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# Cyborgs, desiring-machines, bodies without organs, and Westworld: Interrogating academic writing and scholarly identity

KOME – An International Journal of Pure  
Communication Inquiry  
Volume 5 Issue 1, p.91-103.  
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kome@komejournal.com  
Published by the Hungarian Communication  
Studies Association  
DOI: 10.17646/KOME.2017.16

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**Abstract:** This paper fashions a lens through which to view scholarly identity and the experience of academic writing. The lens of inquiry I apply is the metaphor of Season 1 of sci-fi HBO television show *Westworld* and its characters, especially its cyborg protagonist Dolores. Thrumming like electric currents through this lens of inquiry are Haraway's theorization of the cyborg, the fictional worlds of science fiction and Wonderland, my own lived experience, and Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machines and bodies without organs. I engage in the cyborgic technology of writing in order to playfully explore what it means to be a cyborg academic operating in intersecting machinic worlds. I ask: Can we listen to our internal voices and write our own stories? Can we burn the world clean with our scholarship and the ways in which we interrogate ingrained and expected practices?

**Keywords:** New Media, metaphor, cyborg, science fiction, Deleuze and Guattari

## Introduction

In this paper I use my relationship with the metaphor of Season 1 of the HBO television series *Westworld* as a way into scholarly identity work and theoretical exploration. I adopt a technological lens as a mode of inquiry and a disruptive act of destabilization within the authoritarian world of academic writing (Muhr & Rehn, 2015). In doing so, this paper responds to Muhr and Rehn's (2015) call for greater attention to be paid to the technological mediation of academic writing, to cyborg writing in particular, in order to facilitate a wider variety of textual forms, especially in scholarly journals.

In this paper, *Westworld* and the cyborg character of Dolores act as a metaphor for the Western academe and the Western academic. As conceptual processes are defined and structured through metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003), using metaphor as a lens to re-see the world and re-consider reality can help to restructure experiences and understand intangibles. It can provide a coherent frame for imaginative rationality (Martinez, Saulea, & Huber, 2001), helping us to test imaginative models for reality against our own realities. Being playful in our orientations to research can spark imagination and lead to fresh insights

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Article received on the 21th December, 2016. Article accepted on the 12th May, 2017.

Conflict of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interests.

(Watson, 2015). Scholars can straddle the imaginative and the real (Mus, 2014), drawing together fiction-like artistry and scientific systematization. Researchers have employed metaphors in order to develop researcher and reader understanding of complex experiences. For example, Jones (2013, 2015) has utilized the bat from Aesop's fable as researcher and storyteller (2015); and the Persephone myth and labyrinth image as metaphor for the journey of the doctoral student (2013). Brabazon (2016) uses the zombie as a lens through which to critique the neoliberal university. These metaphors provide not only playfulness, but can also operate as structural frames and meaning making tools (Netolicky, 2015; Sharoff, 2013). They can, as McWilliam (2000) puts it, unsettle what it means to behave properly in the academe and in doing so push against accepted ontologies and epistemologies.

The metaphorical, the imaginary, the literary, and the fictional, can be legitimate tools in the researcher-writer's arsenal. Writing, reading, and viewing are all methods of inquiry. Czarniawska (2007) sees literary artefacts such as novels as partners of research, sources of meaning, and models of inspiration. For Haraway, looking through the science fiction genre is a way to explore the production of worlds (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013; Haraway, 2004b). Science fiction can be seen as a kind of cyborg ethnography (Balsamo, 2000). Fictionalizing research (such as Kara, 2013) can create layers of deepened awareness, invoking imagination to conjure new and alternate ways of knowing (Caine et al., 2016). In this paper, I semi-fictionalize my own experiences as I move between authorial and semi-fictional voices, writing inside, outside, and alongside the lens of *Westworld* and its character Dolores. I slip in and out of *Westworld* fiction, my own constructed and deconstructed realities, and my authorial voice that tries to impose order onto my muddled thoughts and dis-ordered written words. I explore metaphor as a vehicle for scholarly and writerly identity work, while happily embracing what St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) call a lusty confusion that interrupts and deterritorializes knowledge making. That is, this paper is open to messiness, not yet knowing, showing my workings. In it I 'think out loud' through writing in order to offer a perspective on the ways in which scholars, especially those early in their research careers like myself, work through their identities, make choices in their research and writing work, and negotiate their mechanical entanglements.

Method is political (Lather, 2013) and this paper deliberately embraces cyborg writing as radical site of disruption of accepted notions of science (Prasad, 2016). I draw upon Haraway's cyborg (1991, 2006), which offers an alternative way of understanding the self and its relation to the world (Brophy, 2016). I embrace Haraway's (1991) assertion that reading, writing, and in this case viewing, science fiction are useful for theorizing and exploring possibilities. Goodeve (Haraway & Goodeve, 2000) notes that Haraway uses the tools of science fiction to speculate through myth-building; building ontologies via the imaginative. Science fiction is a methodological tool and source of inspiration for Haraway (Grebowicz & Merrick, 2013), allowing her to speculate about possible theories and potential futures. In this paper, the science fiction television show *Westworld* allows me to explore possibilities and push at boundaries of writing and of self. I take up Brophy's (2016) challenge to deploy the figure of the cyborg with care and self-reflection, in order to more deeply understand self-technology relationships.

Although theorization of the self has a long history (see, for instance Cooley, 1902), by the 1980s identity had emerged as a rich, complex, and explicit field of study. The field of identity remains interdisciplinary and diverse, with inconsistent views of what identity is and how it is shaped. While a tension remains around to what extent identities are fixed or fluid, stable or unstable, this paper takes identities as flexible, multiple, and continually shaped by contexts and relationships. This view is consistent with theorists who conceptualize identities as pluralistic, multiple, overlapping, and intersecting constructions, operated by the individual (Breen, 2014; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Lawler, 2014). In this view,

identities are ever-unfinished, ongoing co-constructions, constantly being recreated and refined over time.

This paper's notion of academic writer as cyborgic human-machine is also couched in Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machine (1977) and body without organs (1977, 1987), as well as in the work of others who have explored the machinic, mechanistic aspects of academic writing and scholarship. Muhr and Rehn (2015) write that:

We as scholars ... readily accept that our writing will always be processed through a set of complex mechanistic moves, reduced to fit the journal issue, suitable for packaging and sale by the academic publishing industry. We as writers struggle with the limitations that technologies of writing place on us, as they constrict and control us, pushing our words into the straightest of lines and most linear of narratives. (p. 136)

Their words —“reduced”, “constrict”, and “control”— reflect the oppressive pressure that limits and shapes scholarly writing. The reference to “mechanistic moves” and “packaging and sale” construct academic writing as a neoliberal machine concerned with performance and metrics. Henderson, Honan, and Loch (2016) channel Deleuze and Guattari's desiring-machine to explore the academicwritingmachine and the ways scholars may desire to both be ruled by, and to break, the machine. In a world in which academic writing is critiqued and measured at every turn, Henderson et al. note that academics are shaped by their interactions with the world of publication, citation, and performance. The academic writer, they suggest, becomes machinic themselves in their response to the machine and their desire to be counted as worthy within its performative metrics. Riddle (in press), too, conceptualizes the academic as desiring-machine; that is, individualized producer churning out performative outputs for the competitive university system. According to Riddle, the academic is hyper-visible, hyper-performing, hyper-producing machine, desiring success within the neoliberal system. He suggests, however, the need to question both the system and academics' part in keeping the system running as it is.

Like Donna Haraway's (1991, 2006) cyborg, the academic writer is an organism-machine, an assemblage of humanity, experience, science, and the technologies of writing and communicating. Writing itself is the technology of the cyborg (Haraway, 1991, 2006), and all forms of writing are cyborg writing (Muhr & Rehn, 2015). The academic writer melds themselves with their electronic devices and with software for word processing, reference management, data generation, and data analysis. They become one with their online identities through social media, Twitter bios, academia.edu profiles, and citations. Deliberate cyborg writing is multiplicitous and diverse, operationalized to challenge dominant Western epistemology (Prasad, 2016). Those such as Gale (2016) embrace the technology of writing, and the interrupting of writing technology, making it trip and falter, a vehicle for constant non-linear becoming. Here I embrace my own cyborg self, as deliberate fusion of flesh and machine, and the possibilities offered by science fiction, for theorizing ways of being in the world. In this paper I use the metaphor of the *Westworld* cyborg character of Dolores to reimagine my scholarly-writerly identity, envisioning a future in which, as the character of Maeve asserts in Episode 8 of *Westworld's* first season, I can "tell my own fucking story," in my own way. This paper thereby gives others permission and encouragement to tell their own stories in ways that might challenge dominant ways of being, knowing, and writing.

### **Westworld's world of human cyborgs and monstrous humanity**

The HBO television show *Westworld*, based on Michael Crichton's 1973 film of the same name, aired its first season from October to December 2016. For the purpose of this paper, the ten episodes that made up Season 1 provide a metaphorical lens through which to view

scholarship and writing in the academe. In the show's *Westworld* (an Old-American-Western-themed game park of sorts) cyborg creatures look, feel, suffer, and behave like humans; the cyborgs' suffering, we learn, is key to their humanity. Like Haraway's cyborg, *Westworld* androids are ubiquitous and invisible (Haraway, 2006). Their artificial intelligence is made up of coded memories, scripted dialogue and loops of repeated behaviours. Their bodies were once made up of the true cyborgic combination of "part metal, part meat," as Frenzt (2009, p.821) describes the nature of the cybernetic organism. Later, however, as technology evolved, their bodies are made up of organic matter: muscle, flesh and bone. These later cyborgs—3D printed humanoids dipped in skin on Vitruvian Man style hoops—are virtually unrecognizable as different from the humans. But, as Haraway (1991) and the sterile lab surrounds in *Westworld* remind us, the cyborg body is not an innocent body, born by and into nature. It is mechanically and unnaturally constructed. It is Other. This Other-ness is part of why the cyborg is "about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities" (Haraway, 2006, p.121), an apt metaphor for the academic writer exploring their identity. The cyborg academic writer, too, risks being Other, being dismissed, being marginalized in academic discourse.

The cyborgs of *Westworld* are literal bodies without organs, but also bodies without organs in the Deleuze and Guattarian sense: "nonstratified, unformed, intense matter ... the full egg" (1987, p.153). The *Westworld* cyborgs represent unformed consciousness, potential consciousness, awakening consciousness. They are the embryonic egg through which intensities pass again and again. They are corporeal matter, and as the season evolves, they realize that they *do* matter. The *Westworld* cyborgs are full of untapped uncracked potential, yet they are imposed upon by the coders and creators who control them, much like the organism that imposes upon the body without organs' "forms, functions, bonds, dominant, and hierarchized organizations, organized transcendences" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.159). Throughout Season 1 we watch as the cyborgs of *Westworld* slowly rattle in their eggshell cages, finding ways to be sentient and free.

In *Westworld*, androids are seeking their own humanity. In academia, scholars are seeking scientific systems and technological aides to research, write, and communicate. For Haraway's cyborg and for the academic writer, identities are fractured. In *Westworld* the robot-humans flash back and forth between timelines, identities, and memories, piecing together their experiences and seeking to understand their world and their selves. In academia, scholars become more and more cyborgic in order to communicate their theories and findings, in order to become part of the academic machine, and in order to resist it.

The *Westworld* universe is one in which binaries—their existence and their disintegration and implosion—are central. A binary appears in the setting of the show; the Old American Western world of the *Westworld* theme park is juxtaposed with the unseen 'real' world outside the park. To the characters within the park, its world—complete with clichéd American desert setting, an abundance of cowboy hats, the genre-typical saloon, and plenty of gun-slinging paraphernalia and explosive pyrotechnics—is the only world they know. It is real to them even though they repeat their narrative loops with *Groundhog Day* style repetition. The outside world is hinted at but never seen by cyborg or viewer.

Binaries appear, too, in the pairing of various characters. One such pair is the two creators of the park and its cyborgs: Robert Ford and Arnold Weber. Arnold is recreated by Ford after his death as a cyborg called Bernard Lowe (his name an anagram of 'Arnold Weber'). The central protagonist and cyborg Dolores is paired at different times with Arnold, her father who is 'played' by two different cyborgs after the first iteration of Dolores' father breaks down, fellow cyborg and in-park-narrative love interest Teddy, and human guests William and the man in black (who are in the final episode of Season 1 revealed to be one and the same character). Cyborg brothel madam Maeve has a previous *Westworld* back story

in which she was paired with a daughter. When we meet her she is paired with prostitute cyborg Clementine, and then with the outlaw cyborg Hector. In the lab Maeve makes an alliance with human Felix, who helps her to escape the limits of her coding, or so she thinks. William, who is also the man in black, is paired with himself in the past-present dichotomy that viewers experience at the same time through the fractured storylines of the cyborg characters. In one time and place William is a white-hatted potential hero; 30 years later he is a black-hatted villain. He is paired with his brother-in-law Logan, with whom he enters the park for the first time. Robert and Arnold, Arnold and Bernard, Robert and Bernard, Dolores and Teddy, Teddy and Wyatt (who we discover later is really Dolores), Maeve and her daughter, Maeve and Clementine, Maeve and Hector, Maeve and Felix, William and the man in black, William and Logan. Pairs abound in the Westworld world.

Throughout the first *Westworld* season, the Shakespearean line “these violent delights have violent ends” is used as a trigger to move the cyborgs along their paths of awakening as they become more and more human creatures who can make their own choices. Yet these choices are still limited to riffing off scripts written for them by someone else. That Shakespearean line comes from the play *Romeo and Juliet*, which explores the dualism of two families and two lovers; it is a play of pairs. The Westworld cyborgs, like Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977) desiring-machines, are binaries, with one machine always coupled to another. Yet at the same time as *Westworld* presents us with pairs and clear cut dichotomies (white hat versus black hat, hero versus villain, damsel versus whore, cyborg versus human), it seeks to challenge and break these binaries.

In particular, the binary of cyborg and human is challenged. As Haraway (1991) suggests, technology pushes against and can suggest a way out of dualisms; it is unclear who makes and who is made when it comes to human and machine. In *Westworld*’s Episode 6, Felix notes that humans and cyborgs are “the same these days, for the most part,” referring to the way cyborgs are made for the Westworld park, out of organic material, just like people. In Episode 8, when questioned by Bernard about the difference between humans and cyborgs, Westworld creator Robert says that humans “live in loops, as tight and as closed as the hosts do, seldom questioning our choices, content, for the most part, to be told what to do next.” He says that the cyborgs he has created are “not missing anything at all.” In Episode 9 he warns Bernard that people are “only human” and will inevitably disappoint. The challenge to the greatness of human-ness is also reflected when Maeve says to Felix in the final episode, “you really do make a terrible human being. And I mean that as a compliment.” So *Westworld* contests not only the perceived difference between human and machine, but also the notion that being human is nobler than being machine.

The binary between organism and machine, human and robot, real and imagined, is transgressed, blurred, and erased in *Westworld*, echoing Henderson et al.’s (2016) and Riddle’s (in press) notions of the academic writer’s own mechanistic compliance to the machine of academia.

It also echoes the warning of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (another science fiction text): that science and humans can be more monstrous than the inhuman products they create. In Episode 8 of *Westworld* the character of Robert Ford references Shelley’s character Victor Frankenstein when he says, “One man’s life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion I should acquire.” We are reminded of the monstrosity of the scientist, and the humanity of the created creature. As Frankenstein’s creature was in some ways more human than its creator, so Robert’s creations are in some ways more human than he is. This resonates with Haraway’s (2006) warning that machines have become more lively, self-developing and human, and humans more inert. The academic writer may wonder about the energies of technology and flaccidness of their own human agency.

## Dolores as metaphor for the academic writer

In order to see through the lens of *Westworld*, to explore what it might offer the academic writer, below I take a multi-voiced approach to placing myself into and outside of the cyborg body and mind of Dolores from *Westworld*. Like the robotic or artificially intelligent characters in other television series and films, Dolores develops consciousness beyond her programming as she moves from being controlled, exploited, and brutalized, towards becoming increasingly self-aware, critical of her world, agentic, and empowered to make her own choices. For me, Dolores is an apt personal metaphor, offering something idiosyncratic through her character's allusion to Lewis Carroll's Alice. In my PhD I employed the world and characters of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* as a symbolic and structural frame for analysis and academic writing (Netolicky, 2015, 2016). Carroll's Alice can be seen as a metaphor for the Western scholar. She is constrained by the rules and regimentations of Victorian England in which the novel is set, as the academic writer operating in the Western academe is contained within its dominant ontologies, epistemologies, and mechanisms. As an author, Carroll used writing as an act of disruption and destabilization. He wrote his fantastical fiction using the pen name, 'Lewis Carroll', while his more mathematic-logical work was published under his real name, 'Charles Donaldson'. Dolores, as the Alice character of *Westworld*, bestrides the worlds of the fantastical and the rational. She presents a dark Alice, a much-abused character who, as she learns the rules of her world, also learns why and how they might be broken. Her narrative of disruption and empowerment can provide a provocation for academic writers and their ways of being, knowing, and writing.

In taking on Dolores as a cyborg lens for cyborg writing, below I present italicized semi-autobiographical snippets beneath each sub-heading. These are experimental attempts at sense making, using writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000, 2002), and voice-formation. Like Richardson (2000), I embrace autobiographical writing as theoretical and practical sociological praxis; a method of making sense, revealing epistemological assumptions, and challenging hegemonic academic constructs. I use data from Season 1 of *Westworld* and the cyborgic technology of my keyboard and screen to piece together my experience of Dolores with my own worlds and my own scholarly-writerly selves. I use metaphor as lens, to see and make my world and my selves in new ways. I take on Frentz's (2009) suggestion to embrace storied vulnerabilities and lived experiences, and Caine et al.'s (2016) notion of embracing fictionalizing as a playful way in to theorize and understand more deeply the experience of academic writing and scholarly identity. Here writing is method, identity work, and activism.

### Transformation and awakening

*I wake from what seemed like a distant dream, into a present that feels like the past. Where and how am I? I am today like Alice, in my dreamy blue dress. I am corseted into my stereotypical femininity, my limited role, my narrative loop. Like a wind-up doll I move, trance-like, through my days. Easy. Uneasy. I am daughter, woman, damsel. Doing what is expected of me. I feel like a human doing, not a human being. Yet perhaps I am not human at all, but robotic slave to the machine of expectations. Going through motions. Pulled by mechanical puppet strings. Trying to understand the machine so that I can be productive within its mechanisms, and also so that I might escape its prison. Easy. Uneasy. I am warrior, rebel, hero. I am. Am I?*

*O, where to find the luxurious space to stop and think? How to just be? How to break from the Groundhog Day of daily grind and ascend, find a line of flight and follow it towards the stars? Sometimes, I plant ideas and problems for my academic writing and then walk, alone, without the technology of music to accompany me. Like a body without organs, I let myself be matter, let my ideas matter, allow intensities and confusions to flow through me. I race home to scrawl down what I remember.*

*I burrow into the rabbit hole of my scholarly identity. Digging digging into the dark, my nails jammed with dark earth and my eyes desperate for illumination. On I go. Wondering what I might be, what I might say, how I might write, if only I could reimagine my own story or my own self, or break from the parameters of my narrative and of this world.*

Dolores is one of the Westworld park's original cyborgs. When we first meet her, she is wearing an Alice-in-Wonderland-esque blue dress, a nod to Lewis Carroll's nonsense world of Wonderland. Dolores is the Alice character, feeling like she is in a "distant dream," reminiscent of the unconscious and dreamlike quality of Haraway's cyborg (2004a). Dolores is constantly trying to figure out the world in which she has been thrust. Alice finds Wonderland to be a land of nonsense. This is reflected in *Westworld* when, in Episodes 7 and 9, Bernard remembers reading to his son from the Carroll's novel: "if I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, and everything would be what it isn't!" This quote from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is a clue to the Westworld notions that the world seems real to its cyborg inhabitants, but is a game park to its human visitors. Perhaps it also refers to the experiences and identities of the cyborgs; there are many ways in which they are not what they seem. The *Alice* reference also alludes to Dolores' awakening as she tumbles through her Westworld experiences. It is given a nod when, in Episode 3, Bernard asks Dolores to read the following quote from the novel:

"Dear, dear! How queer everything is today. And yesterday things went on just as usual. I wonder if I've been changed in the night. Let me think. Was I the same when I got up this morning? I almost think I can remember feeling a little different. But if I'm not the same, the next question is 'Who in the world am I?'"

Dolores here is asked, through the reading aloud of Carroll's text, to interrogate her own journey of transformation, to look for it and own it. To ask herself who she is and who she might become. Unlike the storybook Alice, who seems to live in books, Dolores doesn't want to be a character in a story. She declares in Episode 6, "I don't wanna be in a story ... I just wanna be," signalling the transcendence and escape central to the rhetoric of cyberculture (Adam, 2000). Dolores wants the ability to be and to become. To awaken and transform. To be uncontrolled and in control.

### **Multiple competing identities**

*Where am I and when am I? I flash back and forth between times when my hand has been firm and my voice large. My grip strong and my intention fierce. And then I wake in my bed with soft curls in my hair and tender untorn skin, vulnerable and soft like the underbelly of an animal, and wonder what happened to the scars, blood, and fighting spirit of my dreams.*

*On awaking, expectations abound. They crush and swoop and strangle. How to be all-the-things? So many borrowed robes, I collapse under the weight of them all. Parent. Wife. Daughter. Sibling. Worker bee. Doctor. Writer. Thinker. Cog in a machine. Mouse on a wheel. My own multiplicity has me running back and forth and around in circles. I am*

*teacher, school leader, university adjunct, reader, writer, blogger, wanderer, and wonderer. I am everywhere but belong nowhere. My selves collide and tear at each other.*

*I try to immerse myself in my academic writing as my children swarm around me. Suddenly—thanks to a broken LEGO tower or a bumped body—my writing time crumbles into nothing. I make breakfast for my children while running the script for my work day in my mind. I send emails from the edge of the playground, tweet in queues at supermarkets, and text while waiting for my coffee at cafes. I am fused with my devices. Attached to my iPhone, which pings with each email, Viber message, Twitter notification, Facebook like, and Wordpress comment. I write and rewrite my many selves across my many worlds: social media, conference bios, Facebook highlight reel, my blog, through my clothing and my body. I perform my academic identity online like a public dance in which I try to give my audience what it expects to see.*

*I become cyborgic as my fingertips attach to the keys on my keyboard, as the tendrils of my corporeal, mental, writerly, and online identities entangle. The pads of my fingertips wear down the keys on my keyboard just as the keyboard wears away their delicate ridged swirls of flesh. Technology and I smooth each other out. We meld together. A mummy-teacher-leader-researcher-writer cyborg, I am at once connected to humans and machines, mechanical tools and relationships, people online and people in the room.*

*My roles messily overlap and violently crash into one another. I am many. I am multiple. I intersect. I expand and cave in on myself simultaneously. I am here and there. I am now and then. I am before and after. While I try to control the chaos and flatten my edges, I am endlessly unravelling and eternally becoming. Shaping and being shaped.*

Dolores is a character with multiple fractured identities, embodying Haraway's split and contradictory self (1991). Haraway's split self is described by Frentz (2009) as breaching the longstanding dichotomy between human and machine. Dolores is constructed as *Westworld's* protagonist, and one of its most human cyborgs. She often seems to exist simultaneously across geographies and times. As Season 1 progresses, she flashes between timelines, appearing to be in the same place at different times. While her costume is a clue to viewers as to *when* she is, Dolores herself becomes increasingly confused about her flashbacks. She exclaims in Episode 8, "Where are we? *When* are we? Is this now?" Dolores is existing on multiple planes, via her memories. It is also in Episode 8 that Felix explains to Maeve that human memories are hazy and imperfect, but that the cyborgs recall memories so perfectly that they relive those moments in exactitude. As Robert explains to Dolores in Episode 10, it is suffering that is key to her humanity. Her memories of pain, like Maeve's and Bernard's, are precious. They allow the characters to feel real emotion, live vigorously, and grow in consciousness. While Robert would take the memories of pain from his cyborg creatures, it is these memories that make them stronger and more agentic. For academic writers, the brutal processes of peer review, grant applications, and job applications, can build resilience and strengthen work.

Dolores' memories take her between not only times and places, but also identities. She is shocked to remember herself massacring an entire village of cyborgs, and a human. But it is through her acceptance of her multiplicity of selves—damsel, murderer, cyborg, lover, victim, heroine—that she reaches a point at the end of Season 1 when she understands her potential and the choices available to her. She, like Maeve, begins to write her own story, the Season 1 culmination of which is her decision to murder Robert Ford, the park's founder, by

shooting him in the back of the head. Like Lewis Carroll, who used a pseudonym for his novelist alter ego, so Dolores embraces her ‘Wyatt’ narrative, smashing through the binary stereotype of the blonde damsel in opposition to the male cowboy villain. It is in this final episode that Dolores realizes that the voice she has been listening to all season—the voice to which she must listen—is her own.

### **In control but controlled**

*I hear the words coming from my mouth, see them pouring from my keyboard onto the parchment of the smooth white screen. Are they mine? Are they the only words available to me? Must I stick to script? Speak and write only in particular ways, expected ways, ways that count and can be counted? Only for high impact journals or well-trafficked opinion sites? Only about topics that are popular, with titles that are likely to get hits? Am I a writerly cog in the machine, churning words out in order to please others, the reader, the unseen audience, the internet overlords, the university system, my workplace?*

*As a writer and academic, what is the use of writing freely and experimentally on my personal blog, of shouting into the online void? If a blog post appears in the night and nobody reads it or shares it on social media, did it really happen? Did it matter? Do I matter? What if I write and my words languish in dark corners of libraries and online repositories? Or worse: unpublished. Is production my purpose? I’m perpetually exhausted, breath panting, but getting nowhere. I am stretched thin by workload and laid out constantly on the cold slab of peer review for evisceration.*

*I scour my Google Scholar citations, set up an academia.edu account, check the number of downloads of my PhD thesis, scrutinize my Wordpress blog’s statistics, follow the numbers down their dark lightless joyless rabbit hole of self-doubt and what’s-the-point and clicks-equal-self-worth. Yet as an adjunct, I am free from the demands of the machine. I exist at the margins. The university dragon does not breathe down my neck with its urgent flames of impacts and publication metrics and journal hierarchies. So can I cast its expectations aside? If so, why do I still feel the desire (desiring-machine!) to be counted, acknowledged, and accepted into the academe via its performativities?*

*Am I a desiring-machine? What is it that I desire? To be published? To be read and respected? To feel intellectual and important and a worthy scholarly voice? What drives my words and my decisions about where and how to publish them? Who and what controls me and territorializes my time, my body, my words, my actions? Where do my boundaries end and the external academic writing machine begin?*

Like Deleuze and Guattari’s body without organs (1977, 1987), Dolores is literally a body without organs, especially in her first mechanical iteration. We see this viscerally when Logan cuts her open in Episode 9 to show her inner robotic moving parts. Dolores begins her journey as a Deleuze and Guattarian (1987) cancerous body without organs; that is, she and her organless body are caught in endless cycles of circular repetition. As the season unfolds, Dolores shows signs of becoming a more productive body without organs. We begin to see her “freeing lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) as she fights to overcome the loops and roles written for her by her creators. She begins to deterritorialize and reterritorialize her own self, ascending from her scripted place towards another plane of consciousness and potential action.

Two lines from *Westworld* provide an insight into the developing power and humanity of its cyborgs. In Episode 5 Dolores says, “I imagined a story where I didn’t have to be the damsel,” and in the final episode of the season she claims her own power of choice and action, but even this empowerment may be the result of a narrative written by someone else: Robert. Throughout *Westworld* cyborg characters’ arcs, their creators and coders are central to their thinking, feeling, behaving, and becoming. Even their apparent rebellion is programmed, part of the script constructed for them. Perhaps this is also true for academia in which scholarly resistance is another choreographed move, an accepted and vital part of the machinations of the academe.

The peer-reviewed scholarly journal is itself a technology, or machinic agglomeration of technologies, shaping academic writing into a form that is uniform and conforms to accepted norms (Muhr & Rehn, 2015). The academic writer is a cyborg creature constrained by technology but also with the potential to be freed by it. While the academe continues to work, write, and communicate in old, accepted, agreed-upon ways, the cyborg is an act of resistance (Haraway, 2004a), a way in to reimagining scholarly ways of being and academic writing practices. Invoking the cyborg opens up productive ways of thinking about subjectivity and identity (Balsamo, 2000), but, as for the cyborgs of *Westworld*, there are real dangers. Academics who resist the machinic game of academia may, like Dolores and her cyborg peers, risk being decommissioned, left to languish and atrophy until they can be re-coded, re-institutionalized, or discarded.

### **What does the *Westworld*-Dolores lens have to offer the academe?**

The character Dolores, when explored as a lens for cyborg writing and analysis, reveals themes common in both science fiction and academia: transformation and awakening; multiple competing identities; and control. As the dark Alice of *Westworld*, Dolores is demoralized and abused by more violent means than the Victorian morality and language rules that constrained Lewis Carroll’s Alice. Her treatment could, however, be viewed as a metaphor for the repetitive loops in which some researchers find themselves. Her journey in Season 1 towards agency and empowerment has something to offer the academic who feels limited by and controlled within the machine of academia.

One of Robert Ford’s final lines, in the final *Westworld* Season 1 episode (before he is killed at the hand of Dolores-Wyatt) is that there will be “the birth of a new people, and the choices they’ll have to make, and the people they will decide to become.” Dolores says to herself in that same episode that the world “belongs to us” and she chooses, or appears to choose, to reclaim *Westworld* for the cyborgs. Yet it is Robert that activates the more-assertive, damsel-defying Wyatt narrative he has written for her. The viewer of *Westworld* is encouraged to wonder: Is her newfound strength her choice or her coding? Is she acting on her own or still as a controlled puppet, or a cog in a machine from which she cannot transcend or escape? The academic writer might ask: To what extent do scholars and academic writers have choices in their work, their writing, and the kind of scholars and writers they decide to become?

In a *Westworld* flashback to Arnold during the final episode, we hear him say that “consciousness isn’t a journey upward, but a journey inward” and he urges Dolores to listen to her own internal voice, rather than to his voice or to the code that has been written for her. Dolores and her narrative offer a suggestion that academic writers can recode and reclaim their selves, but not without a cost. Academic scholar-writers may benefit in agency and lived authenticity from following the *Westworld* cyborgs’ lead of listening to their own inner voices in order to counterbalance or drown out external performative metrics and the voices

of others, reviewers, and the academic machine. They may find, however, that their rebellion only serves to draw them deeper into the world from which they are trying to escape, or to alienate them from the world of the academe. After all, despite Robert's dream of the birth of a new people, in Westworld those cyborgs that do not play by the rules are often re-coded or retired. The academic writer faces potentially serious career risks if they do not play the game of the academic machine.

Despite jeopardy to reputation, career, and remuneration, academics might take on St. Pierre's (2013) assertion that "*thinking and living are simultaneities*, and we have to think possible worlds in which we might live" (p. 655). This paper is part of a thinking-possible of a potential academe, one in which academic writers can pull free of neoliberal mechanisms and dominant scholarly orthodoxies. Henderson et al. (2016) and Riddle (in press) promote alternate ways of being, researching, and writing. Riddle seeks to work both within and against the parameters of the university machine. Gale (2016) uses the cyborgic technology of writing to dissolve binaries. He writes that in writing "this was there then and becomes again now and in so doing dissolves the binary artifice between there and then and here and now" (p. 307). These examples show the possibilities of Haraway's vision of dissolving binaries (1991) and active resistance (2004a) in the Western academe. Harking back to Maeve's comment in Episode 8 of Westworld Season 1, perhaps it's time to write our own stories, in our own ways. Maeve's character begins to rewrite Westworld narratives from the inside, controlling other cyborgs and their actions. Academics might choose to break from our own loops and our own desires for accolades and visible performative success, but in doing so are likely to be punished with less success, less publication in high impact journals, and less promotion through the ranks of the academe.

Lather (2013) challenges scholars to explore 'QUAL 4.0', to do qualitative inquiry differently, in a way that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently. She warns, however, that this inquiry is untidy; it is without clear and unproblematic guidelines or protocols. Dolores says in Episode 9, about Westworld, that "someone's gotta burn it clean." What might it mean for scholars and writers to burn the academic world clean? To set it alight with research and writing that matters – to us, to our communities, to our nations, to social justice, to the greater good? To use our keyboard strokes as the drumming that thrums beneath a call to battle and a thundering of cyborgian hooves across the plains? As St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) suggest, work at the margins is in reach of the centre. Early career researchers, adjuncts, pracademics, and professors can choose to engage in cyborg writing as a political act, to listen to their internal voices about the work and writing that is important. While fighting the machine from within runs the risk of replacing one method and locus of control for another, cyborg writing can act as a medium to burn the world clean with scholarship and to re-make the ways in which we interrogate ingrained and expected practices. The cyborg, the body without organs, and the desiring-machine, are all conceptions with which the cyborg scholar might engage. Like Adam (2000), this paper adds to the work on where academics find themselves in relation to technologies, and shows a glimpse of how we might imagine alternate futures. Science fiction, metaphor, the semi-fictionalization of our own experiences, and cyborg writing, can provide ways that we can push from the margins into the centre of the academe. We can apply writing, reading, and viewing, as inquiry, using metaphors as frames for gaining a deeper of understanding of our selves and the worlds in which we operate.

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