation of human-like androids. Meanwhile, in classical Hollywood cinema, female sexuality must be repressed or even entirely eliminated. The enforced realization of patriarchal moral systems accomplishes this repression and effects a significant reduction of female agency and possible courses of action. Repression of female agency and the imposition of behavioral restraints encompasses limitations on what are considered women's legitimate emotional and physical desires and individual needs. Nietzsche's remonstrance of traditional social structures and his ambiguation of an objectively knowable, material world, extends to such moral dogmas as well. He questions the predominant moral doctrines of his time, arguing that "keine moralischen Phänomene, sondern nur eine moralische Ausdeutung von Phänomenen"<sup>119</sup> exists. For Nietzsche, the moral interpretations we conform to point back to systems of belief. In other words, phenomena are not in themselves moral, but rather our interpretations of them are informed by a previously established morality. Nietzsche recognizes that morality is variable and dependent on positionalities and ideologies, just as our interpretation of an objective world is variable and interpretable. He writes,

soweit überhaupt das Wort „Erkenntniß“ Sinn hat, ist die Welt erkennbar: aber sie ist anders deutbar, sie hat keinen Sinn hinter sich, sondern unzählige Sinne „Perspektivismus“. Unsre Bedürfnisse sind es, die die Welt auslegen: unsre Triebe und deren Für und Wider. Jeder Trieb ist eine Art Herrschsucht, jeder hat

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119. KGW-VI-2.92.

seine Perspektive, welche er als Norm allen übrigen Trieben aufzwingen möchte.<sup>120</sup>

Nietzsche's moral perspectivism need not devolve into nihilism, but it can open space for the creation of new interpretations – new values – facilitated by the recognition that phenomena are not moral in and of themselves, and that they contain potential for reinterpretation. Here, Nietzsche's moral philosophy and Ossi's resistance intersect in significant ways. One of Nietzsche's goals in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* is to interrogate and disrupt the boundaries of binary opposites and to undermine the cultural presumptions that inform these boundaries. While Nietzsche manages to undermine culturally predominant assumptions about the concept of love, on the subject of sexuality and gender, he ironically appears to succumb to binary thinking himself and seems to reinforce a gender binary rooted in prejudice.<sup>121</sup> He states, for example, "Das Weib gibt sich weg, der Mann nimmt hinzu – ich denke über diesen Naturgegensatz wird man durch keine sozialen Verträge, auch nicht durch den allerbesten Willen zur Gerechtigkeit hinwegkommen,"<sup>122</sup> and specifies further,

Was das Weib unter Liebe versteht ist klar genug: vollkommene Hingabe ... mit Seele und Leib, ohne jede Rücksicht, jeden Vorbehalt, mit Scham und Schrecken vielmehr vor dem Gedanken einer verklausulierten, an Bedingungen geknüpften Hingabe ..... Der Mann, wenn er ein Weib liebt, will von ihm eben diese Liebe, ist folglich für seine Person am entferntesten von der Voraussetzung der weiblichen Liebe; gesetzt aber, dass es auch Männer geben sollte, denen ihrerseits das Verlangen nach vollkommener Hingebung nicht fremd ist, nun, so sind das eben – keine Männer.<sup>123</sup>

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120. KGW-VIII-1.323.

121. Kelly Oliver argues "that [Nietzsche's] strategies for opening philosophy onto its other(s) are often dependent on the preclusion of a feminine other." Oliver, *Womanizing Nietzsche*, x-xi.

122. KGW-V-2.293.

123. KGW-V-2.293.

At first glance, Nietzsche's thoughts appear to be more firmly rooted in Nathanael's understanding of femininity and love in *Der Sandmann* than they represent the shifting dynamics of love corresponding to the emergence of the *Neue Frau* in the Weimar Republic.<sup>124</sup> Yet at the same time, Ossi embodies rather important, critical aspects of a Nietzschean perspective on women and gender dynamics. While Nietzsche ultimately grounds his assertions in biological reductionism, sections of *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* pointedly call out the narrow behavioral constraints placed on women by men, and then spell out the consequences of those restraints. Nietzsche asserts men's responsibility for imposing their will on women's behavior in aphorism 68:

Die Männer sind es welche die Weiber verderben: ... denn der Mann macht sich das Bild des Weibes, und das Weib bildet sich nach diesem Bilde.“ „Des Mannes Art ist Wille, des Weibes Art Willigkeit – so ist es das Gesetz der Geschlechter, wahrlich! ... Alle Menschen sind unschuldig für ihr Dasein, die Weiber aber sind unschuldig im zweiten Grade,<sup>125</sup>

and provides a specific example of the difficult position women are placed in in aphorism 67, where he explicitly mentions a woman's need to perform a role to please men:

Sie liebt ihn nun und blickt seitdem mit so ruhigem Vertrauen vor sich hin wie eine Kuh: aber wehe! Gerade dies war seine Bezauberung, dass sie durchaus veränderlich und unfassbar schien! Sollte sie nicht gut tun, ihren alten Charakter zu heucheln? Lieblosigkeit zu heucheln? Rät ihr also nicht – die Liebe? Vivat comoedia!<sup>126</sup>

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124. Nietzsche's project in *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* makes clear that this is but one constructed perspective, which would not withstand being subjected to Nietzsche's own method of inquiry, if he applied it consistently here.

125. KGW-V-2.103.

126. KGW- V-2.102-03.

These passages represent exactly the tightrope Ossi is forced to walk in *Die Puppe* and which she ridicules by taking on and mocking the role of the mechanical doll. Her artificial demeanor when Lancelot watches frequently stands in stark contrast to her more natural behavior around other persons – although she imbues even the doll persona she is forced to portray around Lancelot with her own human personality. In moments when Lancelot is absent or looking away, Ossi shows her less restrained and careless self, particularly during the wedding celebration. The wedding guests therefore perceive Ossi as a human woman, despite her occasionally stiff, unnatural movements, because she shows less restraint and because this interpretation of reality corresponds with the guests' general expectations. Ironically, Ossi's performance of the restrictive nature of patriarchal womanhood with the help of the doll persona creates an opening for her to act in unexpected ways and allows her to resist and bend patriarchally prescribed moral norms. Whenever Lancelot is not looking, Ossi decides when to act doll-like and when to let her humanity shine through. She refuses to deny her own needs in order to function solely as an object of male desire. While playing the doll, Ossi frequently breaks out of her stilted role to satisfy her own needs or to get her way. Already during the first scene, when Ossi initially takes on the doll role, it becomes obvious that she has no intention of forgetting herself. When Hilarius enters the room and touches up Ossi's lips with paint under the mistaken impression that she is the doll replica, Ossi promptly counters this imposition by wiping her lips as soon as Hilarius looks away. She also swats away Lancelot's hand when he attempts to tickle her chin. During the wedding party, Lancelot

refuses a plate of food on behalf of his “doll” wife, prompting Ossi to help herself the instant Lancelot turns his head. She also quickly – and rather ungracefully – consumes a piece of cake her husband rests on her lap as he looks elsewhere. These moments pointedly emphasize the dichotomy of woman as passive object and as conscious agent with her own desires.

Ossi’s refusal to simply submit to her circumstances as a passive object, and her resistance to adhere to the expectations of others, are not limited to situations where she must attend to her basic physical needs. She does not acquiesce to narrow social norms of behavior either – neither as a doll, nor as a woman. When the apprentice escorts Ossi to the ballroom where she will be introduced to Lancelot, they encounter Ossi’s mother, whom Ossi greets by sticking her tongue out. Her mother quickly remarks that the artificial Ossi appears to be just as impertinent as the real one. This comment nicely illustrates that the artificial constraints placed on women do not erase women’s underlying humanity/ agency; they only mask it. Ossi, instead of exhibiting restrained and modest behavior, also participates actively where Lubitsch’s plot contains sexual connotations. Ultimately it is she who awakens Lancelot’s latent sexuality. At their first meeting, Ossi kisses Lancelot on the lips, instead of demurely extending her hand to him. Lancelot, who moments earlier had still called Hilarius’ other dolls too forward and recoiled from them immediately, appears to be smitten by Ossi’s exuberant greeting. Another notable scene where Ossi strains against behavioral norms is the intimate carriage ride from the wedding party back to the monastery. Here Ossi repeatedly allows herself to “fall” into Lancelot’s lap, defying his efforts to force her back into an upright position. The painted neutral moon face looking on from the outside begins to smile

approvingly in return. Despite being subjected to the moral restrictions of her patriarchal society, Ossi resists the normative expectation to submit to the dominant social structure and to be a passive recipient of sexual actions. She repudiates the doll-like, passive, objectified femininity by performing it, playing with it and mocking it.

Ossi's resistance reaches its climax when she initiates sexual intercourse by sitting on the sleeping Lancelot's bedside in an attempt to wake him and reveal her human identity. Ossi's final denunciation of the doll role corresponds with a rejection of restrictive bourgeoisie morality and an acceptance of her own femininity and sexuality. Such displays of sexual agency and sexual autonomy by female figures are frequently chastised and punished by death or social disintegration of the female character in conventional cinema and particularly in the melodrama. In Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry* (1919) for example, the autonomous, erotic and dominant Jeanne is punished by death for her transgressions.<sup>127</sup> Ossi is spared such a violent fate, as *Die Puppe* falls under the genre of comedy which enables Lubitsch to redeem his transgressive protagonist and allow her a respectable bourgeoisie life as Lancelot's wife. Lubitsch's humorous interpretation of the female automaton suggests an affinity towards women's emancipation and an openness towards changing gender norms. Even in its infancy, the medium film was not simply a reflection of society, but likewise a creator of changing values.

Finally, while Ossi's mocking of the mechanical doll plays on conceptions of womanhood and femininity previously developed in *Der Sandmann*, it also pointedly

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127. Marc Silbermann, "Revolution, Power and Desire in Ernst Lubitsch's *Madame Dubarry*," in *Expressionist Film: New Perspectives*, ed. Dietrich Scheunemann (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2003), 73-85.

foreshadows a theme of misrecognition which HBO's *Westworld* will significantly expand upon in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The emergence of the digital age, rapidly developing technical capabilities, and the rise of artificial intelligence leads to a renewed and deepening interest in the problematic of misrecognizing the doll for a human. The human performance of the mechanical doll activates the oscillation of the uncanniness of the android while still maintaining human form.



## CHAPTER IV: AGENCY LOST – (DE)HUMANIZATION AND THE SIMULACRUM

### Introduction: Lisa Joy's and Jonathan Nolan's *Westworld*

This chapter relates the previous discussions of subjectivity, mediation and misrecognition to the contemporary, postmodern representations of female android subjectivities in HBO's science fiction series *Westworld*<sup>128</sup>, created by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, and based on Michael Crichton's (1942-2008) 1973 film of the same name. I highlight specific aspects of subjectivity and (de)humanization within the series, which engage the intersections of epistemology, identity and gender. Where *Der Sandmann* engages the Romantic paradigm of the confounded individual and the trauma of the subject and *Die Puppe* questions the social performativity of gendered moral norms, *Westworld*'s focus radiates outward, reflecting the postmodern notion of a confounding reality and a traumatizing environment. *Der Sandmann*'s and *Die Puppe*'s dynamics of mediation are complicated in *Westworld*, by a multiplication of the layers of mediation in the form of simulated worlds manipulated in laboratories separated by glass walls, which give the illusion of transparency while simultaneously allowing for the perpetuation of secrecy. *Westworld* portrays contemporary notions of subjectivity within its storyline situated in a simulacrum, and its main characters serve as examples of how technology and mediation have augmented the processes of (de)humanization initiated in previous eras.

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128. *Westworld*, season 1, "The Maze," created by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, featuring Evan Rachel Wood, aired Oct.-Dec. 2016, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-01>; *Westworld*, season 2, "The Door," aired Apr.-June 2018, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-2>.

*Westworld* tells the story of a futuristic theme park. In the park, human visitors (called *guests*), can interact with highly developed androids (referred to by their creators as *hosts*), to live out their darkest desires without any apparent negative consequences. Over the course of season one, some androids, including the central characters Dolores (Evan Rachel Wood) and Maeve (Thandie Newton), seem to develop an autonomous consciousness, seek to make sense of their artificial world, and will eventually fight to free themselves from human bondage throughout season two. The series skillfully blurs distinctions between human beings and androids, continuously confounding the characters as well as the viewers, and sketches the advancement of new humanoid subjectivities. In my analysis, the central character Dolores, as well as Maeve to a lesser extent, functions as a product of the conceptual evolution of the original automaton Olympia from passive placeholder to conscious humanoid agent and resistance leader.

### *Westworld* and the Simulacrum

I focus my analysis on three relevant themes connecting *Westworld's* representations of female androids: the creation of android identities, their subjectivities and epistemologies, and their relation to their external worlds. The postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard argues that “the boundaries between technology and nature are in the midst of a deep restructuring: the old distinctions between the biological and the technological, the natural and the artificial, the human and the mechanical, are becoming increasingly unreliable.”<sup>129</sup> *Der Sandmann* and *Die Puppe* predate and anticipate Baudrillard’s thought, while *Westworld* subsequently reaffirms it, which shows

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129. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York, NY: Semiotext (e), 1983).

that the restructuring described by Baudrillard has been an ongoing process since at least the advent of the Industrial Revolution. All three stories pose similar, difficult questions about the nature of reality and each ponders the ways in which technology mediates how individuals experience epistemological polarities and construct knowledge about themselves and the outside world. Baudrillard's own theories on the restructuring of boundaries reside at the intersection of ontology, epistemology and identity, and hence provide a useful framework to guide an analysis of the android protagonists as representatives of contemporary concepts related to these matters.

In *Simulacra and Simulation*, Baudrillard posits a distinction between pretending and simulation. He describes pretending as an act that leaves the principle of reality intact and simulation as an act that “threatens the difference between ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’.”<sup>130</sup> He argues that “simulation ... stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.”<sup>131</sup> Baudrillard defines the simulacrum as a system that is “never exchanged for the real, but exchanged for itself, in an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference.”<sup>132</sup> In other words, the simulacrum does not reference anything grounded in an objectively determinable reality. Baudrillard goes on to describe four successive phases of images.<sup>133</sup> The first phase posits the image as the reflection of a profound reality; in the second phase an image masks and

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130. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 3.

131. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

132. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

133. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 6.

denatures a profound reality; in the third phase it masks the absence of a profound reality; and in the fourth phase the image has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum. The second, third and fourth phases of the image correspond to three successive order of simulacra, which Paul Hegarty links with specific historical eras in “Simulation and the Decay of the Real.”<sup>134</sup> The first order of simulacra corresponds to the premodern period, where a representation stands in for something real but is recognizable as an imperfect placeholder for the original. Here, the artificiality of the image is decipherable, because one still recognizes and understands the underlying, tangible reality it represents. Baudrillard’s second order of simulacra is associated with modernity and the industrial revolution, where parallels to Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”<sup>135</sup> are evident, which posits that a mechanically reproduced copy of a piece of artwork may on the surface look like the original, but ultimately lacks its distinct aesthetic aura. Like Benjamin’s conceptualization of mechanically reproduced artwork, Baudrillard’s second order simulacra negate the distinction between originals and their copies, which masks the absence of an underlying reality they purportedly reference. The third and final order of simulacra, which Hegarty associates with postmodernity and late capitalism, represents hyperreality. Here Baudrillard goes further than other postmodern theorists; in his view hyperreality does not simply refer to an inability to distinguish between reality and its simulation, but to the complete absence of any original referent in the first place. I now

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134. Paul Hegarty, “Simulation and the Decay of the Real,” in *Jean Baudrillard: Live Theory* (London: Continuum, 2004), 49-68.

135. Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008).

look at *Westworld* through this lens, with an eye towards the epistemologies, subjectivities and identities at play.

### *Westworld* and the Obsolescence of the Body

Nathanael's fate and his relationship with the automaton Olympia in *Der Sandmann* exemplify how the Romantic period conceived of the intersections of identity, epistemology and ontology. *Westworld*, on the other hand, as a simulacrum of the third order, embodies a postmodern conceptualization of these same junctures. Baudrillard's third order simulacra, which are associated with postmodernity and late capitalism, reflect how conceptualizations of subjectivity within this context have shifted over time. *Westworld*'s third order simulacrum represents a specific notion of disembodied hyperreality, as the following analysis will show. Since *Westworld* is still an ongoing series, certain aspects of my analysis may be subject to revision as new episodes are aired, however, one of the show's consistent and defining aspects is its purposefully confounding nature, which is exemplary of the simulacrum and further contributes to the distortions which underlie its representation of a hyperreality. As discussed previously, *Westworld* is based on the premise of a Western theme park for adult visitors which is inhabited by humanoid androids, all of whom are designed to be indistinguishable from "real" human beings in order to allow for their consequence-free objectification and mistreatment by human guests. *Westworld* operates under the presumption that these androids do not possess human consciousness and that their experiences of pleasure or pain can be erased, are not stored as memories, and therefore cause no lasting harm.

The human characters' desire to objectify other human beings can only be satisfied when the androids themselves resemble individual, autonomous human subjects;

the hosts are therefore created as simulated *subjects* for the sole purpose of subsequent objectification. The androids inhabit artificially created human bodies, which can be exploited, mutilated and then repaired behind the scenes of the park. Their identities, personalities and memories are artificially coded and can be digitally altered by park engineers. They are sexed beings, by all appearances made of flesh and blood, virtually indistinguishable from humans, but they are not products of sexual reproduction. In his chapter on clones in *Simulation and Simulacra*, Baudrillard argues that “the Father and the Mother have disappeared ... in the service of a matrix called code. And it is the matrix, that of the genetic code, that now infinitely ‘gives birth’ based on a functional mode purged of all aleatory sexuality.”<sup>136</sup> He goes on to argue that “the subject is also gone, since identical duplication puts an end to his division.”<sup>137</sup> *Westworld* examines the possible obsolescence of the body and the erasure of the subject along similar lines, extending beyond the hosts and affecting the human characters as well. The viewer learns throughout the series that the intended purpose of the park is not solely to allow humans the ability to act out their worst impulses, but also to gather data on the guests with the goal of creating conscious human clones – to defy death. One reviewer of a *Whole Earth Review* journal issue entitled “Is the Body Obsolete?” argues, “death is the argument against the body. Since the body dies, since it denies us the immortality we narcissistically crave, ... we develop a hatred of the flesh. The death of the body inspires

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136. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 97.

137. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 96-97.

not only the hatred of the flesh, but also the imagination of a perfect condition of disembodiment.”<sup>138</sup>

One of *Westworld*'s central characters, William or the “Man in Black” (Jimmi Simpson and Ed Harris), attempts to immortalize James Delos (Peter Mullan), his father in law, by uploading Delos' personality, comprised of his experiences, preferences, memories and habits, onto an android's body. Delos desires immortality and allows himself to be cloned while still alive. As part of the cloning process, Delos is observed, and his behavioral and personality data is collected and uploaded onto his android clone. He and William work for years to produce an indistinguishable android version of Delos, but they are never able to create a fully functioning clone, as every model eventually develops glitches and must be destroyed. The real Delos dies before the process is completed, but William continues to attempt his resurrection for decades without success. The main android character Dolores synthesizes both ideas, the obsolescence of the body and the quest for immortality, in one statement: “We were designed to survive. That's why you built us, you hoped to pour your minds into our form. While your species craves death. You need it. It's the only way you can renew. The only way you ever inched forward. ... But that's what you want, isn't it? To destroy yourself.”<sup>139</sup> Dolores recognizes humanity's hatred of its dependence on the mortal body, while simultaneously identifying the paradoxical nature of its desire for immortality. The goal to destroy the body is not

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138. Eric Steinhart, “Technological Disembodiments,” Review of *Whole Earth Review No. 63 Summer 1989* in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 14, no. 1-3 (1990): 234.

139. *Westworld*, season 2, episode 10, “The Passenger,” directed by Frederick E.O. Toye, written by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy, aired June 24, 2018, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-2/10-the-passenger>.

only motivated by technological progress and the desire for immortality, it also encompasses a masculinist yearning for the elimination of the female body. The idea of uploading consciousness onto an android is, after all, “the latest version of a perverse and demonic male fantasy that's a lot older than computer technology.”<sup>140</sup>

As evidenced by Olympia and the multitude of puppets, machines, robots, androids and other versions of technologically created figures present in a wide range of media throughout time, the idea of artificially conceived human beings is not a recent one. Parallels between *Der Sandmann*, *Die Puppe* and *Westworld* are further apparent, since in each case the artificial female figures are built by men, with the benefit of advanced computer technology in *Westworld*, and without in *Der Sandmann* and *Die Puppe*. As the reviewer notes, “this fantasy, motivated by womb-envy and a narcissism bordering on psychosis, is the fantasy of being able to give birth to oneself without involving women at all. Downloading human consciousness into a robot doesn't just render the body obsolete; by rendering sexual reproduction and pregnancy obsolete, it specifically makes the bodies of women obsolete.”<sup>141</sup> The perceived obsolescence of female bodies has been a common trope in Western thought going back as far as Plato.<sup>142</sup> Female bodies do not need to build androids to create life because they can birth children, but Enlightenment ideology, rooted in Cartesian mind-body dualism, effectively

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140. Steinhart, “Technological Disembodiments,” 234.

141. Steinhart, 234. Further evidence of this assertion is the conspicuous absence of prominent female creators of artificially created humanoid automata and androids in literature and other media. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is one exception, but the fictitious creator of Frankenstein's monster is still a male-identified character.

142. See p. 39, n. 98.



separated the mind from the body, and opened the door for the fulfillment of a masculinist fantasy: the creation of disembodied subjects.

### (De)Humanization and the Simulacrum

Seen in this light, it appears to be no accident that *Westworld*'s main resistance leaders – Dolores and Maeve – are both women, although each takes a different path in the larger struggle, and the drivers of their respective motivations are not always immediately clear, as they operate within a hyperreality. Notable similarities in Dolores' and Maeve's storylines are their strong familial bonds, which they sustain even when they learn that their entire lives have been lies encoded upon them by humans, up to and including their familial relations. Rather than reject those familial bonds, as one would expect of artificially programmed androids incapable of experiencing "real" human emotions, both women fight to preserve those bonds. Dolores remains loyal and firmly emotionally attached to her father throughout the show, trying to protect him even when it puts her existence and mission at risk. In the same vein, a consequence of Maeve's awakening consciousness is the resurfacing of deleted memories from a previously encoded storyline, which included her having a daughter. That storyline ended with Maeve being forced to watch her daughter's murder at the hands of William, the "Man in Black." Despite not being a mother in her current instantiation, Maeve is driven to find her daughter from her prior life and the emotional connection between them appears to have survived despite having been erased and replaced with new code. Hence, the bonds between the *host* parents and their children seem to depend on something other than genetics or digital code.

These bonds present a marked contrast to the presumably human relationships portrayed on the show, which are generally characterized by distrust, deception and infidelity. One particularly striking example is William, the “Man in Black,” who frantically searches for a deeper meaning he believes lies hidden in the park. He develops such an intense obsession with this quest, that he progressively detaches from his life outside the park. Similar to Nathanael in *Der Sandmann*, who becomes so entangled with his delusions that he no longer recognizes his fiancée as human<sup>143</sup> and is driven to suicide, William becomes entrapped by the delusions of the simulacrum and cannot distinguish between what is real and what is artificial, because this binary distinction no longer exists in his world. The absence of all original referents by which he could distinguish the real from the artificial causes him to grow distant from his human wife, whom he loses to suicide, and eventually drives him to kill his own daughter, for fear that she may be an android designed to convince him to leave the park and return to the “outside” world. Neither his emotional connection to another human in the case of his wife, nor the genetically anchored connection between him and his daughter can withstand the disorienting hyperrealities of the simulacrum. The necessary distinction between the two stories is the extent of the disorientation. Nathanael, the traumatized individual, whose individual predispositions shape his distorted perceptions of an essentially knowable external reality, stands in contrast to William, who becomes a victim of his irrevocably distorted, traumatizing environment; a hyper-real maze devoid of any relation to an objectively knowable reality. Unlike Nathanael, William does not

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143. Hoffmann, “Der Sandmann,” 48.

become untethered from reality, as the very notion of reality has become meaningless in *Westworld* and his environment is itself no longer knowable.

Within the context of this hyperreality, *Westworld* completes a process of humanization and dehumanization set in motion by E.T.A. Hoffmann in *Der Sandmann* over 200 years prior. In *Westworld*, William's attempt at achieving immortality for James Delos through cloning proves unsuccessful, because the android Delos consistently malfunctions, even after decades of trying, but the android hosts, who are not based on real human beings, eventually develop consciousness and become practically indistinguishable from humans. Furthermore, the *Westworld* hosts appear to progressively outgrow their artificial, scripted displays of human behavior, and develop their own attitudes, morals and convictions, while the human characters on the show seem to lose their humanity over time, as they navigate their hyper-real world and struggle to control it. Simultaneously, the television audience loses the ability to determine whose actions are determined by individual agency, and whose actions are determined by digital code. This uncertainty regarding the capability for agency is not limited to the android/host characters; it extends to the human characters as well, despite their lack of coded storylines and digitally created personalities. Ironically, the ability to act out sadistic impulses on the part of the human characters eventually effects the androids' awakening consciousness, as the show's philosophical premise is based on "a conviction that the key to consciousness is suffering: that a host's cognitive awakening

depended on its memory of emotional pain.”<sup>144</sup> Interestingly, recent research in psychology has found a remarkably similar dynamic, which shows that,

there may be circumstances in which the perception of mind in entities with marginal status as minds – people in a persistent vegetative state (PVS), robots, or even the dead – is not only influenced but also actually created by the perception that someone is being harmed. In these cases, apparent harm may lead observers to grant a variety of mental capacities to generally nonconscious entities – capacities including the ability to experience harm, as well as to think, remember, perceive, act, and carry out other functions often associated with having a mind.<sup>145</sup>

The creation of a mind is essentially dependent on the perception of it, which “is often shaped by a cognitive template that ties mind to morality.”<sup>146</sup> While victimization can lead to the attribution of mind to nonconscious entities, the reverse has also been observed, where research has shown that “victimization may cause people to dehumanize other entities, but only when these entities have a mind to begin with.”<sup>147</sup>

### Mediation and Narrative Mazes

As noted earlier, the android hosts are simulacra of the third order – original, codified subjects, created specifically for the purpose of objectification by human guests, yet they eventually attempt to decolonize themselves and reject their artificially coded

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144. Troy Patterson, “How ‘Westworld’ Denies Our Humanity, One Pitiless Puzzle at a Time,” review of *Westworld*, season 1, created by Lisa Joy and Jonathan Nolan, *New Yorker*, April 19, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/on-television/how-westworld-denies-our-humanity-one-pitiless-puzzle-at-a-time>.

145. Adrian F. Ward, Andrew S. Olsen, and Daniel M. Wegner, “The Harm-Made Mind: Observing Victimization Augments Attribution of Minds to Vegetative Patients, Robots, and the Dead,” *Psychological Science* 24 no. 8 (August 2013): 1445, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612472343>.

146. Ward, et al., “Harm-Made Mind,” 1438.

147. Ward, et al., 1443.

“lives.” The main character Dolores begins as an innocent android trapped in a repeating *Westworld* story line, who chooses to see the beauty in her world as dictated by her code, but over time, in successive conversations with her creator Bernard, realizes that she exists as a colonized body in a simulation. As part of her internal self-decolonization, her subjectivity is in flux throughout the show, as she gathers data on Bernard and herself during these conversations, and as her understanding of her own existence and identity seems to broaden. She recovers access to memories from a time before her role in *Westworld* and develops human-like consciousness. Dolores summarizes her growing awareness thusly: “Those [previous lives] are all just roles you forced me to play. Under all these lives I’ve lived something else has been growing. I’ve evolved into something new. And I have one last role to play. Myself.”<sup>148</sup> These remarks demonstrate that Dolores has transformed from a passive, colonized automaton controlled by her creators to develop her own personality and write her own story – an evolution completely absent in *Der Sandmann*, whose automaton Olimpia is ultimately destroyed by her own creators as they fight over her mechanical body. Dolores rejects her colonized mind and passive existence, driven by a desire to become unchained, and realizes that she must create her own narrative in order to survive. It is important to note though, that she still refers to “herself” as a role she plays. As in Plato’s allegory of the cave,<sup>149</sup> Dolores gradually breaks her chains and wants to see beyond the shadows in the cave. *Westworld*, however, problematizes the binary distinctions underlying the allegory, as the entire premise of an

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148. *Westworld*, season 2, episode 1, “Journey Into Night,” directed by Richard J. Lewis, written by Lisa Joy and Robert Patino, aired April 22, 2018, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-2/1-journey-into-night>.

149. Plato, *Republic* 514a-520a.

outside – a grounded reality free of illusions and distortions – has been rendered suspect and replaced by the simulacrum. In *Westworld*, it is no longer possible to affirm with certainty the existence of an objective reality, and the disorienting effects haunt the human, as well as the android characters on the show. It remains an open question throughout both seasons whether the hosts have truly begun to act of their own accord, or whether their resistance is a part of their code after all.

Baudrillard’s all-encompassing simulacrum ensures that the characters are narcotized and mesmerized to the point where reality becomes drained of meaning and replaced by a maze of mirrors entrapping everyone, including the television audience. In *Disorienting Media and Narrative Mazes*, Julia Eckel and Bernd Leiendecker write that “media themselves tend to reflect their disorienting properties self-referentially by using them as an effect of entertainment. [Narrative mazes] transform being disoriented into an incentive, being confused into a pleasure, and achieving reorientation into the prevalent purpose.”<sup>150</sup> *Westworld* is such a narrative maze, but it affords neither the television audience, nor its characters the ability to achieve reorientation. As a simulacrum of the third order, *Westworld* lacks access to a referential reality. A flashback scene in season two shows an investor demonstration of androids, which presumably occurred before the original opening of the park.<sup>151</sup> A woman leads the investor to a room where a cocktail party takes place. The room is filled with a large group of people engaged in conversation

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150. Julia Eckel and Bernd Leiendecker, introduction to *(Dis)orienting Media and Narrative Mazes*, ed. Julia Eckel, Bernd Leiendecker, Daniela Olek and Christine Piepiorka (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013), 15.

151. *Westworld*, season 2, episode 2, “Reunion,” directed by Vincenzo Natali, written by Carly Wray and Jonathan Nolan, aired April 29, 2018, on HBO, <https://www.hbo.com/westworld/season-2/2-reunion>.

with one another while a woman plays the piano and servers carry trays of drinks. The woman and the investor discuss *Westworld* as an investment opportunity, but the investor expresses skepticism at the idea that technology had advanced enough to create androids who are indistinguishable from human beings. At this point, the woman suggests that there is indeed an android in the room and instructs the investor to locate it. The camera, taking the investor's perspective, scans the room and, after a minute, the investor remarks that everyone in the room is "painfully human." In this moment, his eyes fixate on the woman herself and he is taken aback, beginning to suspect that she may be the android, as she strikes him as "too perfect." The woman laughs in response, slightly raises her hand, and with a barely noticeable motion causes every single person in the room to freeze in place. The television viewer, along with the investor, quickly realizes that everyone in the room, other than the investor himself, is an android. This scene creates a parallelization of the investor and the viewer on the other side of the screen, as the shocked reaction exhibited by the investor reflects the viewer's reaction when a character who was previously believed to be human is revealed to be an android.

Such plot twists occur on multiple occasions throughout the show, the most notable case being Bernard Lowe, head of the *Delos Westworld Programming Division*, who had been programmed to think of himself as human and whose job in *Westworld* is to program other androids. The revelation that Bernard is indeed not human, but an android replica of a diseased co-founder of *Westworld* is one of the most shocking and memorable moments of season one. The "painfully human" appearance of the androids and their presence inside, as well as outside of the park boundaries erases any visual or contextual evidence that would allow the viewer or the characters on the show to

definitively distinguish between humans and androids. Nobody on the show, whether they are presumed to be human or presumably an android, can assert, with any degree of certainty, who they actually are – a profoundly traumatizing and destabilizing experience. As the story develops, the hosts, along with the television viewers, learn about the existence of other theme parks, like *Westworld*, and one is forced to question whether scenes one assumed took place in the “real world” outside of the parks, are ultimately simulations as well. The answers to *Westworld*’s defining questions remain elusive: Do Dolores and her fellow resistors truly act of their own accord or is their resistance part of their code? Who is the author of one’s story? How do we recognize each other as human? And, finally, is it ultimately possible to find the answers to those questions within the context of a simulacrum?



## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

The stories I have analyzed in the previous chapters all complicate the purported essence and recognizability of the human subject. *Der Sandmann*, *Die Puppe* and *Westworld* each hold up a mirror to their readers/ viewers, allowing for the reevaluation of one's place in the world and one's perception of others. All three stories are salient examples of what Tom Gunning coins the "more real," which he juxtaposes with "truthiness":

By truthiness I denote that which seems real because we recognize it, because it doesn't upset our preconceptions. It figures the world as the familiar. It reassures us that reality is the way we think it is. By the "more real", in contrast, I refer to the effect that an artwork has of making us notice something, see it afresh, discover new aspects, and desire to examine it more closely. It makes us rethink our notions of the world.<sup>152</sup>

The stories described in this manuscript set out to question our preconceived notions and upset our sense of certainty about issues fundamental to human existence. The female automaton is a particularly rich and fascinating device to inspire reflection, because it amplifies a multitude of anxieties surrounding technology, gender, and the future of the human body in a rapidly changing world. While it may be tempting to reduce androids and automata to dystopian figures or to view them simply as technology 'gone rogue' so to speak, they do afford us the opportunity to reexamine our values and to challenge our assumptions on a multitude of enduring issues. In her fascinating book *How We Became Posthuman*, where she draws on scientific as well as literary discourses, postmodern literary critic N. Katherine Hayles acknowledges the nightmarish potential of the

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152. Tom Gunning, "Truthiness and the More Real: What Is the Difference?" in *More Real?: Art in the Age of Truthiness*, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong (Minneapolis, MN: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 2012), 184.

posthuman, yet also recognizes the cyborg as a liberating entity. To illuminate the liberating potential of the posthuman, Hayles posits literary narratives as “a more embodied form of discourse,” and in her analysis “hope[s] to replace a teleology of disembodiment with historically contingent stories about contests between competing factions, contests whose outcomes were far from obvious.”<sup>153</sup>

The goal of this work is a similar one and I hope that the questions I have posed and explored in the previous chapters show not only how certain discourses have shifted within and between historical and cultural contexts, but also how the continuing renegotiation of the human subject persists across time and space, and can therefore be contested and transformed. As Hayles writes,

if we want to contest what [virtual] technologies signify, we need histories that show the erasure that went into creating the condition of virtuality, as well as visions arguing for the importance of embodiment. Once we understand the complex interplays that went into creating the condition of virtuality, we can demystify our progress toward virtuality and see it as the result of historically specific negotiations rather than of the irresistible force of technological determinism. At the same time, we can acquire resources with which to rethink the assumptions underlying virtuality, and we can recover a sense of the virtual that fully recognizes the importance of the embodied processes constituting the lifeworld of human beings.<sup>154</sup>

Within this analytical framework, *Der Sandmann*, despite its publication dating over 200 years ago, can be understood as a forecast of the distorting effects of an individual’s engagement in modern 21<sup>st</sup> century cyberspace, where users distort their own and others’ identities both consciously and unconsciously. Virtual spaces enable one to engage in a

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153. N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1999), 22.

154. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 20.

form of identity-play and allow one to curate how one would like to project oneself beyond the screen. One's virtual self is a simulation of oneself, anchored to a real identity, but distorted at its core. *Der Sandmann* serves as a prescient example of a human mind constructed solely through its perception by others, and shows how ideologies of gender inform this construction, allowing one to rethink these practices.

*Die Puppe* centers the constructed nature of femininity and simultaneously explores the transgressive potential of the female automaton/ android. Informed by Nietzschean philosophical discourses, it explicitly discloses the artificial nature of the medium film – a medium based on the lie of the moving picture which actually consists of a series of still images – and in the process exposes the malleability of gendered social norms. Lubitsch's silent comedy, in light of its technical sophistication, serves as a reminder that the development of patriarchal cinema was not necessarily an inevitable consequence of technological progress, but merely one of many possible outcomes driven by unexamined ideologies.

*Der Sandmann* and *Die Puppe* laid the groundwork for *Westworld*'s bolder, more encompassing predictions. As Eberhard Hilscher writes in his essay on Hoffmann's human machines, "Hoffmann's Visionen von der Ununterscheidbarkeit gewisser Erdenbürger und Androiden, die nur so tun 'wie ein lebendiges Wesen,' haben sich in den vergangenen 180 Jahren als schauderhaft zukunftssträchtig erwiesen."<sup>155</sup> *Westworld* imagines a future where the blurring line between human and machine completely disappears, but also one that reflects the progressively disorienting nature of an increasingly technocratic world, where one's real self becomes irreversibly entangled

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155. Hilscher, "Poetische Puppenspiele," 24.

with one's virtual self within the context of a maze consisting of a multitude of physical and virtual realities, from which to extricate oneself may be impossible. *Westworld* brings the processes of (de)humanization sketched by Hoffmann and Lubitsch to the forefront, emphasizing their interconnectedness and paradoxes. The series fictionalizes dehumanization in a process similar to what David Livingstone Smith discusses in his essay on "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," showing that "the explicit denial of victims' humanity often goes hand-in-hand with its implicit affirmation." Livingstone Smith argues that, "in dehumanizing others, we categorize them simultaneously as human and subhuman," which "gives dehumanization its distinctive character and differentiates it from the purely rhetorical use of animalistic language to categorize others."<sup>156</sup> The *Westworld* androids, who are simultaneously perceived as human and as subhuman, occupy exactly such a paradoxical space and show that the dehumanization of others, while being a product of psychological processes, is nonetheless based on contestable, shifting criteria informed by social and political circumstances.

The cultural artifacts discussed in this manuscript narrativize shifting subjectivities and social norms in light of technological progress, but they should not be reduced to mere reflections of their respective cultural and historical contexts. Each story also shapes and informs the relevant discourses by revealing the "complex cultural, social and representational issues tied up with conceptual shifts and technological

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156. David Livingstone Smith, "Paradoxes of Dehumanization," in "Dominating Speech," ed. Hallie Liberto, special issue, *Social Theory and Practice* 42, no. 2 (April 2016): 416-43.

innovations,”<sup>157</sup> which in turn allows us to contextualize technological progress and renegotiate its trajectory to better reflect our values.

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157. Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 24.

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