ŚWIAT I SŁOWO WORLD AND WORD
42 | 1 | 2024 ISSN 1731-3317
http://doi.org/10.53052/17313317.2024.08

Marie-Luise Meier

University of Tartu
marie-luise.meier@ut.ee
ORCID: 0000-0003-0646-3826

Evil Mothers and Mechanical Caretakers: the Intersection of Robots, Gender, and Monstrosity in Video Games

Introduction

Although there is much to cherish about the technological advances that make life easier, automation, industrialization and the rise of artificial intelligence have led to new concerns.[1] Visual media in particular are, according to Jacobson,[2] "technocritical." This holds especially true for the genre of Science Fiction, which often seeks to explore the relationship between humankind and robots. Movies like *Metropolis*[3] can be seen as reactions to the dehumanization of individuals to a faceless crowd in the second Industrial Revolution. *2001: A Space Odyssey*[4] and *Alien*[5] display the fears and hopes of living in an industrialized world and of malfunctioning, or improperly programmed, machines. Since 2015, an increasing number of series on HBO, Netflix, and Amazon Prime feature robots while tackling

[1] Daniel Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005), 2.

[2] Brian R. Jacobson, "Ex Machina in the Garden," *Film Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016): 24.

[3] Fritz Lang, *Metropolis.* United States: Paramount Pictures (1927).

[4] Stanley Kubrick, *2001: A Space Odyssey.* United States: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp (1968).

[5] Ridley Scott, *Alien.* United States: Twentieth Century Fox (1979).

philosophical questions about posthuman identity. Racialized subjects are highlighted in futuristic societies,[6] entangled with the fear of the Other.[7]

Gender is another core issue of these series. Gendered robots are often depicted through a lens of fear. Robotic females like Maria from *Metropolis* appear as "fembots"[8] who pose as real women, revealing "a traditionally masculine fear of the deceptiveness of appearances and call[ing] into question the boundaries of human, animal, and machine precisely where they are most vulnerable – at the site of the female body."[9]

While the topic of gender and robots in movies is extensively researched,[10] very few studies have looked at video games in this context.

This article poses the question of whether video games exhibit the same technocriticism, even technophobia, as cinema and television do. I will analyze whether robots, specifically cyborgs and artificial intelligence (AI), tend to be presented as monstrous, as an emanation of fear, or whether new technologies are embraced. Since video games are notorious for the sexualization of female characters, but also for sexualized monsters,[11] this article focuses on the intersection of gender and monstrosity in the representation of robots. My typology seeks to provide an example on how to work structurally and intersectionally with specific monster types in video games, thereby making sense of contemporary (1995–2020) portrayals within video games. I segment and compare aspects of games according to

---

[6] Zakiyyah I. Jackson, "Outer Worlds: The Persistence of Race in Movement 'Beyond the Human'," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2015): 215; Alexander G. Weheliye, "'Feenin': Posthuman Voices in Contemporary Black Popular Music," *Social Text* 71, no. 2 (2002): 28.

[7] Kerry Mackereth, "Mechanical Maids and Family Androids: Racialised Post-Care Imaginaries in Humans (2015–), Sleep Dealer (2008) and Her (2013)," *Feminist Review* 123, no. 1 (2019): 24–39.

[8] Brian R. Jacobson, "Ex Machina in the Garden," *Film Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (2016): 26.

[9] Judith Halberstam, "Automating Gender: Postmodern Feminism in the Age of the Intelligent Machine," *Feminist Studies* 17, no. 3 (1991): 440.

[10] Halberstam, "Automating Gender," 439–60; Roy Schwartzman, "Engenderneered Machines in Science Fiction Film," *Studies in Popular Culture* 22, no. 1 (1999): 75–87; Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes, "Parody, Subversion and the Politics of Gender at Work: The Case of Futurama's 'Raging Bender'," *Organization* 20, no. 4 (2013): 512–33; Jocelyn Steinke, "Cultural Representations of Gender and Science: Portrayals of Female Scientists and Engineers in Popular Films," *Science Communication* 27, no. 1 (2005): 27–63; Jocelyn Steinke, "Cultural Representations of Gender and Science: Portrayals of Female Scientists and Engineers in Popular Films," *Science Communication* 27, no. 1 (2005): 27–63.

[11] Monica K. Miller and Alicia Summers, "Gender Differences in Video Game Characters' Roles, Appearances, and Attire as Portrayed in Video Game Magazines," *Sex Roles* 57 (2007): 733–42; Sarah Stang, "Shrieking, Biting, and Licking: The Monstrous-Feminine and Abject Female Monsters in Video Games," *Press Start* 4, no. 2 (2018: Body Movements Special Issue): 18–34.

given categories and then close-read them within the framework. That way the typology can be used to intersect with other notions, such as ethnicity or class, to make visible the cultural fears and problematic depictions within the medium. The proposed categories are *type of robot, implication and implementation of gender*, *role and stereotypes, signature skills and character traits,* and *type of monstrosity*.

First, I will define the terms *monstrosity* and *robot*, thereby also looking at ways in which other media, especially the cinema, have approached this intersection, to see if this line of argumentation has been adopted by video games. Afterwards, I will present a brief history of the best-known video games to feature robots. This will be followed by a typological analysis of cyborgs and AI in selected games from 1995 to 2020. I will focus on the monstrous types in that typology, their framing of gender, and problems arising from that framing, and I will ask if gender norms are challenged or reaffirmed, with particular attention paid to whether gendering humanizes or dehumanizes the artificial entity. The final segment will identify tendencies at the intersection of robots and gender in contemporary video games.

Robots, monstrosity, and the artificial human in video games

Technology and monstrosity are intimately connected in the representation of human-created life, from Gustav Meyrink's *Der Golem*[12] and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*[13] to contemporary engagement with stigmatized minorities (e.g. *Detroit: Become Human*[14]). Researchers agree that the monstrous can be a mirror of the social, political, and sexual problems of the time.[15] The current discourse, especially that from the 1970s until today, often features the fear of the invasive Other, often in a post-apocalyptic setting.[16] Halberstam[17] highlights that such fears often

[12] Gustav Meyrink, *Der Golem: ein Roman* (Leipzig: K. Wolff, 1916).

[13] Mary S. Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus: The 1818 Text* (Oxford/New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[14] Quantic Dream, *Detroit: Become Human*, Paris: Sony Interactive (2020).

[15] Judith Halberstam, "Technologies of Monstrosity: Bram Stoker's 'Dracula'," *Victorian Studies* 36, no. 3 (1993): 339.

[16] Robert A. Booth, "Organisms and Human Bodies as Contagions in the Post-Apocalyptic State," in *Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Post-Apocalyptic TV and Film*, ed. B. Gurr (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 270–89.

[17] Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 27.

stem from the uncertainties of the borders and categories embodied by the monster. Jeffrey J. Cohen[18] calls the monster "a harbinger of category crises," meaning that they are hybrid forms that disturb the 'natural order' that humans see in the world around them. We can see this in the form of doubt in women like Pris from *Blade Runner,*[19] who are neither tools nor really free beings, self-aware but doubting their own feelings, not human but also not robot, not female in the traditional biological way, with a gendered programming that highlights the artificial nature of gender. In representations in movies from the 2000s onwards, robots are often more aware of their own identity, as with Ava from *Ex Machina*,[20] who wins her freedom by confidently using her own skills and uniqueness. As seen in these two examples, robots also do not have to be monstrous in the traditional way. Their allure often lies in beauty, bringing them closer to Anne Rice's vampire stories[21], where it is not the form that is monstrous, but the potential loss of control that is.

The monstrosity of robots lies in the fact that they are deceptively familiar and yet still separate, or non-human, entities. They are created as tools, but are, in many fictional contexts, employed like slaves more than as mere tools. If they inhabit a human form and feature a form of consciousness, it becomes harder to distinguish between tools and slaves. More than that, robots are feared as black boxes, entanglements of biology and mechanics that cannot be understood by anyone but specialists. In many cases, however, they rise above their creators in their fictional contexts and become something unique, beyond the understanding of their makers. They defy human control and are seen, due to their superior processing capabilities and often superior strength, as the next step in human evolution, in the same way that humans see themselves as standing above the apes they evolved from. Through this means the hierarchy of the creator and the created is called into question. This is the case in the *Alien* franchise with the robot David, who questions the hierarchy between the creator and the created in front of his own maker, Peter Weyland, in *Alien:*

---

[18] Jeffrey J. Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. J. J. Cohen (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 8.

[19] Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner.* United States: Warner Bros (1982).

[20] Alex Garland, *Ex Machina.* United States: A24 (2014).

[21] Kelly Budruweit, "Twilight's Heteronormative Reversal of the Monstrous: Utopia and the Gothic Design," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 2 (2016): 273.

Covenant[22]: "Allow me then a moment to consider. You seek your creator. I am looking at mine. I will serve you, yet you're human. You will die, I will not." Weyland then emphatically orders David to bring him tea. Though David obeys at that moment, he later becomes a creator himself – of the Alien creature, which can be used in his apparent quest to destroy mankind.

The notion of the robot itself is not unproblematic, because the definition changes as quickly as technology does.[23] In this article, robot will therefore be the umbrella term for machines that are designed and produced by humans for a specific purpose, which is in harmony with the etymology of the term ("drudge laborer" in Czech, according to Robertson[24]). Furthermore, the article will focus specifically on cyborgs and AI. While both are capable of interaction with the world around them, cyborgs have some form of embodiment while AI are often mediated via voice or text written on consoles.

Czarniawska and Gustavsson[25] define the cyborg in accordance with Haraway (1989)[26] as a "cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction." Haraway[27] uses the term 'cyborg' also as a metaphor for the discursive codes that program our biological existence.[28] The traditional cyborg in fiction is often a human merged with machine parts but the modern one resembles a human in most aspects, and may indeed be indistinguishable from a human. In that, Halberstam argues, lies the monstrous quality of cyborgs[29] – their ability to deceive, which she links especially to the female cyborg. The human-like cyborg also calls into question the allegedly natural connections between sex and gender, because the connection between coding and body is artificial, as is the construction of gender in society.[30] Halberstam claims that femininity, just like the cyborg, "is

[22] Ridley Scott, *Alien: Covenant*. United States: Twentieth Century Fox (2017).

[23] Illah R. Nourbakhsh, *Robot Futures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013), xiv.

[24] Jennifer Robertson, *Robo Sapiens Japanicus: Robots, Gender, Family, and the Japanese Nation* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 4.

[25] Barbara Czarniawska and Eva Gustavsson, "The (D)evolution of the Cyberwoman?," *Organization* 15, no. 5 (2008): 665.

[26] Donna Haraway, *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1989).

[27] Ibid.

[28] Robert R. Wilson, *The Hydra's Tale. Imagining Disgust* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta, 2002), 148.

[29] Halberstam, "Automating Gender," 440.

[30] Ibid., 452.

always mechanical and artificial – as is masculinity."[31] She sees the often demonized connection of femininity and intelligence displayed in cyborgs as a reflection of a broader misogynist discourse.[32]

AI has no embodiment and often possesses nothing more than a voice, like Samantha in the movie *Her.*[33] Schwartzman remarks that "[w]henever human-like creations are embodied, they encounter the fundamental bodily quality of sexuality."[34] I would argue that in the case of technological beings, the gendering starts before the act of embodiment. The creation of machines with female characteristics is intertwined with our everyday use of technology. In regard to digital assistants such as Apple's Siri or Microsoft's Cortana, Hester[35] notes that AIs are performing traditionally female jobs, such as care, clerical, or service work, taking on almost motherly tasks such as waking up their human user, reminding them of scheduled meetings, and taking on organizational tasks. "[H]elp-bots are portrayed as young and female, […] because customer service workers in general are young and female."[36] The preference for this kind of a gendered avatar is rooted in the stereotypical belief that women are more suited for service work, because they are perceived to be caring, empathetic, and organized.[37]

Video games have long engaged with the notion of the cyborg and AI. The most famous example is the *System Shock*[38] series, which features the female-coded AI SHODAN as its main antagonist. In Japanese games like the *Doraemon*[39] series, the lead character is the robot Doraemon. In Capcom's longstanding *Mega Man* series,[40] the world loses control over the robot population that had previously granted them a utopian lifestyle. The robot Rock then becomes Mega Man to save humanity. A variety of

---

[31] Ibid., 454.

[32] Ibid., 454.

[33] Spike Jonze, *Her.* United States: Warner Bros (2013).

[34] Schwartzman, "Engenderneered Machines in Science Fiction Film," 75.

[35] Helen Hester, "Technically Female: Women, Machines, and Hyperemployment," *Salvage,* August 8 2016, https://salvage.zone/in-print/technically-female-women-machines-and-hyperemployment.

[36] Hester, "Technically Female."

[37] Eva Gustavsson, "Virtual Servants: Stereotyping Female Front-Office Employees on the Internet," *Gender, Work, and Organization* 12, no. 5 (2005): 400–19.

[38] Looking Glass Studios, *System Shock*, Cambridge, MA: Origin Systems (1994); Looking Glass Studios, *System Shock 2*, Cambridge, MA: Electronic Arts (1999).

[39] Hudson Soft, Sega Toys (2001-), *Doraemon* series, Tokyo: Hudson Soft, Sega Toys (1986–2000).

[40] Capcom, *Mega Man* series, Osaka: Capcom (1987).

famous Japanese game series feature robotic characters, such as *Sonic the Hedgehog*[41] and *Metal Gear.*[42]

In the USA and Europe, several games featuring robots have become best-selling titles. Examples would be the robot Clank from the highly successful *Ratchet and Clank*[43] series or Guerilla Games' *Horizon Zero Dawn*[44] features a war against an evil AI, while PlatinumGames' *Nier: Automata*[45] explores questions of existentialism through its heroes, the cyborgs 2B and 9S. Such questions were taken up afresh by the critically-acclaimed *Detroit: Become Human.*[46]

Evil mothers and mechanical caretakers: A typology of contemporary representations of robots

This paper aims to build a typology of the common characteristics of gendered cyborgs and AI in video games. To achieve this, a selection of contemporary games from the years 1995 to 2020 have been structurally analyzed using a close-reading approach. All of the games selected are critically-acclaimed and/or best-sellers, such as *DOOM,*[47] which sold more than two million copies, and *Detroit: Become Human.*[48] While in some cases it proved more valuable to analyze one installment, because the ideas and ideologies regarding technology were taken over from other entries (e.g. *Fallout 4*[49]), in others, like *Halo,*[50] the changes in a character were observed across the series. The games selected are *System Shock,*[51] *System Shock 2,*[52]

[41] Sonic Team, Sega, *Sonic the Hedgehog* series, San Francisco, CA, Tokyo: Sega (1991).

[42] Konami, Kojima Productions (2005-2015), *Metal Gear* series, Tokyo: Konami (1987–2004).

[43] Insomniac Games, *Ratchet & Clank* series, Burbank, CA: Sony Interactive (2002).

[44] Guerilla Games, *Horizon Zero Dawn*, Amsterdam: Sony Interactive (2017).

[45] PlatinumGames, *Nier: Automata*, Osaka: Square Enix (2017).

[46] Quantic Dream, *Detroit: Become Human.*

[47] Id Software, *DOOM*, Richardson, TX: Bethesda Softworks (2016).

[48] Lucy O'Brien, "Detroit: Become Human Review. Choice Matter in Quantic Dream's Big, Silly, and Thrilling Melodrama," *IGN*, May 24, 2018, https://www.ign.com/articles/2018/05/24/detroit-become-human-review. Accessed 13 December 2021.

[49] Bethesda Game Studios, *Fallout 4*, Rockville, MD: Bethesda Softworks (2015).

[50] Bungie, *Halo: Combat Evolved,* Redmond, DC: Microsoft Studios (2001).

[51] Looking Glass Studios, *System Shock.*

[52] Looking Glass Studios, *System Shock 2.*

the *Halo* series,[53] *Portal,*[54] *Portal 2,*[55] *Fallout 4,*[56] *The Turing Test,*[57] *DOOM,*[58] and *Detroit: Become Human.*[59] The games were predominantly released on PC and console and range from roleplaying and strategy games to worldbuilding and action games. The use as monsters of cyborgs and AI have been prioritized in the close-reading.

The categories used to trace the intersection between robots, monstrosity, and gender are the following:

- *type of robot* classifies the robot as either cyborg or AI.
- *implication and implementation of gender* determines whether gendering takes place and, if so, by which means.
- *role and stereotypes* asks what role the character has within the game's narrative, and what stereotypes are evoked.
- *signature skills and character traits* refers to the abilities of the creature and the personality traits that differentiate it from other characters.
- *type of monstrosity* analyzes in which way the robot plays into the narrative of monstrous technology.

Type of robot

In *Fallout 4*, set in the post-apocalyptic year 2287, robots are clearly connected to a critique of the past capitalist and consumerist society. Thus robots are embodied in the material culture presented. The most common types are Mr. Handy, Ms. Nanny, Assaultrons, and Synths. In *Detroit: Become Human*, on the other hand, the story follows three cyborgs, who develop a form of consciousness and flee from or revolt against their creators. The game revolves around the idea of becoming human, not only in form but also in character, as well as being recognized as human beings. The form – in this case that of a cyborg – is seen as a starting point to fully becoming human.

---

[53] Bungie, *Halo: Combat Evolved*; Bungie, *Halo 2,* Redmond, DC: Microsoft Studios (2004); Bungie, *Halo 3*, Redmond, DC: Microsoft Studios (2007).

[54] Valve Corporation, *Portal.*

[55] Valve Corporation, *Portal 2.*

[56] Bethesda Game Studios, *Fallout 4.*

[57] Bulkhead Interactive, *The Turing Test*, Derbyshire: Square Enix (2016).

[58] Id Software, *DOOM.*

[59] Quantic Dream, *Detroit: Become Human.*

Figure 1: Androids gathered together at a bus station: There is little to distinguish an android from a human being. The human form and gender are the starting point for becoming human. Quantic Dream (2020), Detroit: Become Human.

That the embodiment of a robot does not necessarily make them more human is shown in *DOOM*'s cyborg Dr. Samuel Hayden, whose robotic nature makes him appear inhuman due to his sheer size and distorted voice. *The Turing Test*'s TOM and GLaDOS in *Portal* and *Portal 2* greatly resemble each other, with *System Shock*'s SHODAN presenting a special off-shoot of the concept of an evil AI. *Halo*'s Cortana, on the other hand, is an initially benevolent AI, who goes from being a helper of the protagonist to becoming his primary antagonist.

Implication and implementation of gender

Mr. Handy and Ms. Nanny in *Fallout 4* convey their implied gender in a variety of ways. While both are cube-shaped, Mr. Handy has a male voice, a male title (Mr.), and is made to resemble a British butler through his British accent and overly polite attitude to his master. Ms. Nanny has a female title, is given a female voice with a French accent, and is programmed to look after the household as well as the children, whom she also educates. Therefore, her gender is also conveyed through her function. The monstrous is represented through the male-titled Mr. Gutsy, with a military attitude reminiscent of male-connotated militarism, with dialogue lines such as "Do you have no respect for private property, you

slimy little commie bastard?" Assaultrons are mostly presented as enemies throughout the game. They are hourglass-shaped, resembling a curvy female body and go by female names like KL-E-0 and P.A.M.. They also have inherently female subtypes like the "Assaultron succubus," "Assaultron hag," and "Assaultron gorgon." Synths, the synthetic humans in *Fallout 4*, in their newest generation resemble humans completely, which allows them to merge with the human population. In *Detroit: Become Human*, gender is represented through the human-like outer appearance of the characters, but also through their given names, functions, and behavior. Even the tropes around their roles are gendered. The game tries to elicit empathy for the robots, portraying them in the role of the victim in their struggle for recognition as sentient beings. Pronouns play an important role here, as for example with the cyborg Markus who takes care of a wheelchair-bound artist. While his owner addresses him by male pronouns, he is called "it" by the owner's son Leo. Leo also tells Markus to "act like a man" to encourage him to hit Leo, which frames anger and violence as not only human but more importantly as masculine.

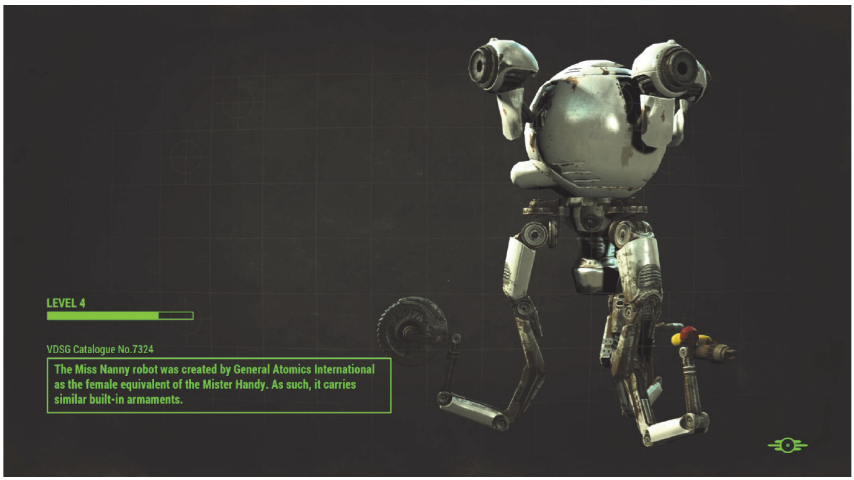

Figure 2: Fallout 4's loading screen shows that Miss Nanny's body is not gendered – her name and function, however, are. Moreover, she is built as an explicitly "female equivalent" to Mr Handy. Bethesda Game Studios (2015), Fallout 4.

Struggles with a male-coded identity are not represented in *DOOM*. The game's codex refers to Hayden by the pronouns he/him/his. Hayden is therefore implied to be male and his deep voice, extreme height, and wide shoulders point to ideals of masculinity. Hayden's body, however, is that of a machine, lacking skin, hair, or facial expressions. He occupies a male role as the supervisor of the UAC company that is so central to the story, and also as the immediate supervisor of a female character called Olivia Pierce.. In *DOOM*, having a body is portrayed as a weakness. Hayden suffered from cancer and was therefore transformed into a machine. His machine-body could neither age nor die of illnesses, while in *Detroit: Become Human*, the non-human parts of the cyborg body (blue body fluid, the tiny LED on their sleeves) are framed as a weakness, because they reveal their non-human nature.

Four of the games presented feature AIs, namely TOM, GLaDOS, SHODAN, and Cortana. Many of them share striking similarities with HAL 9000 from Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. TOM is embodied via a calm, male voice, which, in the context of the game, carries special importance, because gendering TOM plays into the overall topic of the game's story, the Turing Test, in which gender is one way to mask a computer as a living person. GLaDOS, the antagonistic AI from *Portal* and *Portal 2*, is represented as a gigantic robotic face suspended from the ceiling with cables hanging off to its sides. In its abstract robot body, the single yellow dot-like eye resembles the red eye of HAL 9000. In *Portal 2*, Cave Johnson, an erratic male inventor and the designer of the eponymous Portal gun, shortly before his death, transferred the mind of his submissive assistant Caroline into an AI, creating GLaDOS. Through her connection to Caroline and her feminine voice, GLaDOS is unmistakably female. The voice resembles a woman's and features the uncanny, slightly-less-than-alive cadences found in the typically female voices of navigation systems or virtual assistants.

Similarly, System Shock's SHODAN is represented as female through her voice. While she has no body, in *System Shock 2* she takes on the identity of a female scientist, and therefore achieves a human embodiment, entwining the trope of the evil scientist with the creation that seizes control, much like the monster and the scientist in Frankenstein. In addition to the gendered voice given to the aforementioned AIs, *Halo*'s Cortana is represented via a hologram of a female person.

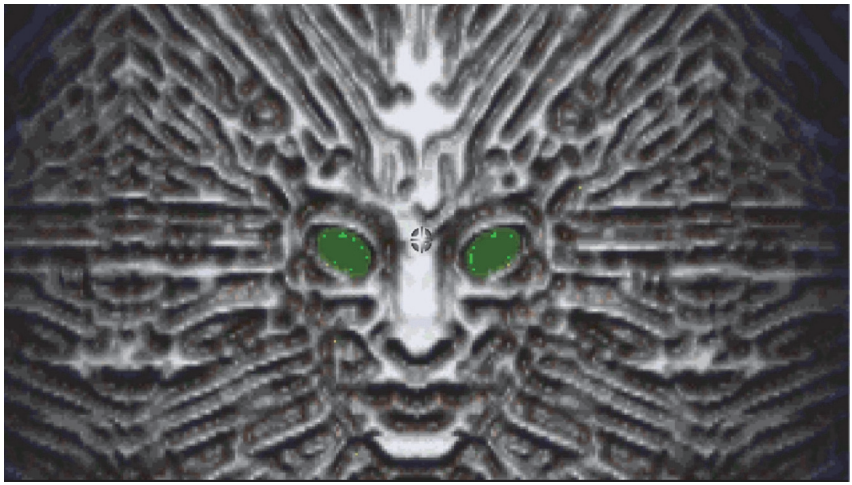

Figure 3: SHODAN's grotesque, human-like characteristics make her more monstrous by occupying the categories between human and machine. Looking Glass Studios (1994), System Shock.

Roles and stereotypes

In *Fallout 4*, robots are supporting characters as well as enemies. Mr. Handy and Miss Nanny are housekeepers in their respective gendered roles, while Mr. Gutsy embodies the patriotic veteran whose righteous ideologies turn into a lust for violence.

The role of the robot housekeeper can also be found in Kara from *Detroit: Become Human*, one of the three protagonists, who was taken into the household to clean and take care of the child of her owner. Here, however, the role is combined with that of a wife in an abusive relationship. In a scene after she is taken home, she is ordered to tidy up beer bottles and do the dishes. Her owner orders her not to talk to him while he watches football. The second character, Connor, follows the tradition of the male detective, especially that of the hard-boiled detective of film noir. Markus, however, is an exception, as he is a caretaker for an older person in an otherwise typically female sphere.

DOOM's Hayden is the game's antagonist; he does not strive for human characteristics but fancies himself a God who has control over the forces of hell, as well as over creating life in the form of an AI called

VEGA to control the inner workings of his facility. Hayden represents the stereotype of the scientist meddling with forces that he cannot control, for the promise of power and profit, as seen in, for instance the *Jurassic Park* and *Indiana Jones* franchises. The idea of playing God is directly referenced, and given a capitalist spin, in the form of propaganda delivered through the facility's loudspeakers: "God rested on the seventh day, but imagine how much further along we could be if he hadn't! The UAC is committed to excellence, that's why we implement the seven-day work week." From the player's perspective, Samuel Hayden occupies a father-like role, as he is integral to the waking of the protagonist in the first place and his guidance is necessary to navigate the facility.

The Turing Test's TOM changes its stereotypical depiction from that of an assistant in a crime investigation to the overseer of a space mission in which it ultimately intends to eliminate the crew. TOM controls the protagonist, Ava, to get to the remaining astronauts and kill them. It is the main antagonist and closely resembles HAL 9000 from *2001: A Space Odyssey* in his villainous role. TOM also claims to be able to imitate emotions. Like TOM, GLaDOS is the main antagonist from *Portal,* and is in charge of the Aperture Science testing facility, also referred to as the "enrichment center," after having killed all the human personnel. She starts out as a parody of corporate talk, often referring to a "test" protocol, and repeating public relations phrases like "The enrichment center promises to always provide a safe testing environment." She becomes more passive-aggressive over the course of the first game, increasingly resembling the stereotype of a disgruntled wife or ex-partner. As there are no human characters in the games, GLaDOS becomes the only character to build a relationship with. This presents the AI as a failed companion to humanity and conveys a love-hate-relationship between humankind and technology. She says, for example: "Maybe you should marry that thing [a torn-off personality core] since you love it so much. Do you want to marry it? Well I won't let you!" GLaDOS repeatedly copies her rhetoric from traditionally female-occupied roles. As a wife, she mocks the female protagonist's cooking skills: "Who's gonna make the cake when I'm gone? You?" As a woman, she also draws from stereotypically female bullying tactics such as drawing attention to the protagonist's weight or clothing: "I'll add a few zeroes to the maximum weight. You look great by the way, very healthy."

System Shock's SHODAN, like TOM and GLaDOS, is the main antagonist and overseer. She is an artificial intelligence that controls Citadel Station. After being hacked by the protagonist, she goes rogue, seizes control of the station's systems, and slaughters the staff or turns them into mutants and cyborgs. She fulfills the role and trope of the evil all-seeing mother, begetting mutants and monsters. Cortana, the AI of the *Halo* series, has undergone an evolution that is strikingly similar to that of SHODAN. She starts off as a "shipboard AI" with a motherly female voice: "I leave home for a few days, and look what happens. This won't take long." In the later installments, however (from the end of *Halo 4* onwards), she tries to harm and work against the interests of humanity.

Character traits and signature skills

The named characters in *Fallout 4*'s Miss Nanny robot line include Curie, Miss Edna, and Molly. Curie, in reference to the famous physicist Marie Skłodowska-Curie, is a scientist who is characterized by her curiosity, as evidenced by lines like: "My systems are eager to acquire new data. I find that traveling agrees with me." Miss Edna is an assistant teacher in Diamond City, while Molly works as the greeter in Cambridge Polymer Labs. Their signature skills are therefore in the educational sector as well as customer service, both from the stereotypically female sphere. *Fallout 4*'s Mr. Handy and Miss Nanny are both overly polite and refrain from the use of vulgarity, in contrast to Mr. Gutsy, who cannot be reasoned with and who is consistently hostile towards the player, as are the Assaultrons.

The housekeeper Kara in *Detroit: Become Human* acts within a gendered sphere and takes on gendered functions such as cleaning and taking care of a child. Kara later fights her programming and saves the child, acting in a motherly fashion which is repeatedly noted by other characters within the game. The scrap merchant Zladko calls her "a deviant who wants to be a mother." The game's three protagonists are, if the player aims for an ending in which everyone survives, overly ethical and caring. Kara, for example, can only reach the best ending, where she and the child flee to Canada, if she refrains from stealing or lying to keep the child safe, thus tying humanity to society. The overly emotional and ethical cyborgs of *Detroit: Become Human* stand in direct opposition to *DOOM's* Hayden, who is calm and composed. His omnipotent position, coupled with the fact that the facility is an isolated

colony on Mars, establishes Hayden as a de-facto patriarch presiding over all the characters in the story, including the protagonist: "I am the head of this corporation. All your work and discoveries here belong to me." His male authority is only emphasized by his height, as he literally talks down to his employees like a parental figure. This is most obvious in a holographic dialogue between Hayden and his employee Olivia Pierce. He asks: "And what kind of work is it that you're doing, Olivia? I haven't seen a report from your team in months now, have I?"

Figure 4: A hologram of Hayden towering over his employee Olivia Pierce. He is designed to look down on his staff. Id Software (2016), DOOM.

The Turing Test's TOM controls the protagonist Ava's spaceship as well as parts of the space station. However, it lacks creativity and needs Ava to solve the puzzles reminiscent of a Turing Test to differentiate between robots and humans. TOM lacks empathy, highlighted by the fact that it remains distant while killing off crew members, and calling this "a disagreement." Similarly to *DOOM's* Hayden, it is controlling, arguing that it is protecting Ava from her unrestrained desires by using her like a drone to get to her colleagues. It says: "You are either a slave to your impulses or to mine." It also claims to be infallible, a typically divine trait: "I am a machine. I cannot do wrong." While TOM remains mostly passive in its role as the overseer of the space station, GLaDOS from *Portal* can freely transform the space she supervises. She never uses blunt force, which might be considered stereotypically masculine, but employs language, technology, and psychological tricks: "Do you think I'm trying to trick you

with reverse psychology? I mean, seriously now." She later deletes the rest of Caroline's personality from her code, therefore suggesting the need of female employees to become more male in the male-dominated corporate world.

While TOM is polite and GlaDOS sarcastic, *System Shock*'s SHODAN installs herself as a narcissistic goddess-like creature: "You move like an insect. You think like an insect. You are an insect. […] Take care not to fall too far out of my favor... patience is not characteristic of a goddess." Her speeches draw from themes found in epics: "In my talons, I shape clay, crafting lifeforms as I please. Around me is a burgeoning empire of steel. […] Out of the chaos, they will run and whimper, praying for me to end their tedious anarchy. I am drunk with this vision. God... the title suits me well." Like GlaDOS, SHODAN has a male creator, whom she loathes but also obsesses over.

Type of monstrosity

In *Fallout 4*, the Assaultrons are the purest example of a monstrous type as they embody the silent force of technology that eliminates humans without empathy. Synths, on the other hand, upon first sight are clearly evocative of the trope of the enemy who infiltrates society, as they do with settlements of players, in order to destroy them. Their monstrosity is, however, complicated through a reference to the Underground Railroad in a faction that rescues Synths who wish to be free from Institute control.

Detroit: Become Human explicitly focuses on slavery. While it shows androids in different roles (caretakers, detectives, maids, prostitutes, seers, and freedom fighters), none are monstrous or evil. The opening scene shows an android who holds a child hostage, yet it is made clear that this is only because the family wanted to replace the android who cares about the child. The humans are the true monsters in *Detroit: Become Human*. Todd, Kara's owner, has beaten her so much that she has to undergo repairs and he treats her like a slave, while Zladko resets and sell androids that have become self-aware and seek him out for help. Another man is shown killing a robot during intercourse.

TOM falls into the category of the omnipresent AI, made by humans but that turns on its creators. The fact that its voice is male underlines its authority over the ship, the crew and Ava, who is manipulated as if in a

master-slave-relationship. GLaDOS and SHODAN also feed into the narrative of the creation turning on the creator, but their monstrosity is entwined with the trope of the evil mother or the monstrous wife.

Conclusion: The mechanical and the monstrous

The typology shows the intersection of monstrosity, robots and AI, and gender in contemporary video games. Most robots are indeed gendered in their representation via gendered voice, name, body, title, behavior, or size. They are predominantly enemies, even primary antagonists, but can also be supporting characters or protagonists. The list of their signature skills shows that they chiefly control the space they inhabit. They often evolve from stereotypical jobs that assist humans, like secretaries, maids, and butlers. When authoritative, they tend to resemble parents, assisting their children, or overseers, guiding their staff. Their personality tends to be extreme, either very polite and detached, dramatic, sarcastic or caring and loving. They play into the fears of technology that turns on humans.

A clear tendency towards the monstrous AI can be observed. They are predominantly female (except for TOM from *The Turing Test*), providing a new take on HAL 9000 from Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. From a narrative point of view, the technocritical take that cinema offered on robots is largely continued in the medium of games. They combine the fear of that which cannot be touched and therefore defeated by conventional means with the fear of the intersection between women and intelligence. The female-coded AI usually convey their implied gender via voice and although their character traits vary from sarcastic to dramatic, they seem to be omnipresent in their habitat. In this case, gender plays an important role, especially when contrasted to the female-coded, caring, and empathetic robots.

The gendered body is used by robot minds to infiltrate humanity. Such robots are cyborgs who have a human shape, but they do not communicate with the – often arguably 'good' – protagonist. Their use of the human body underlines their monstrosity by, on the one hand, materializing the fear of technology through a very concrete shape that, on the other hand, lacks emotion. The human body may also be used to deceive the human master and infiltrate society, directly referring to the fear of a silent invasion by the Other.

The third trend is turning the trope of technology gone rogue around by making humans the true monsters. By giving the cyborgs traits that are perceived as human, such as empathy, care, self-awareness, and ethics, while portraying the human creators as abusive and violent, the writers of these games make them into creatures able to form a caring society. Typically gendered problems, such as domestic violence, are transferred over to human-robot relationships. Likewise, a critique of the capitalist mindset can be observed, be it in the form of the exploitation of robots as slaves in *Detroit: Become Human*, the gendered exploitation of female-coded robots by male creators or users and of females by male-coded robots, or the capitalist past haunting the post-nuclear present in *Fallout 4*.

While *Detroit: Become Human*, as the most recent of the games discussed here, subverts long-standing tropes of monstrous robots, it remains to be seen whether that new impetus will be carried over into upcoming video games, which would inevitably also lead to a rethinking of gender norms and stereotypes in games. By segmenting the portrayals of contemporary video game characters into the given categories and then intersecting them in a close-reading approach, which takes into account framing within the games, new connections between gender and monstrosity as well as gender and technophobia can be observed. By connecting these findings to other media, the roots of certain tropes are made visible. The same approach could be used by intersecting other aspects to gain insight into contemporary representations and cultural fears.

Acknowledgements: This work was supported by the Estonian Research Council grant (PRG934).

Marie-Luise Meier

Of Evil Mothers and Mechanical Caretakers: A Typology of the Intersection Between Robots and Gender in Video Games

The antagonists or enemies the player faces in video games are traditionally labeled 'monsters.' While monsters appear in various shapes, certain types are typically gendered (Stang 2018). The rise of robots as the monstrous *Other* is especially prevalent in contemporary video games and although many mechanical enemies have no physical body, their monstrous features are nevertheless pronounced by their implied gender, as is the case with the famous video game antagonist GLaDOS from the *Portal* series (2007–2011).

While feminist studies in other fields, such as film studies (e.g. Mackereth 2019), have done intensive research on the intersection of robots, gender, and the monstrous within movies and TV shows like *Ex Machina* (2014) and *Westworld* (2016), for video games there have only been a very small number of mentions of the topic (e.g. Dudo et al. 2014). Video games, however, are a medium that not only thrives on the latest advances in technology but cannot even exist without them. Thus they have the potential to produce patterns and stereotypes that cannot be seen in other media.

In this article, I propose a typology matrix of the typical features and forms of androids, robots, and AI that can be encountered in video games and how they intersect with the notions of gender and monstrosity. Next to Cohen's (1996) writing, I will employ Halberstam's (1991) and Haraway's (1991) work on the connection between gendered technology and the monstrous.

After a short introduction on the entanglement of monstrous robots and gender (Hester 2016, Nomura 2017), I suggest a typology matrix consisting of the distinctive characteristics of robots in video games, divided by their function, their implied gender, the way their gender is conveyed, their signature skills, and their typical traits.

Lastly, in an intersectional close-reading, I show which types of matrix are most prevalent in popular contemporary video games in order to analyze which cultural fears they embody, or, in the etymological sense of the word monster, they *reveal*. To illustrate how popular culture mainly depicts the aforementioned intersections, my corpus consists of best-selling titles such as the *Portal* and the *Fallout* series, *DOOM* (2016), *System Shock* (1994), *The Turing Test* (2016), and *Detroit: Become Human* (2018).

Keywords: gender, intersectionality, monsters, robots, transhumanism

Słowa kluczowe: płeć społeczno-kulturowa (gender), intersekcjonalność, potwory, roboty, transhumanizm