

## Damsels Un-distressed: Scoring Complex Women in HBO's *Westworld: The Maze* (2016)

**Damiselas sin apuros: la composición de los personajes femeninos complejos  
en *Westworld: El laberinto* (2016) de HBO**

**Julin Lee**

University of Music and Performing Arts Munich

[julin.lee@hmtm.de](mailto:julin.lee@hmtm.de)

ORCID iD: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7139-6901>

### ABSTRACT

In the HBO series *Westworld: The Maze* (2016), two female characters, the “hosts” (androids) Dolores and Maeve, are not only compelling characters with whom the viewers engage with, they also subvert gender-bound tropes pervasive in the Western genre. This article will examine the role of the soundtrack in the construction and evolution of complex female characters in *Westworld*, giving due attention to Ramin Djawadi’s original compositions and how they interact with his piano arrangements of contemporary rock songs. Additionally, this article elucidates how the music constructs gender as a repeated, performed process by drawing on Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity. Beyond adding musical interest to the series, this article argues that the score sonically manifests the complex negotiations of gender and power that underlie *Westworld*’s first season.

**Key Words:** Television series music, complex female characters, Western, gender performativity, Judith Butler.



**RESUMEN**

En la serie de HBO *Westworld: El laberinto* (2016), dos personajes femeninos, las “anfitrionas” (androides) Dolores y Maeve, no solo son personajes convincentes con los que los espectadores se comprometen, sino que también subvierten los roles de género omnipresentes en el género del western. Este artículo examinará el papel de la banda sonora en la construcción y evolución de los complejos personajes femeninos de *Westworld*, prestando la debida atención a las composiciones originales de Ramin Djawadi y a cómo interactúan con sus arreglos para piano de canciones de rock contemporáneas. Además, este artículo muestra cómo la música construye el género como un proceso repetido e interpretado, basándose en las teorías de Judith Butler sobre la performatividad del género. Más allá de añadir interés musical a la serie, este artículo argumenta que la partitura manifiesta sonoramente las complejas negociaciones de género y poder que subyacen en la primera temporada de *Westworld*.

**Palabras clave:** Música de series de televisión, personajes femeninos complejos, Western, performatividad de género, Judith Butler.

Lee, J. (2022). Damsels Un-distressed: Scoring Complex Women in HBO’s *Westworld: The Maze* (2016). *Cuadernos de Investigación Musical*, (15, extraordinario), pp. 119-136.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

In an article for *Time magazine*, Daniel D’Addario (2016) observes that the HBO series *Westworld* “takes the iconography of the American West – would-be Marlboro Men, on steeds with six-shooters in hand, ready to save the maiden or terrorize her – and flips it. By the end of *Westworld*’s first season, the women have seized control.”<sup>1</sup> Considering the Western genre’s history of privileging male dominance and subjectivity, reducing women to stock roles of either the “virtuous woman” (representing refinement, virtue, civilization) or the “fallen woman” (a prostitute, usually presented as a saloon entertainer) (Warshow, 1974, p. 403), critics have duly praised *Westworld*’s subversion of the Western genre’s gender tropes.

In the highly realistic amusement park set in the American frontier called Westworld, human guests interact with incredibly lifelike androids called “hosts” in a variety of Western-themed scripted scenarios. A major appeal of this exclusive theme park is that it allows the guests to “live without limits”: they are able to indulge in their violent and sexual fantasies without fear of the consequences, because the hosts’ code prevents them from harming humans. Damaged hosts are repaired, reset and put back into the narrative loop assigned to

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<sup>1</sup> The author gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance provided by the Institute for Musicology of the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany that has facilitated the author’s participation in several conferences, which has enriched this article.

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them with their memories deleted. Although the hosts are by all means artificial beings, the repeated abuse that they are subjected to raises ethical questions due to their human likeness in appearance and behavior.

However, following a recent system update, some hosts start to remember the abuse they have suffered and they override the narrative roles assigned to them. Notably, this change is most evident into two female hosts: Dolores, the rancher's daughter, and Maeve, the madam of the Mariposa Saloon. Dolores attempts to change her fate by "[imagining] a story where [she] didn't have to be the damsel" (E5, 00:44:17)<sup>2</sup>. Going against her sweet, innocent and helpless nature, she acquires the capability to fight back physically when being threatened. Meanwhile, Maeve discovers that her world is an artificial one controlled by the park operators. Seeking to take control of her destiny, she devises a strategy to escape from the park. However, as both Dolores and Maeve gain agency, questions about their autonomy arise: are they truly in control of their fate, or did the park director and founder Dr. Robert Ford program their rebellion?

While *Westworld* features more diverse and complex female characters that challenge male hegemony both within the fictional world of the park and the real world of the park's operations hub, its portrayal of violence against women has drawn criticism. *Westworld* has been called out for indulging in the "spectacular violence" and "outmoded gender politics that enable male sexual fantasies" which it appears to challenge (Wilkins, 2019, p. 39-40). The depiction of the two main female hosts' repeated suffering on their path to consciousness and freedom compels Eliana Dockterman (2016) to ask, "in a television landscape filled with shows that routinely depict sexual violence against women, does the fact that women now run *Westworld* justify the abuses the female robots suffered throughout this season?"

Lisa Joy, *Westworld's* co-showrunner alongside her husband Jonathan Nolan, has defended their depiction of women's oppression, stressing that sexual violence is taken seriously and that in portraying it, they "endeavored for it to not be about the fetishization of those acts" (Dockterman 2016). Evan Rachel Wood, the actress that plays Dolores who is also an advocate for sexual abuse victims, urges the viewing public to "wait for the context in which [violence against women is] being used. As the show progresses, the way it's being used is very much a commentary and a look at our humanity and why we find these things entertaining and why this is an epidemic, and flipping it on its head" (Wigler, 2016).

Notwithstanding its controversial portrayal of violence against women, *Westworld* is still one of contemporary television's most feminist offerings, in that the series depicts how gender itself is constructed by taking the hosts' programmed identities as metaphors for socially and culturally determined human identities. Thus, via the strategy of exposing how compelling characters are crafted, *Westworld* presents an extraordinary case in which its female characters are both diegetically and meta-textually rendered complex. Elizabeth Mullen

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<sup>2</sup> The timings are cited from the series' DVD set from Warner Home Video (2017). In the interest of efficiency, only the starting timestamps for audio cues that are crucial for validating the points under discussion will be indicated in the format (Episode number, Hour:Minute:Second).

(2018) notes that “we get a play-by-play demonstration of Butlerian performativity through the use of repetitive story loops intercut in such a way as to underscore the audience’s awareness of them” (§4). She draws attention to *Westworld*’s deconstruction of gender and also of genre through the use of camera work, editing, and its effective script, which is riddled with repeated phrases that take on nuanced variations in different contexts. While Mullen acknowledges the role of dialogue and sound in articulating the power relationships along gendered lines amongst the administrative personnel of the park (§9-15), she only makes passing remarks about the music accompanying the scenes that she analyses. On the other hand, Susanne Köller (2019) and Kingsley Marshall (2019) explore in greater detail how the player piano and song covers comment on Maeve’s character development. However, the contribution of Ramin Djawadi’s original score, which actually makes up the majority of the music heard in *Westworld*, has yet to be addressed in detail.

Building on these insights, I aim to elucidate the soundtrack’s role in the construction and evolution of female characters in *Westworld*, giving due attention to Djawadi’s original compositions and how they interact with the piano arrangements he produced for the contemporary rock songs. I adopt Rebecca Fülöp’s stance that the gender of fictional characters on screen is something that is determined by various factors – including music. Fülöp (2012) argues that the gender of cinematic characters should not be understood as being “intrinsic and internal to the bodies of the actors portraying them” but rather as “created (and often overdetermined) by a multitude of factors that go into creating film characters: script and storyline, direction and lighting, editing and cinematography, costume and makeup design, acting and musical accompaniment” (p. x). I draw on Grace Edgar’s (2020) findings that scoring practices are sensitive to contemporaneous gender politics in my examination of the soundtrack’s contribution to *Westworld*’s revamped if not contentious portrayal of female characters within a Western genre setting. Additionally, I aim to elucidate how music constructs gender as a repeated, performed process, drawing on Judith Butler’s theories of gender performativity. Via close analyses of the music accompanying the two main female host characters, Dolores and Maeve, I draw attention to not only the musical features of selected themes but also how the music is employed. More broadly, I aspire to contribute to a better understanding of the musical strategies employed in serial narrative programs that “center on female characters that are complex, multi-dimensional, and who possess the female gaze, the narrative center with whom the audience is aligned” (Pinedo, 2021, p. 1), which engage with feminist issues pertinent to our time.

## 2. VARIATIONS ON DOLORES’ THEME

At the beginning of Episode 1, viewers are introduced to Dolores in her narrative habitat: her day begins with her waking up in bed, getting dressed, going downstairs to greet her father before heading into town to run some errands. This sequence is accompanied by a voice-over, comprising the exchange between Dolores and a man, whose voice viewers will later recognize as that of Bernard, the park’s Head of Behavior. As she delivers her response on what she thinks of her world, the musical underscore makes its debut (E1, 00:02:52). The piano introduces a simple melody in its top voice accompanied by homophonic chords; this

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forms the basis of the musical theme associated with Dolores' character, in particular her (programmed) positive outlook of her world as she declares, "some people choose to see the ugliness in this world, the disarray; I choose to see the beauty". The modest theme rendered on the piano befits Dolores' benign portrayal and her simple, peaceful "life" with her family on a ranch, besides aligning the viewers with her perspective. Nonetheless, the viewers soon discover the aptness of her melancholy-tinged theme as well as her name which means grief or pain<sup>3</sup>. As night falls, Dolores returns home to find her family murdered before the vicious human guest known as the "Man in Black" brutally drags her into a barn and viewers are left to assume the worst.

The image then cuts to black and startlingly we see Dolores repeating the same sequence of events as seen in the exposition. This repetition exposes the narrative loop assigned to Dolores – the role she plays within the Westworld park's web of intertwining narratives, in which the guests participate. In fact, this opening sequence is seen a further two times in the first episode alone, highlighting the rigidity of Dolores' narrative loop and by extension that of all the hosts in the park. Furthermore, the obvious recycling of this sequence draws attention to how Dolores' gender identity is constructed via routine activities, here however taken to the extreme: she is depicted wearing the same outfit, with the same hairstyle, delivering the exact same greeting to her father and receiving the same kind of response. This holds true even when another host replaces her "father" entirely in the final iteration of the sequence in Episode 1. This corresponds to Judith Butler's (2006) observation that gender "is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (p. 45). Thus, this fictional setting mirrors how gender is constructed in real life: the Westworld park's programming that control the hosts' narrative loops corresponds to the social norms and laws that govern our realities.

Upon closer inspection, Dolores' theme (see transcription in Figure 1)<sup>4</sup> reflects her mode of existence in the park: it is minimalistic and repetitive in its features. In the third and fourth measures, the four-note motif introduced in the top voice of the first two measures (E-F#-G-F#) is repeated with only a single modification in harmony on the first beat. The fifth and sixth measures feature only a slight alteration: the third and fourth notes of the top voice are changed to A and G respectively. The rhythm of the melody in the top voice as well as its homophonic accompaniment is straightforward. These features sonically reflect Dolores' simple lifestyle and the routine she repeats with minimal variation within her assigned narrative loop.

<sup>3</sup> Etymologically, her name derives from the Latin *dolor* meaning pain, grief, anger. See "doulour | dolor, n." *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, retrieved from [www.oed.com/view/Entry/56632](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56632).

<sup>4</sup> The transcriptions of musical themes in this article were produced by the author by ear based on the series' DVD from Warner Home Video (2017). While the soundtrack album provided helpful orientation, the transcribed cues printed here are based on their appearances in the scenes being discussed.

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Fig. 1: Dolores' theme as introduced non-diegetically on the piano at the beginning of Episode 1.

Towards the end of Episode 1, the aggregate forming Dolores' theme is manifested in the underscore (E1, 01:02:48). Here, three salient aspects of Dolores' theme come together: the main melody in the violins, the bass line in the cellos/synthetic timbres, and the building blocks comprised of quaver pairs in the piano's top voice.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Piano (Pno.), Violin (Vn.), and Cello (Vc.). The score is in 4/4 time, key of D major. The Piano part is in the top voice, featuring a melody of eighth notes. The Violin part is labeled 'Main melody' and features a steady, fundamental melody. The Cello part provides a bass line. The Piano part is annotated with Greek letters:  $\alpha$  (blue),  $\beta$  (red),  $\gamma$  (green), and  $\delta$  (orange), which label specific pairs of eighth notes. The Violin part is highlighted with a light blue background.

Fig. 2: The first four measures of Dolores' theme as fleshed out towards the end of Episode 1.

The fully unfolded theme sonically embodies the aspects of Dolores' character that the viewers have become acquainted with over the first episode. Like her character, her musical theme is characterized by repetition and controlled variation. While the violins adopt the stable, fundamental melody introduced in the piano at the beginning of Episode 1, the piano's top voice is derived from the repetitions and permutations of the paired-eighth note blocks, labelled  $\alpha$ ,  $\beta$ ,  $\gamma$ , and  $\delta$ .

Following the first full statement of Dolores' theme, the thematic material is recapitulated a further two times, with the piano one octave higher and featuring similar permutations involving the paired eighth notes in the top voice, hence reflecting the continual loop that Dolores is trapped in. However, in the final three measures of the

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underscore, a new C-B eighth note-pair breaks the established 4-pair pattern beginning with the pair  $\alpha$  (E-D $\sharp$ ); even the violins abandon the prevailing melodic ostinato to play a rising melodic line (B-C-D-D $\sharp$ -E) instead.

This musical deviation complements the subtle visual hint that beneath Dolores' harmless surface, she is undergoing critical changes: on-screen back at her home in Sweetwater, she nonchalantly slaps dead a fly on her neck just moments after she answers "no" to the question "would you ever harm a living thing" in the voice-over derived from a diagnostic session. She reflexively gives in to the instinct to kill the annoying but arguably harmless fly instead of merely waving it away. This uncharacteristically aggressive overreaction is the earliest foreshadowing of her character's significant departure from programmed behavior throughout the season. Instead of resetting, she recalls the outcomes of previous scenarios. This enables her to escape and break free from her narrative loop in which she is predestined to be the helpless victim. Her increasingly deviant behavior is reflected in the marked variations to her theme: it takes an ominous turn to the bass regions as she deftly shoots dead several antagonistic hosts (E5, 00:43:47) and acquires a driving rhythmic accompaniment when she fights back against the Man in Black (E10, 00:39:12). In this confrontation, Dolores drags the Man in Black to the church altar – mirroring how he dragged her by the collar into the barn in Episode 1 – and manages to overpower him but falters at the last step. Her code prevents her from shooting him dead; Dolores' visible struggle against her programming is audibly supported by the static ringing in the soundtrack. The Man in Black takes advantage of her hesitation to stab her in the abdomen, thus fatally wounding her.

Nevertheless, at the end of the season, Dolores does arrive at the elusive "center of the maze." In the past, the park's co-creator, Arnold, used the "maze" as a metaphor to explain his theory of consciousness to Dolores: "Consciousness isn't a journey upward, but a journey inward. Not a pyramid, but a maze. Every choice could bring you closer to the centre or send you spiralling to the edges... to madness" (E10, 00:10:04). It has taken Dolores around thirty years to finally solve the maze, meaning that she finally recognizes her own capacity for independent thought and autonomous action. In the present, Dolores contemplates her existence in a diagnostic chamber within the park, seated opposite "Arnold" who the viewers know is merely a figment of her imagination as he had already died many years ago. There, she comes to the realization that the seemingly foreign and external voices that she had been hearing – the voices that urged her to fight back against her aggressors and save herself – were the voices of her own thoughts. This moment of enlightenment is ingeniously captured in the soundtrack (E10, 01:16:34): Arnold's voice is clearly heard in the first part of the question "Do you know now who you've been talking to..." Continuing with "whose voice you've been hearing... all... this..." his voice is mixed with Ford's. Completing the question with "...time?" Dolores' solitary voice is heard as the camera pans to reveal the seat opposite her: Dolores sees herself. Fittingly, Dolores' own theme plays in the soundtrack (E10, 01:16:55) – the very first barebones version is heard, which represents the cornerstone of her entire being. Dolores gains full awareness that her own inner voice has been guiding her to act against her programming in her best interests.

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The recognition of her own inner monologue signals that she is finally aware that she is in control of her own mind; as Nolan puts it, she recognizes that she has been “making up her own programming” (Nolan & Joy, 2017, 23:33–23:36).



Fig. 3: Dolores finds herself at the center of the maze (E10, 01:17:22).

In the language of film music, which is founded on the basis of opera, character evolution is typically musically reinforced by thematic development (Paulus, 2000, p. 155). However, contrary to this convention, Dolores’ theme has not changed tremendously here. The original instrumentation, tonal material and harmony are retained; there is no modulation to a new key or a dramatic, ascending gesture to signify Dolores’ elevated self-awareness. Does the music then cast doubt on Dolores’ awakening? If her life’s narrative is one that has been written for her, and it is associated with her original theme, does the music suggest that she is still abiding by her assigned narrative? Has she truly achieved consciousness or has she been programmed by Ford to think she is conscious when Ford is actually still pulling the strings?

Nonetheless, the key insight Dolores gains at this moment, is that her attainment of full consciousness involves the acceptance of all parts of her, which include her cornerstone programming and all her experiences that have led her to this moment. Thus, against standard scoring prescriptions for narrative film and television regarding character change, Dolores’ enlightened acknowledgement of her own self is reflected in the recognizable reprisal of Dolores’ theme – not a triumphant fanfare proclaiming the arrival of someone new. Besides the thematic affiliation, the music perfectly captures the poignant mood of the moment: one of quiet reflection and calm acceptance and not a pompous celebration of personal achievement.

At the boundary where the theme would be recapitulated, the music takes a fresh turn. The arpeggio motif of *Westworld*’s main title theme (see Figure 4) makes its appearance as Dolores resolves to chart a new path for herself (E10, 01:17:48). Following this, her imagined double vanishes, as she no longer perceives the second (other) voice to be external to her

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but accepts it as her own. The departure to new thematic material, accompanied by the modulation from E minor to B minor, musically embodies the turning point in the story: now fully conscious, Dolores is free to determine her own future. She looks at the gun which Ford left behind for her, foreshadowing that her next course of action will inevitably involve violence. As the scene cuts to the gala party in the festively decorated town center of Escalante, the melody of the main title theme makes its first intra-episode appearance in the soundtrack of the entire season (E10, 01:18:12), providing continuity between the scenes but also acting as a sonic omen for the final showdown.

The image shows two staves of musical notation. The top staff is labeled 'Pno.' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Str.'. Both staves are in treble clef, E minor (one sharp), and 3/4 time. The piano part consists of a series of eighth notes in the right hand, creating an arpeggiated effect. The string part consists of a simple melody of quarter notes in the left hand.

Fig. 4: A musical excerpt containing the arpeggio motif and the melody (first phrase) of *Westworld's* main title theme in the piano and in the strings respectively (E10, 01:18:12).

The unveiling of the title theme's melody is reserved for this momentous event, which encapsulates the very essence of *Westworld's* first season: the hosts' attainment of full self-consciousness and who they will choose to become with their acquired self-autonomy. The *Westworld* title theme, withheld throughout the entire season up until this moment, represents the culmination of the series' narrative arc: the order defined by human control gives way to chaos as the hosts gain sentience.

### 3. ANTHEMS OF MAEVE'S EMANCIPATION

While Dolores represents "white female victimhood", Maeve's character represents "exotic, dominant sexuality" (Köller 2019, p. 172). Together they fulfil two common functions of women in early Westerns: "to serve as victims to be rescued or as temptations to be vanquished (Dow, 1996, p. xviii, quoted in Köller, 2019, p. 164). However, far from being a one-dimensional archetypical character, Maeve's identity is fragmented into three. Besides her current role as madam of the Mariposa Saloon, the viewers learn – along with Maeve – that she previously held the role of a homesteader, living with her daughter on the prairie. Besides these fictional identities, she learns of her "true" identity: an artificial being, a property exploited by the Delos Corporation. Reflecting the complex constellation that makes up the entirety of her character<sup>5</sup>, the music assigned to Maeve in these three

<sup>5</sup> While the intersectionality of gender and race is particularly relevant to Maeve, this article will not investigate how she is musically coded along racial lines. Köller (2019) has explored how the player piano

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circumstances is distinct in type. While carrying out her duties at the saloon, she is accompanied by diegetic player piano covers of contemporary rock songs. When she recalls her past life with her daughter, the melancholic “Memories theme” plays non-diegetically in the underscore – a theme she shares with Bernard, who is also a parent who has lost his child. When she uncovers the truth about her reality, she acquires her own musical theme, which sonically signifies her gain in agency.

Maeve starts to experience disturbing visions following her encounter with Dolores, who in a trance of sorts tells her quietly “these violent delights have violent ends”. At the most unexpected of times, Maeve is overcome by the harrowing vision of herself trying to escape from Native American aggressors, which disrupts her normal programmed behavior. For instance, this vision distracts her from delivering her scripted speech about the “little voice” while entertaining a male guest as the player piano cover of the English rock band Radiohead’s “No Surprises” (1997) plays diegetically in the background (E2, 00:13:56). After being cleared in a diagnostic check, Maeve returns to her post. When she interacts with a female guest this time, the same piano cover accompanies her delivery of the same “little voice” script (E2, 00:21:24). Even the camera tracking direction (left to right) is recycled during the extreme close up of the piano roll (Marshall, 2019, p. 106). Indeed, the title of the covered song describes Maeve’s condition aptly as she is programmed to repeat her assigned narrative with only minimal improvisation, thus preventing any unexpected surprises. Additionally, the specificity of the song-interaction constellation reveals the level of detail of the park’s design and the stringency of its regulation – very little is left to chance.

The diagnostic session exposes the artificial nature of Maeve’s being and by extension also that of her interactions with the guests. A male narrative technician prompts her to complete her scripted response and when she does so correctly – in an appropriate tone and with a fitting facial expression – he concludes that she is functioning properly. Notably, the criteria he uses to assess her functionality are distinctively gendered: she must perform her role in a manner that exudes feminine sex appeal, exactly as how she was designed to be in view of her vocation. Recalling Butler’s (2006) theory of gender performativity, this sequence puts into relief how being “female” – fiction and otherwise – is not a “natural fact” but rather a “cultural performance” (p. xxxi). Maeve’s programmed pupillary response and coy smile draw attention to how gender is similarly performed, not expressed, in real life. As Butler (2006) notes, the “identity that [such gestures] purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (p. 185). Maeve’s highly realistic behavior is literally regulated by the code written by the technicians to generally conform to the expectations of the human guests. Thus, her disposition reflects how “interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body” (Butler, 2006, p. 185) in reality, where normative performances of gender obscure the performed nature of identity.

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“both symbolizes and formalizes Maeve’s rebellion against her enslavement” (p. 172) that is rooted in her status as an android, a woman, and a person of colour.

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Furthermore, the narrative technicians evaluate her performance, and discuss how best to “get her numbers back up”, holding up a mirror to how what is considered normal or successful in terms of gender roles in our world is as constructed as in the fictional world of the *Westworld* series. Even the violence of gender norms affects Maeve in her artificial world: if she still fails to entice the guests, “she’ll be decommissioned”, in the words of the female narrative technician who is diagnosing her error. This means that Maeve will be removed from the narrative system and put into cold storage for failing to satisfactorily play her expected gendered role within the fictional Western society. Not only will she lose her role in the park (her “job”) but her very purpose of existence.

While the recycling of the “No Surprises” cover highlights the repetitive and scripted nature of Maeve’s interactions with the guests, the diegetic presence itself of an anachronistic rock song in a Western setting sonically manifests the park’s artificiality, additionally signaling to viewers that they are watching a “synthetic Western” (Renfro, 2016). As Djawadi notes:

You would think the people in control would make everything authentic, including whatever is played on that player piano. It would be from that time period. And when it’s not, it’s that subtle reminder that, “Wait, there is something not right. This is not real.” It’s just such a powerful tool that only music can do (Hilleary, 2016).

Notably, the “people in control” that Djawadi mentions can refer to both the fictional creators of the park and also the real showrunners of the series. Thus, the selection of anachronistic player piano music simultaneously draws attention to the constructed nature of not only the Westworld park, but also of the *Westworld* series. Further duplicating the fictional experiences in the park onto the plane of the viewers, the haunting familiarity of the instrumental covers provide a mental barrier to the immediate identification of the songs, thus challenging the viewers to remember, just as the hosts struggle to recall and make sense of their disjointed memories. “And there’s a moment where it clicks and they understand. They remember”, explains Nolan, referring to the parallel eureka effect experienced by both the hosts and the viewers (Nolan, Joy and Djawadi, 2017, 07:12-07:14). *Westworld* encourages its viewers to think about the blurred lines between androids and humans and by extension between the artificial and the real, drawing from a long filmic and literary tradition that traces back to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). Miguel Sebastián Martín (2018) remarks that “androids function as a looking glass through which we can reflect on the human condition; they are nothing but our fictional doppelgängers” (p. 58). Considering the many ways in which *Westworld*’s androids mirror real humans, he then posits that the *Westworld* series is a form of metafiction, drawing from Patricia Waugh’s understanding of the term to mean “fictional writing that self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh, 1984, p. 2 quoted in Sebastián Martín, 2018, p. 59). In other words, because the park and the series mirror reality, the anachronistic player piano cover of “No Surprises” sonically accentuates the constructedness of gender in both the fiction we are watching and the reality that we live in.





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Fig. 7: The Behavior Tablet displaying Maeve’s original attribute matrix, which determines Maeve’s character traits (E6, 00:46:23).

Accompanying Maeve’s transformed self as she starts another day in Sweetwater is the piano cover of Amy Winehouse’s “Back to Black” (2006), the final piano cover specifically associated with Maeve (E8, 00:27:35). This time, the camera’s tracking direction across the piano roll is reversed – a break in convention that visually anticipates the reversal in power relations following Maeve’s game-changer modification (Marshall, 2019, p. 109). Although she appears to be continuing on her loop by heading to the Mariposa Saloon, the darkness of the song’s lyrics foreshadows that “this is not an ordinary day in any way, and it’s about to get incredibly dark” (Nolan et al., 2017, 05:12-05:16). While in the original recording, Winehouse sings about a broken-hearted woman who “died a hundred times” as her lover leaves her for an old flame, the line applies literally to Maeve who has been persistently damaged by the guests and restored into service. While critics and scholars alike have noted this felicitous line for its aptness in capturing Maeve’s mechanical existence (Mehring, 2018, p. 47), other parts of the song prove equally valuable in fleshing out Maeve’s attitudes, goals and psychological state. Adapting Winehouse’s lyrics to Maeve’s situation, the lines “Me and my head high / And my tears dry” reflects the culmination of Maeve’s sufferings in her new aspiration to live a dignified life, not a puppet or slave to the desires of the guests. By Episode 8, the once helpless, disorientated Maeve has evolved into an empowered, enlightened woman. Maeve drastically cuts off the emotional ties to her fake life in the park. She stops lamenting over the loss of the saloon-girl host Clementine, for whom she had a fondness beyond their professional relationship. Although she intensely feels the love she had for her daughter from her previous role through her vivid flashbacks, she forgoes looking for her, recognizing and rejecting the fabricated attachment that holds her back.

Maeve’s sinister theme is employed in underscoring her subsequent attempts to escape from the Mesa Hub, which culminates in a bloody confrontation with Delos’ security forces. She alters the park’s security features and makes changes to the core codes of the hosts Hector and Armistice who help her take down Delos’ security personnel that attempt to stop

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her from leaving. Maeve's theme is heard for the last time as Maeve successfully boards the train that is headed for the real world.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS: DAMSELS UN-DISTRESSED?

While Maeve's story in Season 1 seems to end with empowerment, her autonomy is brought into question by Bernard, when he reveals to her that her "Escape" plan is apparently programmed. Despite the evidence, she insists that nobody is controlling her – that she is the one making her own choices<sup>6</sup>. Indeed, the music contributes towards these ambiguities as well. In a flashback, a recording of Claude Debussy's *Réverie* (composed in 1890) is used to instantaneously calm Maeve down (E8, 00:50:42), demonstrating that music can be employed to control the hosts. Thus, was she being manipulated by the player piano covers – whose unverbilized lyrics uncannily matched her changing disposition – all along? Besides agreeing with Köller's (2019) point that the "automated, designed soundtrack" could suggest that Maeve has been "instrumentalized and manipulated" (p. 174) yet again, I add that the repetitive features of Maeve's musical theme could indicate that she is indeed trapped in yet another narrative loop – one which compels her to keep trying to escape from the park until she succeeds. In the light of this revelation, one could equally ask if Dolores truly reached consciousness. Did someone, presumably Dr. Ford, program her rebellion? Or did he merely egg her on, calculating and anticipating correctly that she will be compelled to rebel and fight for freedom? Is Dolores' new theme truly hers, or is it the theme of Ford's final narrative? At the final moments of the season finale, Maeve abandons the escape plan, choosing to remain behind to look for her daughter. Is she truly manifesting her newly acknowledged free will or has she succumbed to a powerful programming that is designed to keep her from escaping<sup>7</sup>? Such ambiguities complicate a straightforward understanding of both these female characters, leaving enough intrigue for the next season.

By avoiding a definite identification of characters and their motives via recognizable codes, the music participates in widening the interpretive possibilities of the narrative. The music thus faithfully supports the complex portrayal of the female characters besides contributing to the first season's open-ended exploration of self-determination, control and power along gender lines. To borrow the words of Judith Butler (2006), *Westworld* "dramatizes the signifying gestures through which gender itself is established" (p. viii) through its music. I argue that viewers are invited to draw parallels between the host characters' lives in *Westworld* the park as well as in *Westworld* the series and their own lives in reality. After all, as Dr. Robert Ford muses, we humans "live in loops, as tight and as

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<sup>6</sup> Contrary to Maeve's assertion, *Westworld*'s second season, *The Door* (2018) reveals that Dr. Ford gave Maeve the "Escape narrative" as he had specific plans for her in the real world.

<sup>7</sup> Nolan has stressed in interviews (see Emami & Riesman, 2016) and in the DVD featurette that Maeve is displaying her free will here for the first time, as underlined by the hand-held camera technique. However, without prior knowledge of this explanation, viewers will arguably be struck by the ambiguity of Maeve's motivation when watching the series for the first time. This has sparked lively online conversations which have likely prompted the showrunners to personally weigh in on the scene's meaning.

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closed as the hosts do, seldom questioning our choices; content, for the most part, to be told what to do next” (E8, 00:34:40).

By sonically translating the repetitiveness of the hosts’ loops which mirrors that of our daily routines into themes with repetitive musical features, the performativity of gender as “a stylized repetition of acts” (Butler, 2006, p. 191) is musically reinforced. Instead of resorting to the clichéd ragtime style to establish temporal and geographic authenticity, the showrunners reinvent the generic soundscape to suit their synthetic Western. Through the diegetic use of player piano covers of contemporary rock songs, the soundtrack self-reflexively draws attention to the constructedness of the park, the series and by extension that of our own (gendered) lives. This analysis provides a useful starting point for further investigating *Westworld*’s musical portrayal of Dolores and Maeve, as the story moves beyond the confines of the park in Season 2, titled *The Door* (2018) and to a greater degree in Season 3 titled *The New World* (2020), offering us viewers even more points to reflect on as fiction and reality collide.

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**Fecha de recepción: 10/10/2021**

**Fecha de aceptación: 18/04/2022**