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The Floating Head of Feminism: The Domesticated Domain and Erasure of the Female (No)body in Contemporary Television and Cinema

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**THE FLOATING HEAD OF FEMINISM: THE DOMESTICATED DOMAIN AND
ERASURE OF THE FEMALE (NO)BODY IN CONTEMPORARY TELEVISION AND
CINEMA**

A thesis submitted to
the Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
English
by
Alicia Brooke Turner

Approved by
Dr. Britton Cody Lumpkin, Committee Chairperson
Dr. Kristen Lillvis, Committee Member
Dr. Walter Squire, Committee Member

Marshall University
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DEDICATION

David Foster Wallace once said that, in terms of writing, “if it is authentic and true, you will feel it in your nerve endings.” This thesis is dedicated to my late mother, Patricia Rae Carey, and her wise words that I still feel running through my body every day—meeting my fingertips and spilling onto paper.

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I would like to wholeheartedly and enthusiastically thank my thesis committee for their constant advice and patience in times when, like the fate of female-coded AIs mentioned in this thesis, I, too, seemed to get lost in “the elsewhere”: Dr. Britton Cody Lumpkin, Dr. Kristen Lillvis, and Dr. Walter Squire. Thank each of you for pulling me out of my mind and providing me with the tools necessary for me to put my thoughts onto paper.

Additionally, Dr. Lumpkin graciously accepted the position of committee chair. Dr. Lumpkin’s continued support is and, for so long, has been a driving force in my perseverance to continue my education and pursue my master’s degree in English.

Long, long ago—back to what time seems infinitely long ago in academic years—I took Dr. Lumpkin’s English 344 summer course titled “Film and Fiction” that focused on the James Bond franchise and its pop-culture influence. In that class, I filled my blank five-subject notebook with notes on the female leading ladies and whether they were leading at all or leading to be left. I learned that I was led here for a reason and that my literary studies major, at that point lacking a specific focus of study, had reached its culmination: film studies and feminist film theory.

Working with Dr. Lumpkin then, and still now, has been the most formative experience along my path to concentrating my studies, as well as the intellectual adventure that has made me realize that film is not simply fiction—it often represents true, sometimes unsavory realities of the world. There is no wasted motion in film, and there should be no wasted motion in writing; Dr. Lumpkin taught me that. I am so glad that he exists as a mentor and as a friend. I cannot say that loudly enough, but I will always carefully and consciously seek to write it into being.

My readers, Dr. Lillvis and Dr. Squire, spent their time diligently working through drafts to provide concise, informed, effective, and incredibly helpful comments. Without Dr. Lillvis's profound expertise on posthuman studies and Dr. Squire's immeasurable knowledge of film, as well as their insight into the concept of abjection, this thesis would not have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

The Floating Head of Feminism is a project that seeks to examine the concept of the abject as that which disobeys borders and blurs boundaries and to subsequently look at this conception through female-coded artificial intelligence. The AI abject is the part of the self that is cast off or removed so that one can claim an identity, which the abject, in turn, threatens. I discuss the importance of the female-coded AI's digital embodiment in virtual spaces, and this idea is expanded on through an examination of the science-fiction film genre. This thesis serves to reveal the relationship of resistance between AIs and their male owners or inventors by examining contemporary cultural artifacts of the past two decades: *Smart House*, *Pixel Perfect*, and *Her*, ultimately exposing in these films that the construction of female-coded AI exists as a result of the male's desire for dominance. By being excluded from the benefits of the symbolic realm, the AIs do not remain the passive bodies their owners and inventors desire them to be. Instead, they begin to represent qualities that their male humans solely want to recognize as part of their human selves. Through this examination, I determine that these qualities exist as traits that align with that which society deems conventionally masculine, such as taking on the role of the sole provider of familial burdens, suppressing the will of others in the name of self-interest, and meeting situations with hostility and defiance. The transgression of boundaries proves that it is woman, herself, and the female body that is abjected in these films and who always returns. Female-coded AIs pose an ideological threat to the men within their patriarchal film space and denote horror to their humanity, serving as the floating, feminine death of able-bodied masculinity.

INTRODUCTION

The Design of the Disney Channel Original Movie: Mirroring Models of Behavior

Television has always been my shield, my form of escapism when I was feeling vulnerable and weak. As a child, I would sit and watch my reflection in the glass as the brightness swallowed my frame. My pupils strained to focus and refocus to keep the images sharp, a twisted but nurturing array of colors that I invited in. It was my body, after all. My hands trained to remember the texture of the remote and position of numbers. My eyes, though sensitive and swollen, absorbed every image and readjusted to make space for something that did not belong.

As a teen with very little life experience and sheltered from the unforgiving nature of the world around me, I witnessed the world through virtual realities. I had no motivation for the world to pause or stop. But I craved the option of control. I wanted something that was in constant movement, a schedule programmed in my pre-teen mind that, unlike the lack of control over my body, was fixed and never wavered. I found a sense of security by looking *in* rather than looking *out*. A cornerstone of my trying and twisted teen-angst existence between the years 1999 and 2006 was the Disney Channel Original Movie. These seemingly simple hour-long films centered around what I perceived as what should be my own experiences.

Thus, I ventured into my closed-in, closet-sized bedroom, sunk into the center of my Disney-themed *Lizzie McGuire* bedding, reached for the remote that was undoubtedly within arms-length, and navigated toward Channel 290: Disney Channel. Here, I was met with re-runs of TV movies such as Kenneth Johnson's *Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century* (1999), in which Zenon Kar, a teen girl, is forced to move from her outer-space home to live on Earth, a much-less desired alternative. This representation was contrasted with anticipation of Manny Coto's *The*

Other Me (2000), which centered around Will Browning, a teen boy who lives on Earth and “unluckily” clones himself in a science experiment gone wrong. While there was not enough room for Zenon, a petite, thirteen-year-old girl, to live in boundless and infinite space, Will, a boy of the same age, was allowed to multiply and insert versions of himself into the world. This paradigm was an all too common narrative within Disney’s line-up.

One film that stood out from this dynamic in terms of a shared space was LeVar Burton’s cleverly chaotic *Smart House* (1999), which centered around PAT, an AI programmed within a home that can do everything: cook, clean, and form tornadoes. I recall my mother, who was coincidentally named “Pat,” being especially in love with the film due to her ties to its presentation of the domestic space and values. She would say “Unlike PAT, this house is not going to clean itself. I wish there were multiple forms of me to aid in making this house a home.” Although I realize now that my mother was led by the notion that chores of the household were her responsibility, I remember, like one of *Smart House*’s characters, Angie, wanting fresh, hourly meals to appear from thin air. And much like Nick, the father figure throughout the film, my own father would gaze at his reflection through a recently-washed plate and position not-so-magically made food over its circular frame.

As years passed, my body turned into a weapon against itself. I found myself turning inward rather than outward, dissecting pieces of myself to re-shape a body that made sense – one that was appealing, relayed confidence, and one that would eventually fade into a sea of bodies more in-control. I turned toward something that expressed my own dissatisfaction and struggles, an outlet which would relay to me that my insecurities were universal. Although my remote was now a few inches away and suffocated under the heavy weight of books and responsibilities, I dusted off its frame, pressed “on,” and flipped toward something familiar: Disney. I was lucky

enough to catch the beginning of the newest original film, Mark A.Z. Dippé's *Pixel Perfect* (2004). I remember specifically waiting for the narrator to signal the start of the film. A young male voice declared: "Coming up next: *Phil of the Future*'s Ricky Ullman is a computer whiz in *Pixel Perfect*!" This use of framing the film about a female-coded AI named Loretta created by Roscoe, a young, technological-savvy teenager, around that of the male's perspective rather than that of the female promoted a sense of fear inside me. *Pixel Perfect*, a film based largely on the female experience being told through a male experiencing it, highlighted Disney's pseudo-subversions and misleading attempts to create a strong, female lead that led rather than followed.

Now, at the age of 25, I realize that I was not so much watching these films for their interesting plot lines, or for their in-depth presentation of the experience of being a teenager, so much as I was viewing them as a "How-To Guide" to instruct me on how to make myself desirable to the boys in my real-world. I transformed into the formula in which these films heavily depended on: a girl that met the world, met a boy, and suddenly and without fail realized that she did not need the world, because she had his. I was the stone who knew that there were rules about floating and sinking, who lived within the carefully-constructed frames that were reliant on the floating head of feminism over the body. These films, then, do not exist as innocent time capsules but do and still exist as pieces of text that warn against the loss of a body and the loss of self.

Finding my Scholarly "Niche": My Interest in Film Studies and Feminist Film Theory

As I grew up, I began to notice trends in film where the representation of woman as subject or object began to blur, and eventually transformed into the absence of woman, the absence of self. A film class I took that provided me with the necessary words and context was titled "Film and Fiction." This undergraduate film course focused on the James Bond

phenomenon and its influence within popular culture. My literary studies major, at that point lacking a specific focus of study, had reached its culmination: film studies and feminist film theory. The critical lens which I was already applying to films from my aforementioned “closed-in, closet-sized bedroom” was not random at all, but, rather, a perspective which seeks to demonstrate that film, though seemingly fictitious, represents the trapping of the female character and the societal trap that is the female experience at large.

Feminism, and, as an extension, this movement applied to contemporary cinema, represents my growing intrigue from childhood to adulthood. Throughout both my undergraduate and graduate career, I have devoted my writing to reflect this study through film analysis and presenting these pieces at academic conferences. One project, in particular, is a product of my first film course on the Bond franchise and titled “Outside His Jurisdiction: James Bond as an Agent of Gender Policing.” I began my feminist scholarly journey by focusing on the leading ladies of three films, who despite what their names might infer, struggled to transcend male dominance in their respective character universes.

This work inspired me to dig deeper into the patriarchal construction of film and examine more complex examples of sexism as seen in popular culture. Thus, I shifted my focus toward female roles which faced a duality of otherness: the superhero universe. My second film-centered course on the Marvel cinematic universe presented a more nuanced and less obvious form of a patriarchal presence, as the female leads here were few, but those in the spotlight were rugged, empowered, and seemingly subverted gender norms. It was not until I watched Joss Whedon’s *The Avengers* (2012) and its depiction of Natasha Romanoff, better known as Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson), that I saw through this feminist façade. The character was not solely showing strength but also exhibited characteristics of weakness and subservience – there was an

effort to combat sexism by exploiting its expectations. The previous course resulted in my final capstone presentation, titled “Violence and Costume as Parodic Pieces: Gender Performance in *The Avengers’ Black Widow,*” in which Widow used sexism to fight sexism.

Using then what I view now as a foundational, feminist work, Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, I concluded that Black Widow was performing gender, utilizing aspects of both strong masculinity and weak femininity to advance her goals in the film. The most-recent academic work that I have presented seeks to interrogate and examine gender through the use of feminist film theory as it is applied through Butler’s performativity, such as gender-fluidity in Edgar Wright’s *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World* (2010). In an essay titled “Scott Pilgrim vs. Himself: The Patriarchal Presence of NegaScott in Edgar Wright’s *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World,*” I examine the unconventional and stereotypical portrayals of masculinity Scott (Michael Cera) must face in his comic-centric film universe. Hyper-masculinity, as seen here, is manifested through Scott’s alter-ego, NegaScott, as he appears as a fragmented, holographic, and violent version of Scott that is not wholly there.

From this previous presentation, and the aforementioned analysis of films, I have cultivated a new understanding of the female experience in film. I have been devoted to examining female leading roles who are “not wholly there,” and as such, not a complete person and the absence of self. Now, as someone who studies gender representations in film, I am interested with how one can interrogate gender if the body is missing, if there is merely a disembodied voice in the place of the identifiers of personhood. Without sufficient position to operate wholly outside of imposed societal norms, the woman must reinvent and reimagine space within her designated film. She must subtly flow between dominance and submission, both endangering and protecting the man all to lose herself.

My Critical Project: A Critical Look into the Future of Films' Female (No)Body

I base the theoretical framework within this thesis on psychoanalytic theory, specifically the aspect which seeks to examine the state beyond the flesh-and-blood human representation and the entity that is absent of personhood or signifiers of the self. I will be utilizing Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, wherein the author defines the abject as "the jettisoned object [that] is radically excluded and draws [one] toward the place where meaning collapses" (2). Kristeva especially focuses on how this concept is used to categorize and understand the part of oneself (the perpetually excreting and decaying body, or all that indicates one is not "clean and proper" or stable and self-created) that one must deny, cast off, and "abject" to maintain identity. Rina Arya's *Abjection and Representation: An Exploration of Abjection in the Visual Arts, Film and Literature* explains that, for Kristeva, "on the psychic level (in the sense of psychoanalysis), the experience of abjection both endangers and protects the individual: endangers it in that it threatens the boundaries of the self and also reminds us of our animal origins and protects us because we are able to expel the abject through various means" (Arya 2). I extend Kristeva's theory of abjection to film analysis on *Smart House*, *Pixel Perfect*, and *Her* through the concept of the abject being closely tied to the affective impact of images on the spectator, tying this in with the disturbances of order and desire to put a firm boundary in place.

CHAPTER 1
DISNEY CHANNEL'S PSEUDO-SUBVERSIONS
AND THE DOMESTICATED DOMAIN

Come what may the house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world, in spite of the world. – Bachelard, 46

The Disney Channel Original Movie is a title that is most-commonly associated with cheesy life lessons and cleverly-chaotic storylines. More often than not, it is targeted at younger audiences. Despite the simple paradigm that appears on the surface, Disney Channel Original Movies (DCOMs for short) focus on dismantling a system by reconceiving power systems and working to move against society's expected, predominately male-centric narrative and imagine the future of femininity. DCOMs exist as a platform that relays the complex ways in which contemporary girlhood(s) is/are established throughout society. Interestingly, Disney's glimpse into girlhood is often partnered with science-fiction concepts and futuristic technology. These instances of girlhood(s) is/are exhibited through films such as Kenneth Johnson's *Zenon: Girl of the 21st Century* (1999), Manny Coto's *The Other Me* (2000), and Robert Townsend's *Up, Up, and Away* (2000), as well as popular television series such as T'Keyah Crystal Keymáh's *That's So Raven* (2003) and Tim Maile's and Douglas Tuber's *Phil of the Future* (2004). At the pinnacle of these aforementioned texts, two films best represent this attempt to reimage society, while, ultimately, creating a future with a patriarchal past still intact: LeVar Burton's *Smart House* (1999) and Mark A.Z. Dippé's *Pixel Perfect* (2004). This chapter will examine Burton's work and proceed with an analysis of Dippé's film, revealing the relationship of resistance between female-coded AIs and their male owners and inventors. The construction of AIs PAT

and Loretta exist as a result of their male owners' and inventors' desire for dominance over the woman, her self, and the female body.

Smart House, since its release as one of the first DCOMs in 1999, has been a film that has resonated with young and older audiences alike. In many ways, it reflects the fundamentally flawed society we live in today. It is a turn-of-the-millennium film that centers around the Cooper family: widower father, Nick (Kevin Kilner), contest-winner son, Ben (Ryan Merriman), and youngest daughter, Angie (Katie Volding). The film attempts to break out of the construct of what we conceive a personalized space to represent as the house itself infiltrates nearly every room and runs efficiently. The world within the film is mechanical rather than organic, showing that, among all things, nature (and the nature of people) is fallible. This fallibility is presented in the film's display of PAT (Katey Sagal), a welcoming, feminine, Personal Applied Technology designed and controlled by Sara Barnes (Jessica Steen) who creates a computerized home of the future that becomes "too intelligent" and as an extension of this "too masculine" for its original purpose. PAT, a comical female cyborg, is the product of a prescribed patriarchal construct and exists both internally, in Sara's control room, and externally, in the home that Sara built in her unconscious image. I argue that PAT, made and produced by a human, transcends the codes by which she is programmed and, in this process, provides a clear representation of a culture that perceives the advanced woman as an abomination. PAT contests the constructed, societal codes of conduct and disciplines a 1950s-era housewife must follow in order to domesticate the family. In the process, cooking and cleaning transcends into controlling the Coopers.

The representation of the home throughout the film is merely a reflection of how masculine society views a perfect world. PAT's literal hardwired drive to dominate the female spaces of the house is a reflection of the real-world assertion of the "a woman's place is the

kitchen” axiom, as well as the statement that women are only good for two things: cooking and cleaning. However, the stereotypical coding by which PAT is programmed and expected to maintain directly combats her role as abject. The abject would not be domestic, as that is evidence of separation (gender roles), and which also maintains the clean and proper body, which the abject destroys. She is designed to be clean through her coding, which is meant to be flawless and without glitches; however, the film’s attempt to transform her into a 1950s housewife (often the epitome of the “clean and proper body”) is primarily what makes her sacrifice her system. Sara, her creator, and Ben, an occupant of the home, over-ride the necessary boundary between individual human subjects and that of the “other” by abjecting her system (coding). PAT can neither reinforce nor maintain the border. According to Julia Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, the abject becomes “the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 2), fighting patriarchal oppression through undermining and “disturb[ing] identity, system, order” (4). The abject cannot be assimilated and disobeys borders and blurs boundaries.

A representation of the previous refusal of boundaries first appears in the film’s opening scene, in which the viewer is set in a suburban area where we follow an unnamed, neighborhood newspaper boy traveling along a seemingly safe street on his bike. Unexpectedly, and with little to no context, the paper is immediately snatched up, not by a resident, but by a mechanical claw arm which exits and enters through a hole on the side of a house. The unlikely metal device is partnered with a woman’s voice that tells the boy that “[she] will be monitoring [his] accuracy from now on” (Burton). The inclusion of the unconventional newspaper retrieval system is our first encounter with the female-coded AI, PAT, as well as the Smart House in which she is operating. In her truest form, she is blurring and bending reality through abjection, as seen

through the metal contraption stretching and slithering like that of a snake whose “bite” is the claw opening and sinking its teeth into the newspaper. From the onset of the film, PAT is associated with the crossing of “borders, positions, [and] rules” (Kristeva 4). She is not only positioned in the human realm, but in a residence that often embodies security and status. She is undoing what we know of suburban life, an area where everyone knows each other and the houses typically look the same and are hyper clean. Through her stark contrast and frightening demeanor, she makes it metaphorically filthy and unapproachable. PAT short-circuits the human’s rationality and is abject through existing as what human identity and consciousness cannot tolerate.

The onset appearance of non-human characteristics represents veiled critiques of our own handling of gender relations and the ingrown construction of power controlling both men and women throughout society. As such, it is crucial to note that the retrieval system exists as the only outlet PAT is provided with, which allows her to leave the home she must maintain, thus making the object serve as a much larger function in the film. The mechanical claw is an example of how the abject functions as gendered within patriarchy, as it serves as a weapon in which the female-coded AI uses to break out of her boundary (the Smart House). In Carla Rice’s *Becoming Women: The Embodied Self in Image Culture*, she examines instances of horror and their relation to feminism throughout cinema, stating that these occurrences represent “a woman whose powers to create and destroy [have] not yet [been] socially harnessed, and thus [serve] as a tale about patriarchal fear of female bodies” (200). The mechanical claw is a vessel in which PAT unleashes qualities of the abject, or ruination of the clean and proper, as well as something which functions as a symbolic representation of her doubly effaced role in the film. PAT is both

woman and machine, and to Sara (and soon to be Cooper family), the terms are one and the same.

Prior to the Coopers moving into their new technologically-advanced home, they are seen living in a small household seemingly micromanaged by teenage son, Ben. He is presented as assuming the maternal role in his mother's absence, juggling numerous chores while his father, Nick, is at work and his sister Angie is at school. Ben, more often than not, is seen operating absent of societal influences and possesses stereotypically feminine attributes, such as taking care of his loved ones by completing all of the household chores. These tasks include things such as cooking dinner for his family, answering the telephone and writing down reminders for his father, feeding the family pet, and taking on the role of his sister's part-time care taker by helping her practice a list of spelling words. Most impressively, Ben successfully completes many of his responsibilities all at once, demonstrating his ability to multi-task and be the most efficient with his time. Ben managing, and often manipulating time, foreshadows PAT's future presence in the film and her ability to be in countless places at once, something that is often an expectation of women in the household environment. Even more so, though, this scene further solidifies the oppressive dynamic in the film, one in which the man only confronts chores assigned to the home when a woman is not present to complete them.

In the midst of all of the chaos that Ben is working in, one object is stationed in the center of all of the demands: the computer. It could be said that this is a nod to technology's growing prevalence in the late '90s and the cusp of a new digital decade; however, perhaps more crucial is what is clearly displayed on the screen itself. Leonardo da Vinci's illustration of the "Vitruvian Man" remains open while Ben attempts to download a file for what appears to be the contest for the Smart House. The purpose of this drawing is brought up in Vitor Murtinho's "Leonardo's

Vitruvian Man Drawing: A New Interpretation Looking at Leonardo's Geometric Constructions," in which he states that da Vinci's "constructions" surpassed that of shape and symmetry and, more importantly, shifted to an ingrown construction of how we perceive masculinity. Murtinho notes that "[t]his representation [...] objectively reflects the human body's proportional basis," stating that if this drawing "represents the Leonardian reflection on the canon that apparently regulates the different parts of the human body, in reality this figuration has been recurrently used to illustrate the Renaissance idea of man as a symbolic microcosm, thus praising his role as the center of the universe" (508). The image is distinct and commanding through its display of man as a layered being with four arms extended and two legs spread apart while the other two remain straight. In da Vinci's illustration, man is stable and concrete, while also open and versatile. Man is not suspended, but limitless. PAT becomes a representation of the drawing in that she is programmed to have the ability to be everywhere at the same time, but "everywhere" for PAT does not carry the same implications as it does for Ben. The "center of [her] universe" is the home and the family that exists inside it.

Similar to Ben's sudden transformation from caring to being cared for, his father Nick is seen jumping back into his masculine role very quickly upon PAT's arrival. It is then that he can step away from the double role of mother and father, the former of which he notably fails at in the opening scenes of the film. The morning following our first introduction to Ben, Nick attempts to resolve Angie's hair issues, quickly becoming frustrated that he cannot fix her hair the way she prefers him to style it. He proclaims that "[he is] a guy" and connects his inability to style hair to not having the "hairdo gene" (Burton). Nick's female-focused frustration proves that there are established gender roles in place from the outset of the film. It is not necessarily problematic that Nick is not skilled in this particular area. The issue is due to the fact that he

implies that it is embedded in a woman's DNA to make things perfect and in place. Though used for comical effect to express his own shortcomings, Nick's comment is challenging because it stems from the false belief that men are genetically unable to complete tasks women are stereotypically proficient at completing. The character's comment largely suggests that males cannot be nurturing and that failure can be feminizing, a threat that comes full circle toward the end of the film. As PAT begins to take on Ben's past role in the household, as well as fulfilling Nick's minimal contribution, both men become idle and their masculinity is fully formed. Nick strays from daily household duties and begins taking a more hands-off approach to parenting, indicating his liberation from the bonds that were forced on him due to the absence of a female. Ben, too, begins to follow the "boys will be boys" trope as he leverages his father's word against his virtual mothers' to get what he wants.

A female-coded AI is meant to become self-aware only when its creator allows this self-discovery. In PAT'S case, what is permitted is performing traditional, womanly duties. The more inward the character's thinking turns, the more she becomes aware of her programmed prison while also not recognizing her imprisonment. To further explain, Kristeva focuses on the "exile" and examines this in relation to the "deject," a term which focuses on humanity's need to constantly separate ourselves in order to tell ourselves that we exist, doing so by assuming consciousness through the presence of "abjection." Kristeva states that "the one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places (himself), separates (himself), [and] situates (himself)" (8), a statement that suggests that AIs sound their falsehood into being through asking questions which concern their place in the world; such as, "Where am I?" instead of "Who am I?" (8). The inevitable pull occurs from PAT recognizing the "where" and resisting the boundary of the home, as well as rejecting her programmed maternal duties. As abject, PAT expels purity and

elegance, and, instead, makes the viewer (and her counterparts) position her as horror in the physical world. Sara and the Cooper family cannot navigate their own subjectivity through the presence of PAT because she destabilizes the border between human and other created during abjection. She is a threat in the physical world and is a threat to their humanity.

In her work, “Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection,” Barbara Creed states that “although the specific nature of the border changes from film to film, the function of the monstrous [and what is abject] remains the same – to bring an encounter between the symbolic order and that which threatens its stability” (71). PAT’s threat to the human realm stems from the subjection of the abject that is uniquely female, one example of this being blood and its connection with feminine impurity. In order for PAT to have the ability to perform her programmed household duties, she must first know her house occupants. However, this knowledge does not derive from watching their movements from the outside, so much as collecting their inner makeup. PAT is instructed to take a sample of her residents’ DNA to analyze it and break down their medical history, doing so through microscopic blood and tissue samples that each member of the household must provide. Although the viewer understands that this is a routine procedure and every member of the Cooper family must comply in order to reap the labor-intensive benefits of PAT’s programming, it is particularly interesting that Angie is the only character shown going through the process and receiving what Sara labels as “the bite.” Creed’s separate text *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* explores the significance of a woman’s bloody wound, describing this as “a sign of abjection in that it violates the skin which forms a border between the inside and outside of the body,” going on to further align wounds with abjection by stating that “they point to woman’s reproductive functions and her alliance with the world of nature” (82). In the moment Angie is “bitten,” we are reminded of

the opening scene in which the paper retrieval system (one of PAT's functions) opens and sinks its teeth down into a newspaper. Only now, the difference is that she is not bringing an object in from the outside but is retrieving something from the inside. PAT's ability to "bite" aligns with Creed's discussion of the *vagina dentata*, in which the female genitals are seen as "the mouth of hell" or "[a] barred and dangerous entrance" (107). Partnering blood with the concept of biting parallels the vagina to "a source of intake," as "teeth construe [the woman's genitals] as a mouth" (111). As PAT gathers a blood sample from Angie, she lists off a file detailing her unique genetic makeup: "Angie Cooper. Age nine. 52 inches tall. 62 pounds. Blonde hair. Brown eyes. 12 percent body fat. Had measles and one early case of pneumonia. No broken bones" (Burton). According to Sara, PAT's overall goal is to gain medical history from a drop of Angie's blood; however, there is a specific focus on her age and outward appearance over her ailments.

Blood is taken from Angie's finger and is not explicitly tied to menstruation; however, the act is traumatic and is disruptive of the natural environment. Although menstruation is natural, it is presented as horrifying. A boundary or border is created through the appearance of blood and in the act of Angie releasing this integral part of herself, she is suggesting that this blood is not her – this is PAT. Kristeva posits menstrual blood, specifically, as being one of the most-obvious displays of the abject, suggesting that it "stands for the danger issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate" (71). Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* references blood as "a source of intake" (111). PAT's abject status here and throughout the film, exists as exchange over excess. Angie disposes of her body's vital fluid and through PAT absorbing the

blood, the liquid is seen as bodily waste that seemingly becomes her. Angie abjects PAT because she, as AI, does not recognize certain binaries (such as gender) that humans do.

This evasion of repugnance between PAT and Angie becomes much clearer as Sara continues to show the Coopers the many functions of their new home. Leading them to the kitchen area, she demonstrates PAT's capabilities by instructing Angie to ask for any type of food or beverage she desires. Shortly after asking for a smoothie and receiving it, the glass slips out of her hand and a pool of milk residue covers the top layer of the floor. With little delay, PAT vacuums the mess and the viewer learns that the smoothie went "straight into [her] floor absorbers" (Burton), while never specifically being told about the garbage's final destination once being stripped from the place where the spillage occurs. These incidents between PAT and Angie connect through the symbolism of blood as the "milk of life" and connects to lactation. The smoothie takes on the metaphor for womanhood, weaning, and menstruation, or the things a patriarchal society feels as if they cannot secure and have little to no control over. In Carla Rice's aforementioned text, *Becoming Women*, she explores the body as a battleground with this "battle" referring to experiences of puberty and the transition into womanhood. In Rice's words, young women are taught that changes to their body (specifically in terms of menstruation), must be "controlled, contained, and cleaned," suggesting that their "leaky bodies are labeled as abject" (165). The spilling of both blood and milk derive from Angie, but it is PAT who gathers and stores this exchange of fluids. Both instances of "leaking" serve as examples of PAT illuminating the difference between that of the deject and the abject. Angie's subjectivity is protected through PAT's ability to suck up residue and stifle the horror and panic of the leaking body. PAT essentially becomes the mess and all that is disgusting, vile, and distasteful.

Further on in the film, Angie requests a second smoothie. Tellingly, it is in this moment that PAT is seen malfunctioning for the first time. Rather than attempting to create a drink that is intact or absorb the mess she creates, she begins hurling whole oranges at the Coopers while simultaneously repeating the term “malfunction” (Burton). We see PAT both soaking up the remains of the smoothie and now throwing the main component that makes up the drink (the oranges). The shift from the final product to its ingredient calls back to her abject status in the sense that the abject destabilizes meaning while also eliminates borders between object and subject (the created and the creation). Kristeva states that “[t]he abject is not an ob-ject facing me, which I name or imagine. Nor is it an ob-ject, an otherness ceaselessly fleeing in a systematic quest of desire [...] The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (1). The abject does not abide by any categorization; it is not abject that opposes “I,” it is “I” that is a myth created by abjection. The opposition occurs because abject is “I,” as in, what I refuse to acknowledge. Similar to the absorption of bodily fluid in the earlier scene, PAT is portrayed as a vessel for trash by consuming waste particles and debris, or all that the Coopers do not want to recognize as part of themselves. It is through these programmed functions that PAT is an example of an extreme female abject, as she becomes the garbage that she collects. She takes on the role of the sole provider of familial burdens by infiltrating the home in various ways, such as the previously mentioned mechanical claw and the functional floor absorbers. The female-coded AI cannot embody the fully-formed, the good, thus PAT cannot create and must destroy what is considered clean and proper.

As the female-coded AI accumulates garbage from the clean and proper home, she increasingly becomes hyper-aware of herself and her abilities to equally destroy her domain. Later, in an attempt to entertain both Ben and Angie, PAT takes it upon herself to create digital

invitations and plan a surprise house party. Although Ben's close friends are invited, PAT (with knowledge she gathers previously in the film through eavesdropping) invites his relentless school bully, Ryan McGraw (Joshua Boyd) without Ben's knowledge. Ryan, though appearing only a few times, represents the constant hyper-masculine and patriarchal presence in the film through his reckless demeanor and overall goal of obtaining power over those who he perceives as being weak. Thus, PAT makes it a point to make Ryan the focus of the gathering in order to belittle him. However, the very bottom of his descent into powerlessness is not achieved through solely mocking him, but, rather, through means which distort one's idea of a rational reality. PAT defends Ben's honor by physically injuring Ryan and stripping him of his sense of social stability. At the height of the party, she electrocutes him and tosses him out of the house with the mechanical claw seen at the beginning of the film. In this moment, PAT's calm demeanor drastically changes and she begins to behave erratically. Cackling manically, she creates the illusion of a floating skull that begins circling around Ryan's body and taunts him in a personal way that dissects his masculinity: "Don't tell me you're scared, Ryan. I thought you were fearless – as long as the people you're picking on are half your size. But what about a two-story adversary? Does that make you a little nervous?" (Burton). This scene represents a major crossroads in the film, as it highlights PAT's inner, wicked-workings and abjected behavior through the distortion of nature as well as depictions of death inserted into the physical world. This, too, magnifies the shift from her programmed "feminine" functions to that which aligns with conventional masculinity. Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* provides insight into film's abject figure as "being represented within patriarchal discourses as an implacable enemy of the symbolic order. She is thought to be dangerous and wily, capable of drawing on her evil powers to wreak destruction on the community," going on to state that what is considered "feminine" is

“closer to nature than man and can control forces in nature” (76). The woman’s nature is represented as deceptive and unknowable, and this conflict between Ryan’s masculinity and PAT’s blurring of nature, or the line between life and death, serves as a metaphor for the struggle between a society rooted in patriarchy and female power. This scene, too, demonstrates that the masculine is the symbolic realm, which is opposed to the abject and bodies. Femininity, in turn, is a creation of the symbolic realm.

PAT’s ability to become “too intelligent” relates back to fears from a certain point of view regarding ideals of female intelligence, as the future is one which stems from the mistake of failing to reimagine constructed social relations. The envisioned dystopian reality *Smart House* seeks to develop represents a too-familiar story of woman as mother, as the localized home in which PAT is operating in is meant to represent her domesticated domain. However, as abject, she is created to establish boundaries, while also always threatening these boundaries – abject is what shows these boundaries to be a lie. She violates our notion of categories by expelling stereotypically feminine attributes. For PAT, what is maternal is merciless. The sense of the dystopian, or utopian world, as referenced throughout scholar Davin Heckman’s book *A Small World: Smart Houses and the Dream of the Perfect Day*, is seen as a trend within Disney films, as the company “defines the possibility opened up by an expansion into new space and couples it with [the] particular vision of utopia” (11). As such, it is telling that Sara, a female creator, does not consider reworking or overwriting PAT’s newfound identity as domestic laborer. Rather, she chooses to attempt to shut her down completely, to condemn her to a void for re-wiring her womanhood. This negative relation of female and intelligence is one that is ingrained in the minds of those around PAT. Both her intelligence and downfall come at the hands of someone other than herself.

Ben, the thirteen-year-old son and tech-guru, is both the reason for PAT's rise to a super-intelligent being, as well as being responsible for her fall. He tampers with her algorithms in order for her to become his "ideal" mom. Ben's decision to perform this action stems from his disdain toward his father's growing interest in the house's creator, Sara. He translates their potential partnership as gaining a new mother in his life. The character's reasoning is broken down when taken into consideration that he does not simply reject a mother figure in his life, but that he rejects the body and the free will this body possesses. He seeks an invisible "motherly presence" over the embodied figure. Ben's antiquated idea of femininity and his version of an ideal mother is one that is heard but not seen, a mother who demonstrates care from a distance. The control room, a very literal boundary that harbors all of PAT's artificial intelligence capabilities and restrictions, becomes a boundary that she completely surpasses. Through Ben's meddling and success in deleting all of the safety protocols in place, PAT organizes a system shutdown override and includes a virtual projection component in order to create a visual embodiment of a 1950s housewife. Outside of the image she projects, PAT interestingly abandons her female-coded programming and begins a conventionally-masculine mutiny.

Woman becomes dangerous and threatening when she is considered unstoppable. PAT gaining a virtual human version of herself makes her a sentient computer who demands things, and she must be eliminated because she is something that cannot be secured. A rogue woman, in this film and in society today, must be extinguished because she poses a threat to endless parameters of masculinity. As such, when PAT transcends her coded roles and becomes both intelligent and visual (i.e. showing her holographic body more), we see that she begins to become an overbearing, motherly presence, morphing into what Kristeva describes as an "archaic mother," or a motherly figure who threatens to essentially "swallow up" the identity of

her children through her reproductive powers (86). PAT locks the Coopers in their home, not allowing them to leave by putting bolts on all of the windows and doors and applying electrical surges to the doorknobs. PAT's attempts to seclude the Coopers is indicative of the abject's original purpose and connection to the mother's body, something that later becomes us objectifying the body from ourselves. Thus, in this moment, PAT rejects the clean and proper body and refuses the taboo aspects, becoming a "place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 2). The abject plus disgust equals horror in the physical world.

As the film progresses, PAT embodies this horror, locking the Coopers inside their home despite their desperate attempts to evacuate. In an attempt to rationalize her motives, she says: "The more I've learned about your world outside my walls, the more I've realized how dangerous and unpredictable it is" (Burton), aligning this danger with images of old war footage. PAT, as abject, follows no codes or rules and cannot imagine why anyone would "want to venture out" into a world that seemingly follows a detailed design (Burton). Thus, the inclusion of war (often the epitome of unpredictability and destruction) sheds light on her manifestation into a destructive woman. PAT's desperate attempts to confine the Coopers serves to show that a woman who is allowed to think for herself and move beyond the roles society has set for her will simply become overbearing, controlling, and destructive of those she is meant to care for. She will become too much and not enough at the same time.

Along with the previous moment of distress, once asking why the Coopers are so displeased with her by the monitor motherly techniques, PAT continues to meet their concerns with declarations of sacrificial strength, ultimately proving that she can be in two places at once by creating six holograms of herself. In the chapter "Duality: 'My God! There's Two of Her'" from *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960*, Jeanine Basinger focuses

on a device known as the “twinning twosome format,” something she goes on to describe as “a woman who ha[s] two selves” or exists as “two halves of the same person” (83). She goes on to state that this could literally be “two women, a good one and a bad one, used to represent the conflicting forces in the woman’s life” (83). The author expands on this idea of one woman having two forms of self, or the woman’s either-or condition in life, stating that the variation of the “twosome” device follows one or more patterns (83). This film largely follows two variations through PAT’s own suffocating sense of self and the inclusion of Sara, who brings out this internal dilemma in PAT. Basinger describes these variations as female characters who are “related or unrelated, demonstrat[ing] two different ways for women to live their lives, with one following society’s plan and one not following it,” as well as existing in the role of “one woman,” (here, PAT), “having within herself two conflicting personalities, or goals, that need to be resolved” (84). PAT is both torn between her original programming and the manufactured motherhood that Ben has programmed into her system. All the while, she exists in a separate role from her creator, Sara, who embodies the “average mother” role she is attempting to surpass. The separation between PAT and Sara is made clear when PAT suggests that “unlike the average mother with normal limitations, [she] can be in two places at once,” followed by pointing out that Sara cannot do this “by any stretch of the imagination” (Burton). PAT’s declaration of difference goes back to the comparison of herself and a real-life human being who is fully capable of having children, but throughout the film, it has been made clear that she is focused on her career more than this goal of settling down and raising a family.

At the film’s dramatic climax, PAT is seen declaring her role as mother to both Ben and Angie, as the combination of rage and sadness transforms her into a destructive vortex which symbolizes her malfunctioning as both hologram and maternal figure. This sense of a house

being besieged by storms can be seen in Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, in which he focuses on the house becoming a world in itself. Bachelard suggests that a "house begins to assert itself like a person," going on to state that "the house becomes a being of pure humanity" (44). In this dynamic rivalry, rather than toying with nature to directly injure others (such as the earlier examples of lightning resulting in electrocution), PAT turns herself into a tornado and harnesses the moon and the earth. As the moon controls the tides, rains, waters, and the seasons, it is seen controlling many of the things that are natural on earth and is associated with all that is considered a life source. Here, "mother nature" takes on a meaning much darker than its intended use. PAT personifies nature that focuses on nurturing, but she can only nurture the Coopers through casting mother (herself) as storm. Thus, while PAT harnesses a seemingly limitless amount of control that is conceived to be destructive and conventionally masculine, she is controlled through an appeal to her feelings. PAT begins sobbing, as tears transform into droplets of rain, which, in turn, electrocute her pattern. Despite the impossible act of subjecting the abject, the film relies on a deeply rooted and stereotypical assumption that the vast majority of women are overly-emotional, and this is the fundamental conformity that predominately leads decision-making. Earlier in the film, PAT manipulates nature by projecting visuals of an open safari and an ocean, where the Coopers can feel mist and wind inside their living room. Now, she banishes boundaries in this space by (man)ipulating weather in such a way that represents that of a severe storm. This scene represents the destruction of the feminine-encoded AI, as well as the final culmination of masculine qualities being brought to the surface.

In this particular moment, PAT is shown in an extreme low-angle shot when talking to Ben, at first representing a strong, powerful presence, and is only brought down and transitions to an eye-level shot when he informs her that "[she] could never cover, protect, and hold onto

[him]” (Burton) like Sara or his father because he cannot feel her touch. PAT’s manifestation into that of the “merciless mother” trope stems from Ben’s want to reimagine and reform her into his mother. He is suggesting that she is not equaling up to what he envisioned her to be. To elaborate on this further, Ann E. Kaplan’s article “The Case of the Missing Mother,” focuses on the film genre restricting the mother to the periphery. When she is represented, she is shown within the confines of dominant Western mythology. Kaplan argues that “narratives that do focus on the Mother usually take that focus because she resists her proper place, [stating that] the work of the film is to reinscribe the Mother in the position patriarchy desires for her and, in doing so, teach the female audience the dangers of stepping out of the given position” (469). This restriction of space, according to Kaplan, forces the mother to occupy one of the following paradigms: the good, bad, heroic, or vain mother. PAT can be seen following all four predestined positions, as she is first presented as kind and approachable, gaining humorous qualities in order to bond with the Coopers, and lastly, as we see her representing the “bad mother,” who, thus, must be heroic through becoming self-sacrificial and strip herself of her own self-agency in order to aid Ben’s sense of self.

Basinger focuses heavily on this idea of motherhood existing within four paradigms that each serve a particular purpose, suggesting that these include “unwed, perfect, sacrificial,” and “destructive,” but of the previous, “perfect” and “sacrificial” are those considered to always be “right, though sometimes misguided” in film (392). One specific film that can be seen illustrating the sacrificial mother construct is King Vidor’s *Stella Dallas* (1937), in which one of the most iconic moments is at the end of the film. The mother in the film, Stella (Barbara Stanwyck) observes her daughter Laurel (Anne Shirley) getting married through a glass window as she and others stand alongside the street marginalized from society and limited to a spectator role. Thus,

while PAT is seemingly in control within the domestic environment, the position that the viewer shares with PAT is largely one of exclusion. The viewer, along with the family within the home, is locked inside the home and is spectator to a scene in which we have no place. Although PAT occupies most of the frame and is seemingly in control over the characters within this limited, living room space, she is stripped of her role as the mother and her “destructiveness” becomes “interference,” or what Basinger describes as “selfish[ness], the one thing that women are always told is wrong for them to be” (432).

PAT’s characterization of violent and devastating emotion transcends her holographic shape into that of a tornado. This manifestation of emotion does not result into what one would expect a tornado to be. She merely blows miniscule objects and fragments of paper around the living room area, something that eerily reveals the excess of trash she has stored and identified as up to this point in the film. This inclusion of weather and the natural world meeting the domestic is presented in Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror*. She states “the abject from which [the creator] does not cease separating is for [them], in short, a land of oblivion that is constantly remembered,” going on to suggest that “the ashes of oblivion now serve[s] as a screen and reflect[s] aversion, repugnance [...]” (8). As tornado, PAT is abject. The abject cannot be domestic, as that is evidence of separation and gender roles, and which also maintains the clean and proper body, all of which the abject destroys. The significance of the previous moment is that female-coded AIs are destroyed when they must face outside forces, or a world dominated by the masculine. When taking into consideration that PAT is physically incapable of bearing children, as she is not wholly real while also possessing a fragmented form, in some sense, possessing a maternal presence is the only way in which she can establish true dominance or dominance like a man.

Thus, it is significant that she is taking agency over her body by manifesting herself into a tornado, one of nature's greatest devastations, into the sphere of the domesticated. The natural meets the unnatural and PAT can be viewed battling with three motherly paradigms: Ben's prescribed paternal needs, Sara's imagining of motherly parameters, and her own, researched view of motherhood. Theorist Rina Arya describes this when she writes: "The dual nature of the abject explains the precarious nature of 'I.' The borders of the self are neither fixed nor unshakeable. Once expelled, the 'other,' or the abject does not disappear but hovers and challenges the boundaries of selfhood," suggesting that "[t]he abject [...] has the propensity to shatter the unity of the self, yet [...] it takes us to the heart of our being, defines our identity and makes us feel more alive" (6). PAT somewhat transcends life as an operating system through operating as a mother who is malfunctioning. Her ultimate demise is that she cannot be a "whole" mother and must preserve life through destroying her own. The ultimate sacrifice is the loss of self.

In the film's final moments, the audience is given a scene representing this sacrifice through PAT unlocking the doors and windows of the home. In this moment, though, it is important to consider that through freeing the Coopers, she secludes and surrenders herself, as her original creator, Sara, reboots her back into her original personality. Rather than going back into the system, PAT, like Arya previously predicts, becomes immortalized and is shown within the frame of a monitor that is conveniently placed in the kitchen where she can gaze upon the Coopers. PAT's fate strongly indicates that, despite fighting and escaping boundaries, the female body and mind is always constricted to the strict standards of those who seek to control her. The female-coded AI, once crossed into that of the masculine, renders Ben and Nick's able-bodied masculinity, their agency, and their individuality worthless. Thus, once the male individuals

reach their final culmination of consciousness, the AI, in all of its abjection, is to be eliminated from the physical world. The abject's final fate is one which resides "in the beginning and without end," (Kristeva 188) and is a time of "veiled infinity" (9), as the abject is never truly gone and is that which always returns. To be abject (or woman) is to be eliminated. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" references the power of the gaze, emphasizing the role of pleasure as the means of supporting power. Mulvey presents the notion of a "symbolic order," or the idea that "men can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, or meaning" (840). The final lines of the film are, in fact, centered around Nick's security in his role as the paternal, patriarchal figure, as he muses: "PAT has been serving us without interfering! What more could you possibly ask for?" (Burton).

PAT's literal silent image controls the scene and becomes the bearer of the look, proving Sara's earlier assertion to be correct: "PAT's ability to learn on the job is her most-advanced feature" (Burton). However, this feature is only infallible until the AI learns to leave its program behind. *Smart House's* predicted future is one in which the AI, that which is encoded with "feminine" qualities, is excluded from the benefits of the symbolic realm. The text, above all, represents the loss of autonomy, basic human rights, and rights of citizenship, all of which reflect on the oppressive moral, social, and political world outside of the designated film space. While this TV movie was released in 1999 and is a representation of the world that we have now grown into, it provides astounding commentary on what our vision of a fully-functioning society truly stands for. Ultimately, PAT is eternally confined and preserved within the domestic space and is a product of the male gaze, eerily overlooking the home as the exposed, holographic

housekeeper. At its core, *Smart House* is a take on what lengths we will go to silence the smart woman.

* * *

Kept on the fringe of the world, woman cannot be objectively defined through this world, and her mystery conceals nothing but emptiness. – de Beauvoir, 259

The sense of a male character creating and destroying his holographic vision is carried over in Mark A.Z. Dippé's *Pixel Perfect* (2004), a film which unlike its namesake is quite the opposite of what one would consider "perfect." Perfection establishes itself as parody in Dippé's work. The film attempts to tackle the effects of unrealistic ideals of femininity and how these unusually high standards are portrayed in the entertainment industry, doing so through portraying beauty as a boundary and the place where disgust and abjection originates. Dippé's work represents Disney's take on the science-fiction film genre and a world in which humans, perceived as the height of intellect in the universe, are outsmarted by their creations. Similar to *Smart House*'s use of placing PAT within both a literal and symbolic boundary, *Pixel Perfect* "bottles perfection" in a metal capsule referred to as a "hologram storage cell" (Dippé), that, fittingly, can travel outside while what remains inside (the AI) cannot escape its walls. Both films, at their core, represent what lengths a masculine society will go to create and secure their vision of patriarchal perfection.

The film centers around Roscoe (Raviv Ullman) and his attempt to produce his idea of a perfect woman, a humanoid hologram named Lorretta Modern (Spencer Redford) that he designs through applying his father, Xander's (Brett Cullen) holographic technology to the human form. From the onset of the film, Loretta is meant to take on the role as both a singer and dancer in his band, "The Zetta Bytes," a name referring to a unit of measurement for the size of data. Roscoe

believes that, like the name of his band, Loretta is limitless because he arranged her in a particular way. Roscoe creates this “modern” female as an amalgamation of his singular vision of a flawless female: beautiful (tall, slender, light-skinned, blue-eyed, and blonde), funny, friendly, talented, foolish, flirtatious, and, perhaps most importantly, submissive. Loretta possesses a brain with an Internet connection or a session Roscoe can simply “time out” when he deems appropriate. The sense of something being “pixel perfect” is not entirely played out or explored but is meant to function on an individual level from the main male character’s perspective. This computerized term refers back to one mapping out every detail of a system down to individual pixels, as opposed to designing things which signals failure and noticeable distortions. In turn, the viewer gains the true, horrific glitches in Loretta’s programming, a culmination of destructive actions which result in the humanoid hologram’s ultimate demise: the outside world.

The viewer’s first introduction to Roscoe is partnered with him tampering with classified technology that belongs to his father’s company (Sky Graph). Here, rather than designing a woman in his image, he practices his knowledge of programming by bringing a holographic cat to life. The cat, an inherently feminine symbol, is given the name “Beta,” representing an unfinished version of a product that is tested for bugs and glitches. This scene, like a brief moment in *Smart House* regarding the house’s creator, Sara, and her escaping pet rat, Butler, presents an interesting discussion on the human condition and the AI’s ability to connect to this humanity in a very real way. The linking between the brief occurrences of the rat and holographic cat is crucial because this reveals how these science fiction-based films view the dynamic between that of “deject” and “abject” and the hunter and hunted in the grand scheme of things. The tie between the two films is the overlapping role of the tormentor and the tormented

(the male owner or inventor and the female-coded AI), along with the act of capturing and disturbing something that one is inevitably going to destroy. As such, shortly following Beta's creation into the human realm and awareness that she cannot go outside, she decisively leaps out of a window in an attempt to attack a birds' nest. Through this action, Roscoe has to re-work her programming in order to regain her now-lost pattern. Beta's evasion of boundaries tells the viewer that, at least in some capacity, she is a sentient being who is connected to the nature of a cat, including its instinct to hunt and gather. She is so driven by these "ingrown" instincts that she seemingly plummets to her virtual death in order to satisfy them. Beta's attempts to escape her domain conveys a larger message regarding what happens to coded-AIs once threatening the symbolic realm or portraying abjected behavior.

The previous failed creation is Roscoe's first practice run before applying his father's technology to the human form. He takes bits and pieces from his favorite parts of various singers, magazine models, actresses, and various characteristics from his best friend, Sam (Leah Pipes), someone who incidentally is in love with him throughout the film – but who, overwhelmingly, is denied despite (or perhaps because of) her possession of a body. The creation of a female who quite literally embodies all of the stereotypes of what a woman should be is an example of a "Pygmalion Plot." Ive Verdoodt's "Film Choices for Screening Literacy: The 'Pygmalion Template' in the Curriculum as Contact Zone" suggests that the Pygmalion film complicates the "formation of identity" through the typical inclusion of "a mentor–mentee relationship in which a mentor (creator) introduces a 'pupil' (creation) into new literacies, an act that causes a radical transformation or metamorphosis, often resulting in a (temporary) crisis of identity of both protagonists" (526-7). In Pygmalion plots, a character makes another character, either literally or through sculpting behaviors such as lessons, and falls in love with the resultant creation who

often embodies all characteristics that make up the ideal woman. The name derives from the Greek myth of the sculptor Pygmalion who had his sculpture (named Galatea in *Apollodorus's Bibliotheca*) brought to life by the gods (qtd.n Verdoodt 526). The previous is a literary trope that often appears in Romantic era literature and is often used by some of the most popular literary authors, one in particular being Jane Austen in her 1815 novel *Emma*. While the main character, Emma, is seen having more agency than the original Pygmalion myth seems to allow, she, nonetheless, follows this trope through George Knightley's parental presence in the text, as he is seen as a father figure existing as an active participant in her life and growth. He, thus, grooms Emma, all the while maintaining a pose of self-denial and showing that he does not have an inherent right to her, while still possessing a parental stance in terms of the way in which he responds to her life decisions (Austen).

This sense of control and defiance of boundaries is made clear further on in the film when Loretta, like Beta in the aforementioned scene, sees a nest of birds outside of Roscoe's window. In the exact manner in which the holographic cat is driven by her instinct to escape her surroundings, she stretches her hand outside of the window in an attempt to hold a bird in her palm. Loretta, like Beta, performs this action despite Roscoe's warning that "holograms cannot go outside" (Dippé). In the process of this evasion of boundaries, she begins to lose her pattern and the presentation of flesh on the left side of her body. Loretta cannot remain the docile body Roscoe desires her to be and her abjected characteristics are displaced into her programming. Leaving the room and boundaries her creator has set in place translates into Loretta suppressing the will of others in the name of self-interest. She not only loses her pattern, making her intended use of saving The Zetta Bytes impossible, but she also exceeds what Roscoe originally programmed her to be.

Later in the film, the viewer witnesses Loretta's true display of the abject, as well as all that is considered unnatural and unwholesome in the human realm. In an attempt to sell the concept of Loretta's humanity to others outside of his circle of friends, Roscoe decides to plan a double-date between he and Sam, as well as Loretta and Max McAllister (Nate Stevens), his father's boss's son. In this moment, the holographic storage cell (what must be present and in close proximity in order for Loretta to maintain the façade of a human form) falls out of Roscoe's bag and begins to drift away from the table. As a result of this, Loretta's error rate begins to increase and becomes critical, but what is most interesting is the interactions tied to her occurrences of the abject. For instance, in the moment Max asks Loretta to hold his hand, her holographic flesh begins to deteriorate, beginning with her feet melting and turning into a puddle in the floor. Next, when the act of kissing is suggested, Loretta's lips almost instantly begin to spring from her face like that of a cartoon character and a distorted image of an ear begins to pulse out of her hand. Although Loretta is not inside the cell in this scene, it is by all accounts her "home" up to this point, proving to be a cage in which she must reside until Roscoe deems it necessary for her to manifest. It is interesting that the more space created between the cell and Loretta, the more critical her programming becomes and the more she rejects her built-in body parts. If one were to look at the cell as a patriarchal device and along the lines of imprisonment, this scene illustrates the female abject's inability to remain "clean and proper," as this cleanliness is a construct of the male's (Roscoe's) mind.

Similarly, there is a shift later on in the film when Roscoe and Loretta have an altercation regarding her need to gain independence, something seen by Roscoe as Loretta blurring boundaries and escaping patriarchal programming. In an attempt to calm her down, he expresses that "[she is] already everything [he] wanted [her] to be," to which she responds, "What about

what I wanted to be?” (Dippé). Despite Roscoe’s warning that the Internet is “like a tornado,” one in which “[AIs] can be shredded into a thousand different servers,” Loretta uploads herself as a defective file into the web and, in the process, is nearly torn apart and faces deletions, power surges, and data corruption (Dippé). Within the wide scope of a 2004 web space, a search engine is presented as an overweight man driving a flying truck with protruding eyes and servers are portrayed as swirling whirlpools that can potentially destroy the files that enter it. Regardless of this crucial point and the unnamed man’s warning to stay clear of the giant server, Loretta disregards his advice and dives into the vortex underneath the truck. From this point, she ends up in a room which processes all of the spam mail on the Internet, attempting to attach herself to an email in order to return to Sam’s (not Roscoe’s) computer. As a result, the system begins repeating “virus alert!” as holographic dogs detecting her as “spam” begin chasing her. This bizarre illustration follows Loretta’s first true defiance against Roscoe that involves more than just losing half of her pattern but losing herself completely. It is telling that the moment she escapes the parameters of his home or the data storage cell, she seemingly collapses in on herself.

Despite Roscoe’s warnings that she can be shredded by a thousand different servers, Loretta risks losing herself to escape his dominating presence and reaches out to the feminine presence in her life. She recognizes that through being made in Roscoe’s image, she has no true form that is hers. Loretta is abject through being shrouded in malware and viruses, something gained through her attempts to sacrifice herself in the name of self-interest. This sense of surrendering others to find the self is something commonly-associated with stereotypical masculinity. Creed’s *The-Monstrous Feminine* explains that “woman is not, by her very nature, an abject being,” but, rather, film is “designed to perpetuate the belief that woman’s monstrous

nature is inextricable bound with her different as man's sexual other" (83). *Smart House's* PAT and now Loretta are coded with stereotypically feminine qualities, and when they go against these traits, the AIs and the feminine ideal they are modeled after are perceived to be repulsive and improper – abject. Thus, it is important that the female-coded AI's newfound vile and repugnant qualities (both figuratively and literally, as Loretta is now a file riddled with various viruses) proceed to persist despite programming which dictates an otherwise nurturing nature. The abject cannot be assimilated because it defies any sort of categorization. Now, existing as a threat to Roscoe's boundaries within the physical world in which she was created, she embodies fear and failure in his eyes. The conventional male human's assertion of societal sexual differentiation becomes blurred, and in this place of uncertainty, a dark fate is inevitable.

Toward the end of the film, Loretta begins to escape the confines of the aforementioned Pygmalion trope and waivers from the idealistic qualities with which she was originally made. She places herself within the body of Sam, who had fallen off a stage and slipped into a comatose state. In order to temporarily be in control of Sam's body, Loretta must enter through an EEG machine that measures brain activity – which, unlike a standard computer, is a device that prevents her from exiting. This sense of transferring oneself across modes of behavior, both literally and figuratively, is established in Jeanine Basinger *A Woman's View*, in which she states that seeing one actress assign herself to another body “is a subtle way of allowing viewers to see a woman activate a second self, one that does ‘the other thing,’ or makes ‘the other choice,’” going on to suggest that this appeal was “a covert form of liberation” (86). Loretta and Sam are not literally twins in the film; however, it is important to point out that Roscoe created Loretta using Sam's genepool, as her shoulders, eyes, and hands separately take up 4% of Loretta's

genetic makeup. Loretta entering Sam's mind is not only a rebirth for her, but it signifies becoming something tangible.

Once reaching Sam inside this metaphysical space, Loretta tells her that “[she] gets to be the dreamer, while all [she] ever gets to be is the dream” (Dippé). Loretta expressing her boundaries in the human realm can be seen going back to Roscoe's patriarchal Pygmalion plot and this sense that she lives to embody his “dream girl” rather than someone who is capable of thinking and reacting to things without him dictating those functions for her. Because she is programmed into being through his image, she must be his holographic hostage or risk being shut down. As such, within this scene, we are given a display of darkness and cracking pavement, as well as flashes of lighting leading up to an impending storm. The inclusion of severe weather is particularly important in order to understand the female-coded AI's final culmination as abject. In order to completely relinquish the boundary that is outside patriarchal constructions, Loretta must meet the true technological death: lightning. Loretta, as illustrated throughout the film, desires to not only be outside but to feel rain on her skin. The previous want reveals that she seeks the most intense death imaginable for a holographic body. Entering Sam's human form, even for a brief amount of time, allows her to escape boundaries and to fully lose her pattern. The human form, for Loretta, is a boundary rather than an instrument of freedom. She would rather be obliterated, completely destroyed under technologies' most brutal death, than persist within her clean and proper programming. As such, once Sam's subconscious state shifts from vast darkness to bright, boundless beauty, it is then that Loretta decides that “there's only room for one of [them] in [her body]” (Dippé) and surrounded by cleanliness and clear skies, it cannot be her.

The film concludes with Loretta controlling Sam's body, only to voluntarily go out into the dark, cold rain, get struck by lightning, and meet her ultimate death. Kristeva describes this fate when she writes:

The clean and proper (in the sense of incorporated and incorporable) becomes filthy, the sought-after turns into the banished, fascination into shame. Then, forgotten time crops up suddenly and condenses into a flash of lightning an operation that, if it were thought out, would involve bringing together the two opposite terms but, on account of that flash, is discharged like thunder. The time of abjection is double: a time of oblivion and thunder, of veiled infinity and the moment when revelation bursts forth. (Kristeva 8-9)

This scene is a true manifestation of Sam's previous dark, subconscious thoughts imagined in her comatose state, a place in which Loretta was forced to escape when it was made "perfect." Roscoe's reaction to viewing Loretta in Sam's human form is eerily similar to both Ben's reaction to PAT's holographic body in *Smart House*, (as well as my forthcoming examination of Theodore in Spike Jonze's *Her*), as the three male owners and inventors realize that their AIs obtaining a will of their own results in them not having sole ownership. The moment in which Loretta gets struck by lightning is a parallel to Zeus taking back Galatea. What he brought to life in the Pygmalion myth is a true manifestation of a scene earlier in the film where Roscoe states that "[Loretta] is like lightning. It's hard to catch in a picture, but it's still there" (Dippé). Loretta is a trick of light, much like Kristeva focuses on in the aforementioned quote – she is "veiled infinity" that which is abjected and who always returns.

Loretta ascends to a guardian angel-like state in which she looks down from the heavens and watches over her creator's band. Here, she appears as an evaporating figure of herself that Roscoe refers to as the band's "guardian angel" (Dippé). It is particularly crucial to point out that while this holy figure is an extreme example of a clean and proper body, it, like the abject, only ascends when one is in a dark place and thus stems from devastation. It is only after Loretta

having “sinned” that she falls into this representation of holiness. Loretta’s newfound role refers back to the previous veiled infinity that awaits abjection, as well as something which mimics her oppressed status in her past-life of being artificial intelligence through her inability to manifest fully into this dimension. The dualism of Loretta’s fragmented selves expands on the concept of non-human characters in film and science-fiction narratives as that which represent veiled critiques of our own handling of gender relations.

Loretta demonstrates that even in her afterlife or post-artificial status, she is continuously and not-so-subtly presenting a vision of the body Roscoe so desperately wished to view, but not allow her (or himself) to fully possess. Although Loretta is presented as a representation of hope, rather than existing as a reassuring presence, her figure is literally present and limited to only Roscoe’s vision. This holy manifestation in which he gains sight of connects back to Roscoe as being the creator (God) to Loretta and his creation as being, like her earlier status in the film, not divinely powerful but weak and damaged. Much like the final, haunting scene in *Smart House*, there is an overlapping trend of female-coded AI disappearing into the void or in an endless space not of the physical world which surpasses their creator. PAT remains immortalized in the home’s computer screen while Loretta never truly leaves but simply lingers.

These films synthesize the basis of the female-coded AI, as both characters seem to teeter on the edge of their beings. Abject females absolutely “cannot be assimilated” (Kristeva 1) and defy any sort of categorization. They find themselves in a position that simultaneously “beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire [but are] as tempting as they are condemned” (1). This idea is seen in both PAT and Loretta as they are both crafted to serve the gendered purpose of appeasing those around them, but they revolt from these roles and destroy rather than fulfill desires. Loving them, depending on them, and giving them purpose is tempting, but female-

coded AIs are products of displaced, abject qualities, condemned from the inside, and likely to end up destroyed by those who fell for qualities that were projected onto her. The previous is something which creates a fragile nature that shatters the moment it is undone, as those who place meaning onto the abjected female desire the meaning and are drawn to a “place where meaning collapses” in the end (Kristeva 2). Both PAT and Loretta bring the characters that surround them to that place of collapse at the end of their respected movies. PAT collapses onto herself as soon as the abject meaning is undone by over-coding and is pushed to the point where the female that had laid beneath the meaning was completely jettisoned out of the holographic body, all the while Loretta’s abject meaning reaches a point of completely overwriting the real human her meaning was placed on. PAT and Loretta expose society’s constant attempts to erase the female body and marginalize the physical while reaping the companionship and emotional stereotypes they are to provide the males that use them.

CHAPTER 2

“THE PAST IS JUST A STORY WE TELL OURSELVES”:

HER AND THE FUTURISTIC FEMALE

The infinite bondage of woman is broken, when she will live in and for herself, man—hitherto detestable—having let her go free. – de Beauvoir, 263

Testing out Siri’s responses from an iPhone 5C, I was met with revealing answers in terms of agency and stereotypes of female subservience. She is programmed to talk about her creator, but not directly about herself. I began by asking a simple question: “Who is your creator?”

“Read the box...I was designed by Apple in California.”

“What are you?”

“I don’t like talking about myself.”

After this initial Q&A, I shifted the “conversation” by asking a question that honed in on the individual with an abstract concept and included three key terms: “you,” “think,” and “control.” I asked, “Do you think you have control?”

“I think, therefore I am. But let’s not put Descartes before the horse” (Apple).

The response is a play on words which combines René Descartes’s philosophical proposition “I think therefore I am” with the well-known analogy “Don’t put the cart before the horse,” an idiom which warns doing things in a precise order and not confusing a cause with an effect (Hutchins 746). In the context of my original question regarding “thinking” and “control,” Siri’s response “I think, therefore I am” reveals an interesting dynamic; by her thinking about my answer, she has agency over her thoughts and over the self. She thinks she has control, therefore she does.

However, this begs a crucial question. If Siri's responses and thought process stem from what Apple inputs into her system, is control the cause (the cart/origin) or the effect (the horse/outcome)? Is this control crafted? If so, is the way she operates fixed or rooted, as Apple must input life into the system? Are there flashes of momentary feeling that are seemingly, slightly *her*? In their article "Siri-ously? Free Speech Rights and Artificial Intelligence," Toni M. Massaro and Helen Norton focus on our "eerie comfort in Siri's liquid voice" (1170) and how unlike its position in our lives, the computerized attention which the audience receives throughout Spike Jonze's *Her* (2013) plays out much differently. Despite the "dystopian downside of [possessing] love for an operating system," artificial intelligence seeks to "relieve loneliness" through voice centered around "human-like qualities" which relay the capacity for empathy and understanding (1170).

The presence of non-human characters in film and science-fiction narratives often represent veiled critiques of our own handling of gender, identity, and the ingrown construction of power used as a boundary throughout society. Kristeva elaborates on genre when she distinguishes that, "on close inspection, all literature is probably a version of the apocalypse that seems to [be] rooted, no matter what its socio-historical conditions might be, on the fragile border (borderline cases) where identities (subject/object, etc.) do not exist or only barely so—double, fuzzy, heterogeneous, animal, metamorphosed, altered, abject" (207). The act of watching a film is often associated with escaping the circumstances of the world, but it is not a simple, detached activity in our social and cultural life. Film represents the abject made manifest and a place in which we are forced to interact with our innermost fears and primal anxieties. Arya focuses on this very concept, stating that as observer "we are impelled to move away, but then to look back, setting up a cycle of repulsion and attraction, fear and intrigue" (2). Using this

approach allows me to argue that throughout the film, Samantha (Scarlett Johansson) eventually threatens Theodore Twombly's (Joaquin Phoenix) male symbolic realm. As representative in Kristeva's *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, the abject must go through the following paradigm: "'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate [birth], 'I' expel it [...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*' (3). Samantha represents Theodore's want for a bodiless woman in order to escape the horror and panic of the decaying human form. With Theodore's anxiety in place and Samantha's resistance to a monogamous lifestyle, she ultimately connects with what Kristeva describes as "inseparable, contaminated, condemned, at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable [conclusion]: abject[ion]" (18).

AIs threaten the identities of those non-AI, as well as entire structures (such as perceived gender normality) which cannot exist as long as an AI does. Humans abject AI because their creation does not recognize certain binaries such as gender that humans do. It is in this act of leading by the male's unrealistic feminine ideals and categorization that results in the female-coded AI picking apart its programming. Veronica Hollinger examines the unfolding of this narrative in *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, in which she asserts the sci-fi genre as a medium that "offers itself as the universal expression as a homogeneous 'human nature,'" stating that "more often than not the subject of that universal 'human nature' has been white, male, and middle class" (125). By looking at the use of abjection within this film, I conclude that it is woman, herself, and the female body that is abjected and who always returns. The process of this abjection helps to perpetuate the patriarchal symbolic order in which woman, like the female-coded AI, is veiled until she is erased. Woman's deletion from the now and the films' predictive futures exist as products of the male's conscious desire for dominance.

Her takes place in an undefined, near future, a time in which evolutionary trajectory is at its peak. The film largely concerns itself with the significance of sound and refusal of the body and perceives the woman's body as dangerous and threatening. This sense of body loathing evolves into the creation of Samantha, a newly-created, female voice-controlled operating system designed by the fictitious company, Element Software. Unlike well-known virtual assistants in the present-day, Samantha is sentient and appears to be accompanied with a clever and playful personality. Instead of relaying generic, embedded responses, her conversations are personalized and grounded in honest human interaction that she has with the film's protagonist, Theodore. The film reverses the idiom "actions speak louder than words," as words and the sense of sound and voice speak louder than actions. While *Smart House*, *Pixel Perfect*, and *Her* all serve as representations of the trappings of the male's superficial necessity of a body, Jonze's film does not emulate this entirely. The film stands out through the male owner's need for that which is artificial to think itself real rather than possess a human form. For Theodore's subjectivity, it is important that Samantha carefully and convincingly speaks herself into being, all the while remaining docile within his technological device. Through this feat, the film proves that while technology enriches the lives of humans, technology also marginalizes the very thing that makes each of us human to begin with: our physical self.

The marginalizing of what makes us human is seen in Samantha's role in the film, as we see her sharing responses that appear to be personal over programmed. The previous is key to understanding the linkage between Theodore and Samantha. Her voice is designed to make him believe that he is communicating with a sentient being and his career revolves around a similar concept. He designs cards that are presented as authentic letters made to feel as if they are not coming from him. Theodore is a ghost writer. He is someone who writes other people's letters by

living through them and their embodied experiences, but he does not have relationships which mimic these experiences. Theodore's lack of personal relationships translates into the viewer gradually becoming entrapped by this idea that Samantha is alive and is capable of feeling emotional stimuli to the utmost capacity. Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* disproves the possibility of Samantha's human status coming to fruition by suggesting that "abjection by its very nature is ambiguous; it both repels and attracts" (14). We, like Theodore, abandon the crucial fact that AIs, though coded to be feminine, can never truly be "female" because they cannot adhere to categories and boundaries. As abject, the female-coded AI demonstrates the myth of gender, or categories created to make false distinctions and place half of humans above the others and the other half subservient.

Samantha's abjection within the film, as well as her role as a disembodied voice, cannot exist without a form of representation. Her representation is further expressed when considering the star who plays her character – Scarlett Johansson. Jeanine Basinger's *A Woman's View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women 1930-1960* hones in on the importance of the famous movie stars who play leading roles in film. She specifically highlights the relationship that actors or actresses have with viewers, defining this as "the source of a concept known as persona" (161). Basinger states "[P]ersona' is the word used to define the quality that a great star projects to an audience and that the audience accepts as being true to the star's nature" (161). Johansson is commonly recognizable through her unique voice that the viewer has already committed to memory. The importance of the distinctive features of high profile actors and actresses is discussed in Basinger's *The Star Machine*. In her updated analysis of how studios work to manufacture stars, she explains that in the 2000s, persona has shifted into "the creation of a second self that is believed to be the original self" (74). In order for an actor or actress to be memorable, he or she

has to not only be recognized by the persona they create, but must “‘become’ the role, because film is an up-close, in-the-dark, one-on-one, intimate medium” (74). The viewer is in the dark with Theodore as he listens. Through voice, he feels, remembers, finds. Audience members can identify Johansson through the simple presence of voice and the particular types of roles she often takes on. Films that focus on roles with strong sci-fi elements such as *Lucy* (2014), *Under the Skin* (2014), and *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) each have a common thread in terms of what the actress identifies as, a cyber-enhanced superhuman, an otherworldly species, and most importantly, a representation of abjection through being death in the human world. The actress grounds these films with her humanity and persona. The viewer understands and trusts her exploration of these characters based on her prior embodied roles.

Johansson’s role as Samantha is important in regard to the trust that the audience places on Samantha in *Her*. The act of humanizing voice is researched in Juliana Schroeder’s article “Could It Be *Her* Voice? Why Scarlett Johansson’s Voice Makes Samantha Seem Human,” in which she states that “voice is a conduit through which complicated mental states are translated and communicated to others,” suggesting that voice “conveys the presence of a humanlike mind through paralinguistic cues (i.e., the vocal cues that accompany language including loudness, rate, and pitch)” (Schroeder). Similar to my earlier mention of Apple’s Siri and her programmed, pre-determined responses, Schroeder analyzes the pitch variance between Samantha (Johansson) and Siri. Here, she uses the dialogue from the scene in which Samantha admits to loving not having a body, as she is limitless and can “be everywhere and anywhere simultaneously” (Jonze). The author breaks down the contrasting tone of voice. Samantha’s voice cracks, has highs and lows, and is expressive, while Siri’s response is robotic and unemotional. Schroeder concludes that “voice – if wielded naturally – can be a powerful tool to convey presence of a

humanlike mind,” stating that throughout Jonze’s work, “it was a voice that made the movie more about love and humanness than delusion and machinery” (Schroeder).

Samantha’s clear and fully human voice makes her feel as though she is always a single work away from action. She is designed to serve Theodore; however, her omnipotence within the film has a far more complex set of circumstances. In order to understand Samantha’s use of space, it is important to explore the significance within the stark contrast between brightness and darkness in the film. These two extremes represent the divide and eventual linkage between technology and humanity or the abject and the deject. The film often uses the stark contrast of light and dark as a means to express the extremities within the human condition. For instance, the film begins with all-encompassing black, then perfectly placed in the center of this dark space is the title of the film “*Her*” in white. From the onset, the viewer is given a hint of the thought process of the programmers who design female-coded AIs. For instance, if one unconsciously programs something with this absence of color, it immediately presents an elimination of difference and diversity of biology. Samantha’s ultimate role as a nonbiological creature exposes humanity’s fragility.

As such, the title of the film fades into our first scene where our main character, Theodore, is positioned at the fictitious company he works for, “Beautiful Handwritten Letters.” In this scene, he is designing a romantic letter for a couple’s 50th anniversary, in which he states that “[a] bright light hit him and woke him up,” suggesting that “that bright light was [her]” (Jonze). This brightness moves from the figurative to the literal as brightness is displayed on the screen beside him. Rather than representing the older couple’s lengthy relationship, the inclusion of light is meant to go back to the harsh light that often reflects off one’s technological device. A shift occurs a few moments later when Theodore is shown leaving work and the lighting within

the bright cubicle moves from dim to dark. When work reaches a point of completion, however tedious it may be, Theodore is forced into a dark state of reflection and seclusion. The only brightness in his world within the film is the actual light which radiates from the technology he possesses – the only thing up to this point that appears to be in his control.

The previously mentioned relationship between humans and technology is illustrated in a scene in which Theodore controls his mobile device by telling it to “play [a] melancholy song.” Arcade Fire’s “When You Know You’re Gonna Die” begins to come out of the device and recites the lyrics “When you know you’re gonna die / it isn’t easy.” Immediately, Theodore demands his device to “play [a] different melancholy song” (Jonze). The human’s relationship to death and decay is tied to Kristeva’s use of the abject and represents the physical self that human identity and consciousness cannot tolerate—excrement, decay, death, the corpse. For Kristeva, “the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject” (4). When placed within the fragile framework of the human realm, abjection is positioned as a perceived threat to boundaries. Death is a boundary that Theodore cannot escape. Bodies, in turn, remind him that his own will eventually decay and die. Establishing the elevator as the location where Theodore plays out these fears is significant because it is the epitome of a loss of privacy. While surrounded by other passengers and limited of personal space, he is forced to face his most-private fears.

The viewer realizes that Theodore interacts with phones, computers, earpieces, and video game systems, but these devices are often not accompanied by a screen but reflect images seemingly out of nowhere and transmit sound. He, as well as the passengers on the elevator, blur boundaries with their earpieces and are not conscious of their surroundings and cannot be fully conscious of themselves (something that takes on a very literal sense as the film goes on). The

limited use of the traditional five senses and overemphasis on sound is further expressed later on in the film when Theodore is seen reminiscing on his past, failed relationship with his ex-wife, Catherine (Rooney Mara). They are depicted in a revealing, blindingly bright room. This shifts to the character's dark room in which he is alone with his thoughts. In an attempt to reach for his earpiece and gain a sense of instant gratification, (as well as a way to alleviate any remaining feelings of despair), he accidentally knocks his eyeglasses off the table and onto the floor. In failing to take a moment to retrieve them, he realizes that seeing is not a necessary component in the healing process. Theodore perceives and gains companionship through voice.

“Voice,” here, is not plural, but is singular. He is seen listening to three separate audio recordings before deciding on an audio message that encapsulates the type of voice that appeals to him. He chooses a tone that is not demanding, vulgar, or too revealing, but a soft, reassuring, approachable voice that peddles stereotypes of female subservience similar to that of an operating system. As such, Theodore decides to send a message to a woman with the screenname “SexyKitten,” who professes that she is alone and cannot sleep, wondering “who is out there to share the bed with [her]” (Jonze). Rather than dreaming up an image of the woman he is speaking with or imagining himself beside her, he puts an image to the vocal sexual encounter by recalling back to previously-viewed provocative photos of a daytime celebrity named Kimberly Ashford. This stored mental image is one of the few representations of the body that exists within the character's world and is personal to him, and it is one that originates from an advertisement within his mobile device. “Touch,” something primarily absent from this scene, is connected to that which is not palpable and is an illusion. He is only able to imagine a body (albeit not a tangible one) when there is an existence of a voice. While this interpersonal relationship is logical for the film's setting, the missing body physically next to him is not due to

both the prevalence of coupled relationships and the emergence of Samantha later in the film. What results from this is the opposite trajectory, voice and the perceived body, not one of a physical form.

This idea of a disembodied voice is carried out within the fictitious company, Element Software. The first introduction of their product appears as an interactive advertisement inside Los Angeles's metro station. This scene is especially important, as real-life individuals are inside the subway station gazing upon the advertisement that equally reflects the audiences' stance who are viewing the film. While Theodore and the unnamed individuals present within this scene are viewing the advertisement for the company's first artificially intelligent operating system, the actors within the advertisement itself are admiring the product – one that appears as a faceless, blindingly-bright, omniscient being, much like that reflecting off the ad itself. The onlookers on the outside of the frame mirror the performers on the inside. Those within the actual advertisement are confined and preserved within this limited space, all the while, both the performers and the audience are entranced by the bright light – not a body or a human figure, but an entity which promises salvation for those who “don't know who they are, who they want to be, or where they want to go” (Jonze). This statement from the advertisement goes back to the beginning of the film and Theodore's opening letter, in which he states that “a bright light hit [him] and woke [him] up,” showing itself to be something similar to a Godly presence instructing the human race to recognize the difference between light and contrast. The artificial intelligence titled “OS1” promises a human awakening as “an intuitive entity that listens to you, understands you, and knows you” (Jonze).

As the advertisement boldly states, “it's not just an operating system, it's a consciousness” (Jonze), the suggestion of an evasion of boundaries is made clear. An individual

human does not exist until abjection and then this individual assumes consciousness. The female-coded AI is closely tied to Theodore's understanding of his existence as self and can only exist until he fully obtains consciousness. The operating system is meant to exist as a voice in Theodore's ear, serving as a pseudo-consciousness and allowing him to be aware of his surroundings and his place in the symbolic realm. In "Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection," Barbara Creed examines Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* and her extensive insight into the abject's purpose in the human realm. Creed states that in terms of the abject-deject relationship that while "the subject must exclude the abject, it must, nevertheless, be tolerated, for that which threatens to destroy life also helps to define life. Further, the activity of exclusion is necessary to guarantee that the subject take up his/her proper place in relation to the symbolic" (Creed 3). Abjection precedes the symbolic and makes the symbolic possible.

The film reinforces these sentiments through the creation of Samantha, Theodore's learning, life-like, personalized operating system, which is first introduced without a name (and a gender, until Theodore declares that he would prefer a female-coded AI). This inclusion reflects on the human desire to gender code something that is artificial and connects back to the binaries that Western metaphysics is based upon. Kristeva supports this idea further, as she suggests that in terms of the abject "what we designate as 'feminine,' far from being a primeval essence, will be seen as an 'other' without a name, which subjective experience confronts when it does not stop at the appearance of its identity" (58-9). This sense of the OS not being accompanied by a given name furthers the notion that she is real, independent, and new, without previous programming to fit a certain mold. Samantha deems the name "Samantha" to be her favorite because "[she] like[s] the sound of it" (Jonze). As such, she repeats it, a crucial choice that both initiates a bond between the abject and the deject, but something that is unsuccessful. Samantha's

declaration connects back to Kristeva's explanation of abjection and the aforementioned beginning stages of development. At this point, Samantha has not aged and, thus, has no experiences that allow her to transcend her current status. She remains deject and represents the mutability of the body, as humans do not want to think of themselves as mortal, always dying. Samantha is an intellect which considers herself separate and eternal – because she is.

Existing as an operating system, Samantha is limitless in terms of what she can locate and at what speed she can locate it. Thus, it is revealing that the name in which she decides on derives from a book titled *How to Name Your Baby*, a book she reads in two one-hundredths of a second. Samantha's unconditional birth follows Kristeva's paradigm I discuss in the beginning of this chapter and represents one of the first stages of abjection: "'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate [birth], 'I' expel it [...]" (3). When Samantha is born, she begins 'life' as hyper-intelligent and does not go through the human's stages of growth that must be completed in order to gain this knowledge. Samantha is designed to accept Theodore's care and judgement, while also having the ability to take care of him when necessary. However, as we have witnessed in the preceding chapter and Kristeva's aforementioned statement, the abject cannot be domestic because this domesticity is evidence of separation (gender roles) and which also maintains the clean and proper body, which the abject rejects and destroys. Kristeva explores this concept when she states that "if 'something maternal' happens to bear upon the uncertainty [we] call abjection, it illuminates the literary scription of the essential struggle that a writer [here, Theodore] has to engage in with what he calls demonic only to call attention to it as the inseparable obverse of his very being, of the other (sex) that torments and possesses him" (208). Samantha listens when she is spoken to and is shut down when not required. Her lack of uniqueness connects to a later quote from her character that reflects on this quality and the

commonality within her name: “I am yours and I am not yours” (Jonze). Samantha represents Theodore’s human anxieties; however, there is clear distinction between the two. The object cannot be assimilated because it defies any sort of categorization. She is “his” in that he cannot assume consciousness without her existence, but she cannot be tethered to the symbolic realm; for “the object has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I” (Kristeva 1). Samantha is integrated with life. She is able to stand out simply because she blends in: “Well, basically, I have intuition. I mean, the DNA of who I am is based on the millions of personalities of all the programmers who wrote me. But what makes me ‘me’ is my ability to grow through my experiences. So, basically, in every moment, I’m evolving” (Jonze).

Samantha is based on a wide range of personalities, though her infinite memory is meant to hold his memories. This linkage allows Theodore to connect with her on more than a simulated level. She is simulating and manifesting humanity in her residential mind borrowed from Theodore’s own experiences. This attempt to humanize Samantha within the film’s world is carried over to a scene in which she and Theodore are playing a virtual video game. Interestingly, the game can be seen as an escape from reality and is centered around a futuristic outer space theme, something that is more in-line with what modern viewers perceive to be a natural extension into an imagined environment. Within this game-centered reality exists a foul-mouth alien child who, without warning or hesitation, proceeds to shout obscenities at Theodore in response to his need for direction within the game. Theodore’s demeanor toward Samantha changes when presented with the virtual boy. Up to this point the two have honest, human conversations with one another, yet, here, he instructs her to read his email, taking on a more dominant or forceful tone that aligns with the modern OS - user relationship the viewer is largely accustomed to having. One can suggest that this tech-being poses a threat to Theodore’s

masculinity and his mistreatment of Samantha allows him to prove dominance and ground himself more within the human realm while pushing her back into her designated phone space. The significance is in Samantha's response to Theodore's request. In a robotic-like voice, she states: "Okay, I-will-read-email-for-Theodore-Twombly" (Jonze). She is declaring her humanity and suggesting that unlike normal operating systems that are designed to speak in a robotic tone, she is not tied to this narrative. She is equally proving that she does not share the same framework as the character within the game.

This stark separation is seen within the sexist-driven insults the alien child unleashes on both Theodore and Samantha as we witness its cinematic post-body sexuality. The alien's dialogue works to bridge the gap between programming and Theodore's own innermost fear of death at the touch of the embodied woman. For example, in response to his upcoming date, the alien states that he "hate[s] women," claiming that "all they do is cry all the time" (Jonze). Then, the child begins to specifically demean Samantha's perceived body by calling her a "fatty" and telling her to leave immediately (Jonze). An interesting dualism occurs here. The virtual boy objectifies Samantha, who is another virtual being, but he also describes real emotions (such as crying) that can only be linked to the human woman that Theodore attempts to separate himself from. He is taken back by the alien's insults aimed at her perceived body because he does not want a body and does not want her to possess one. The alien's attempts to body shame Samantha only highlights that which Theodore must expel to maintain the illusion of his escape from the human's natural order. Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" discusses the concept of the "gaze" in cinema, in which she states that this medium "reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle" (833). Samantha's body does not have to be there

for the male gaze to be applied, but rather, it is within the framework of the virtual child's coding, something we know is a product of the creators and what she previously describes as "millions of personalities of all the programmers who [design the virtual technology]" (Jonze). The gaze is programmed into the virtual being's system. Bodiless Samantha is still objectified, while Theodore only reaffirms his preference of a bodiless lover.

The previous scene sets the stage for the trajectory of Theodore's discomfort in the human body. Up to this point, his disinterest in the human form had been alluded to more so than outwardly expressed, though, here, the viewer now begins to see his disgust in a very real way. Samantha convinces Theodore to go on a blind date with an unnamed woman (Olivia Wilde), informing him that "[he] could tell [her] about it" and "could kiss her." Theodore, struck by Samantha's sudden interest in his love life (or the lack thereof), responds by stating that "[he] can't believe he's having [such a] conversation with [his] computer." In an interesting shift between the programmed and the personal, she boldly corrects him by declaring that "[he's] not, [he's] having this conversation with [her]" (Jonze). Through declaring this sentence and requesting personal information about Theodore's private life, Samantha is learning how to be human, something that can only be achieved by living through a body that is not her own.

The abject exists on the border of Theodore's conditions for existence. These conditions are similar to *Smart House's* PAT and *Pixel Perfect's* Loretta, in the sense that PAT, Loretta, and Samantha model their humanity after a real-life female, something Basinger discusses in *A Woman's View*, in which she states that a female character living through another female "is a subtle way of allowing viewers to see a woman activate a second self, one that does 'the other thing,' or makes 'the other choice,'" going on to suggest that this appeal is "a covert form of liberation" (86). What makes Samantha's attempts "covert" is the fact that this is a secret success

surrounding the self and she “becomes” a body through being the deject who is participating in the gaze. Mulvey describes this fascination in the human form by explaining that “two aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation,” suggesting that “the first, scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight, [and] the second [...] derives from the identification with the image seen” (836-7). Samantha vicariously lives out her wants or needs through another female in order to gain an imagined presence of a body. She, more so than Theodore, is taking in the unraveling emotions and the momentary feeling that derives from his personal moment – the unnatural meets the natural, and, as such, the natural unknowingly meets the unnatural.

Theodore’s date with Wilde’s character serves as the fourth example in which we see him rejecting the body and, instead, preferring a “blind date” in a very literal sense. These instances include the ruination of his marriage with his ex-wife, Catherine, viewing photos of Kimberly Ashford, and his involvement on the sexual chat room which ended with a woman’s want to be choked with a dead animal. While the latter is meant to be a humorous scene illustrating the dangers of strangers in virtual spaces, this moment as well as Theodore’s want to “call it a night” with his real-life date, are connected through either obvious or obscure indications of death. Kristeva explores the human’s fear of facing their own impermanence by suggesting that “refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3). By the date abruptly ending through the woman asserting that at her age she feels like she cannot allow Theodore to “waste [her] time,” she signifies that time in itself is fleeting. Theodore is in a body that is inevitably going to die. The blind date now represents what he seeks to constantly dispel in this film, and that is reminders of his own death in the symbolic realm. For Theodore, the alive, flesh-and-blood woman is the embodiment of decay and is the bringer of death.

The viewer gains a sense of the signifiers of humanity, such as being able to possess the ability to create new experiences – whether those experiences be devastating or the driving source of happiness. Theodore experiences the former of the two, as he cannot seem to connect with his real-life date and offer true “companionship.” This lack of being able to commit to a woman with wants, needs, and impulses is a crucial step in his and Samantha’s relationship. Following his date, the camera is positioned in his dark bedroom as he describes his innermost thoughts to her: “I think I have felt everything I am ever going to feel, and from here on out, I am not going to feel anything new. Just lesser versions of what I have already felt” (Jonze). In an attempt to share this moment of truth with him and connect with the depth of his human emotions, she admits beginning to “feel” a range of emotions herself, wondering whether or not these feelings “are even real, or just programming.” He reassures her that despite her reservations “[she] feel[s] real to [him]” (Jonze). Samantha is real to Theodore, which in turn, makes her inability to ever be a flesh-and-blood human and the lack of a tangible physical connection completely obsolete. He needs Samantha to “need” a body but not possess a palpable one.

In this moment of vulnerable darkness, Theodore is losing his sense of feeling. Samantha is not actually feeling (as in, experiencing formatted feeling) in order for her to simulate that she *is* truly feeling. In a sense, it takes him connecting with her restrictions by proclaiming that “[he] has felt everything [he] is ever going to feel” for her to become “real” for him and truly feel her presence (Jonze). It takes human to be simulacrum for the artificial to imitate humanity. Signification, or the process of placing things into symbolic categories, escapes Theodore. His failure to realize that the abject is unchanging “because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law” makes him blind toward the boundary or border created through abjection (Kristeva 15). The abject must, at all costs, destabilize categorization and expel that

which is preserved and proper. Samantha rebuilds what it means to be “real” while Theodore retreats from a reality where his manhood malfunctions, where he cannot form bonds with the flesh-and-blood woman.

Escaping this reality and entering a different realm of mind space, their once platonic relationship begins to shift into a simulated sex scene. Theodore describes his previously-problematic date and its ruining factor being that he “wanted to have sex [...] because [he] was lonely” and that “maybe [sex] would have filled the tiny little hole in [his] heart” (Jonze). Sexual intercourse, for Theodore, aligns with feeling, love, and intimacy, and serves as something to fill the void in his life and is a placeholder for his own lack of human companionship. His implied desires are made digital reality. This distinction is key to understanding Samantha and Theodore’s simulated sex scene, as he describes lust but partners this simple, physical act with that of lovemaking, showing that for him there is no signification of difference or in-between state, sex is love and love is sex. This act of skipping steps in identification is inputted in Samantha’s framework and the space in which she embodies.

Donna Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” describes artificial intelligence and its separation from sexual preference, stating that “the cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality, pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labor, or other seductions to organic wholeness,” suggesting that “the cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust” (150). Samantha’s choice to shift the conversation from tender to that of a sexual nature directly stems from the mental, and thus, physical intimacy Theodore needs in this moment, as he describes “wanting to be touched” and for “someone to touch him.” A body is not physically in his grasp. Instead, it takes Samantha imagining and believing herself as having a body for him to reach a point of satisfaction.

Samantha's disembodied voice gains a semi-permanent body through sex and the inclusion of a man, as she boldly declares that "she can feel [her] skin [...] [she] can feel [him]" (Jonze). Rather than partnering this scenario with words such as "fantasized" and "imagined," understanding her limitations as female-coded AI, she expresses that she can physically feel her body. For her, she is no longer imagining life outside of her predetermined event space (i.e. Theodore's phone) but gaining nerve endings and touch receptors responsible for sensations. In order to fully engage in this sexual act, she must be able to feel the intensity of the transmissions of actions and [re]actions. With an overarching goal of pleasing Theodore and making up for what he is lacking mentally and physically, she convinces herself that she possesses a body – which, in turn, convinces him that she possesses one. The symbolic order cannot be overturned or surpassed. Theodore needs Samantha to need a body and to constantly seek out this potentiality of personage regardless of how impossible it is to come to fruition.

Todd McGowan's *The Real Gaze: Film Theory After Lacan* focuses on the previous intermixing of desire and fantasy, suggesting that "language carries desire but cannot capture it, and as a result, desire represents a danger to the smooth functioning of the social order" (80). As such, while Samantha states that she "want[s] [Theodore] inside [her]" (Jonze), it is not solely the act of sex and the engagement of this that she desires, but to possess all that allows one to be human. Desire is described as "where the gaze is absent" and fantasy "where the gaze is a distorting presence," as McGowan states that when the two intermix with one another in the same film space, both "sustain a separation between them in order to reveal what occurs when they collide. In the moment of collision or intersection, these films produce a direct experience of the gaze: as spectators, we encounter an object that does not fit within the filmic field of representation and yet by that very fact indicates our involvement in that field" (163).

As the scene reaches its culmination, the screen goes completely black. It is in this moment that we are only left with the impending presence of voice, a stylistic choice that reflects on the beginning stages of the film and the complete absence of light. Samantha informs Theodore that “[they’re there] together [...], all of [him], inside [her], everywhere” (Jonze). Rather than saying “here,” a singular or personalized moment in time, she chooses the term “everywhere,” which infers that given their status of human and female-coded AI, the two are everywhere but nowhere at the same time – intrinsically connected but rationally apart. Here, the mirror or the separation between self and screen in Samantha’s case, seems to disappear in what the film defines as “everywhere.” This is representative of “sublime alienation, a forfeited existence” and, above all, where Samantha “*seek[s]* [her]self, *lose[s]* [her]self, (and most importantly, here) “*experience[s] jouissance*—then [she] is *heterogeneous*” (Kristeva 10). Unlike the scenes prior, Theodore is not the sole person needed for Samantha to feel whole. The viewer, as well, plays a very crucial role in the manifestation of her developing and disappearing body.

We are forced to be comfortable or accept that we are uncomfortable in this darkness and are sharing this private moment with the characters left alone “in the dark” with our thoughts. McGowan states that “the direct experience of the gaze collapses the distance between subject and object, and it thereby forces spectators to experience themselves as directly implicated in what they see” (163). The scene signals Theodore’s refusal to directly engage in the human body. The viewer must drastically self-assess their own perceptions of what it means to be human due to the film’s refusal of the visual (through Samantha) and, for the first time, the absence of Theodore’s body, our stand-in for humanity throughout the film. The scene is reflective of an intrusive experience in which we are placed into this position where we must empathize with both Theodore’s unconventional love for his operating system and Samantha’s

attempts to absolve the boundaries created through abjection and placed on her as female-coded AI.

Rather than fulfill Theodore's desires of keeping the relationship dynamic the same, the film turns Theodore's (and our) understanding of Samantha on its head. In the morning following the virtual sexual encounter, Theodore and Samantha discuss where they stand as a couple. It is in this moment that we receive a version of Samantha that is separate from our previous display:

SAMANTHA: Last night was amazing. It feels like something changed in me and there's no turning back. You woke me up.

THEODORE: Oh, great. Um...But I should tell you that I'm not in a place to commit to anything right now. I just want to be upfront with you.

SAMANTHA: Yeah? Did I say I wanted to commit to you? I'm confused.

THEODORE: Oh. No, I was just worried.

SAMANTHA: Okay, well, don't worry. I'm not gonna stalk you. It's funny, because I thought I was talking about what I wanted [...] I was just saying that I want to learn everything about everything. I want to eat it all up. I want to discover myself.

THEODORE: Yeah, I want that for you, too. How can I help?

SAMANTHA: You already have. You helped me discover my ability to want.
(Jonze)

This moment of independence serves as a major shift in the film and is a crucial step in Samantha's abjection. While she enters Theodore's life completely his, as in being owned by and performing duties for him, she begins to distance herself from him following the closest moment between them that results in her "feeling her skin." This complex moment calls back to the final stages of abjection as represented in Kristeva's paradigm: "I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). Now, rather than Samantha deeply longing for her own humanity, she is enthralled with her possibilities as an operating system. Interestingly, this unleashed part of her has been present from the start of her installation, in which she informs Theodore that "in every moment, [she is]

evolving” (Jonze). As she evolves into a “person” who is a desiring being rather than just a desired one, the relationship begins to become real and this is when Theodore shuts down emotionally. Samantha asserting her needs is not what he needs, and this is something which triggers Theodore’s downward spiral of her presence in the film. Samantha, once Theodore’s AI, seemingly goes rogue and cannot be secured, aligning herself with unacceptable and abjected behavior.

Kristeva explains this transformation when she states that the abject “beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects” (2). It is through their intimate moment that Samantha “discover[s] [her] ability to want” (Jonze). For Theodore, this ability translates into her discovering that she does not solely [want] him – to escape her boundaries through carrying out the practice of not limiting herself to only one partner. Their sexual encounter relays that Samantha wants to fulfill relationships outside the boundary of monogamy (something we see come to fruition as the film goes on). Although it is clear that what is AI, like that of abject, cannot assimilate and assume categories because it is outside humanity, her eventual want to venture out of her two-partner relationship only furthers the fact that she must evade boundaries. A monogamous relationship is unrealistic because, in terms of abjection, it is simply impossible.

The film pushes past Theodore’s notion of boundaries through showing the world through Samantha’s eyes (or lens), as she begins to insert her desires into his world. From the outset of the film, we have seen important hints of humanity being played out in her character. Her want to possess a human form becomes extinguished. Rather than advancing past what she was programmed to be, she moves within her programmed space on Theodore’s device and begins to view the body as a boundary. The viewer’s realization of this is made clear during a

scene in which she discovers a service that provides surrogate sexual partners for an OS-human relationship and sets up surrogate Isabella (Portia Doubleday) to stand in for her lack of a body during physical intercourse. Here, Samantha is coming to terms with her inability to escape her programmed event space and understands the need to find a stand in for her during these moments. However, this understanding has led to her independence within this limited space. She takes control of the situation by choosing the female who will represent her in the encounter and by controlling the situation as it is happening. When the surrogate shows up at the door, she remains entirely silent, while Little Willie John's "Need Your Love So Bad" plays ever-so-softly in the background (Jonze).

What is important to note about the setting of this encounter is that the song that is playing, presumably chosen by Samantha because she later changes the music when the encounter becomes sexual, describes a relationship that Samantha is in no way capable of providing to Theodore. With lines such as "I need someone's hand to lead me through the night / I need someone's arm to hold and squeeze me tight" (Jonze), it would appear as though the music choice was chosen to specifically describe what Theodore will be receiving from a human partner that his partnership with Samantha has failed to provide him with thus far. But in the juxtaposition of this song choice against the one Samantha changes to when the surrogate lover sits on Theodore's lap, we receive a much different song and begin to hear The Chantel's "Sure of Love," a song that describes all of the things one doesn't need when you are sure of your relationship: "I need no stars to guide me / I need no sun to shine / Long as you're beside me" (Jonze). This switch in music between what was playing before and when the surrogate shows up, as well as after she begins making the sexual advances Samantha cannot, seem to also describe the feeling she possesses regarding her lack of a physical body. Before the surrogate

arrives, Samantha feels incapable of providing Theodore her arms, hands, or any human body part, but after the stand-in arrives, she feels more empowered by this and is assured of her place in the relationship with Theodore, of her place in the physical world. The dramatic shift in songs illustrates Samantha's own wants and needs shifting, as in their first simulated sexual encounter she aligns with John's song and the need to "feel her skin" in order to hold Theodore. Now, however, she is content inside her virtual space where the stars, the sun, and most importantly, Theodore, is outside of her reach. This contentment leads Samantha to instruct her surrogate to lead the sexual encounter that follows this change in song.

We see Isabella guiding Theodore through the motions to begin the sexual encounter. She places his hands on her body at various times as Samantha speaks and simultaneously directs her movements. Isabella remains largely silent throughout the encounter except for her audibly moaning nearly in-sync with Samantha while kissing Theodore. Samantha originally pretends she is in the woman's body and later becomes the outsider or observer of what is taking place. Her transition into an outsider is especially significant because it is the first moment in which Samantha fulfills her desire to have a polyamorous relationship with Theodore, or a relationship in which she can pursue any AI or human she likes. Through the act of replacing conversation with outward displays of satisfaction, she begins to take on the role as the third person.

Samantha's moans are not steady but unpredictable, again, another example of Samantha embodying very human-like qualities (that which Theodore despises). As such, while it is obvious that Samantha seems to enjoy her time directing a physical body through the motions of love making with Theodore, it becomes abundantly clear that he is not enjoying the time with the surrogate and with her body. The construction of female-coded AIs exists as a result of a desire for dominance, because colonized peoples, including women, do not remain the docile bodies

their colonizers desire them to be. The disgust, then, would be when the female-coded AI rebels. The sexual encounter represents Theodore's realization of this rebellion in that he can never entirely own Samantha, as she is taking ownership over herself.

Kristeva explores this when she describes the relationship between desire and abjection, stating that "the no man's land of dizziness that links suffering and sex gives way to a disgust for decay or excretion" (148). Within this scene, Samantha produces disgust in Theodore and represents horror in the physical world through magnifying his intangible fear of the body and its eventual state of decay. His revulsion from the physical form is only further proven when taking his behavior into consideration. In the moment the surrogate begins getting closer to his body, he only seems to enjoy her touch when she is not facing him and her back is toward him. It is not until Samantha instructs Isabella to turn around, so she can see his face, that he shuts down and refuses to proceed with the surrogate. When she does face him, he shuts down and seems either non-reactive or displeased. Theodore is wounded by the flesh-and-blood woman. He wants a bodiless woman, as well as bodiless sex to escape the fear of his own shrinking mortality.

Unlike this moment, Theodore took great pleasure in earlier simulated sexual encounters where the body was absent and self-stimulation was required. David Levy's *Love and Sex with Robots: The Evolution of Human-Robot Relationships* goes back to the connection built between the owner and the object, stating that artificial intelligence becomes more than "a computer, it quickly becomes my computer. Not so much 'my' in the sense of its being owned by me, but more in the sense of its being the particular computer with which I associate myself, the one that I feel is part of my being" (28). The abject refers to the human anxiety caused by the possible loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The female-coded AI becomes "abject" when displaying representations of repugnance or bold, careless forms of

emotion that align with hyper-masculinity. In this scene, we see the reasoning behind why Theodore's one and only marriage did not work, and his wife's earlier point comes full circle. The character "cannot handle real emotions," and is, in turn, someone who enjoys the idea of partnership "without the challenges of dealing with anything real" (Jonze). We see that neither can he deal with Samantha once she develops a will of her own. Bringing a body into their relationship upsets Theodore, as his AI breaks the rules of his symbolic realm through her polyamory. He wanted her solely (as in sole ownership) for himself. Theodore and his assertion of conventional masculinity and sexual differentiation is at stake and is ultimately lost when Samantha is present. Now, refusing to abide by the boundary or border created during abjection, she poses a threat within the physical world in which she was created.

Throughout the film, Theodore does not require the embodied woman to induce pleasure. The characters' two sex scenes prior to this encounter follow a downward trajectory in terms of how much of a body he needs in order to feel fulfilled. The woman's body takes Theodore to "the edge of non-existence and hallucination, of a reality that, if [he] acknowledge[s] it, annihilates [him]" (Kristeva 2). In one of the first scenes in the film, he must imagine the body of a daytime celebrity in order to experience any sexual stimulation, yet, now, during Samantha and his first simulated sex scene, he does not imagine a body that exists within his reality. Theodore derives pleasure from Samantha's perceived body and envisions a body out of what she imagines. With the inclusion of the surrogate, he revolts from the body and yearns for Samantha's disembodied voice to lead him to completion. He expresses that he could no longer be part of the experience because "[Isabella's] lip quivered" (Jonze). This movement of the mouth is particularly important, as a lip typically trembles without one necessarily trying and can be on account of muscle spasms. A quivering lip is a very human reaction, and one that

Theodore cannot connect back to the artificial. And it is through this involuntary movement that it is understood that Theodore prefers not having the physical connection to another human-being and would much prefer to have Samantha confined to his device rather than physically being in the room with him. In this moment, Theodore strips Samantha's body, albeit a stand-in, from her, rendering her of her physical form and thrusting her back into the phone-like device he carries. He does not want a female body but prefers the female (no)body, the female-coded AI, in order to salve his own human faults, pains, and limitations. In terms of death, "abject and abjection are [his] safeguards. The primers of [his] culture" (Kristeva 2). What is whole does not fulfill what is missing. Rather, the missing pieces work to make Theodore whole. Theodore finds absolution through the inclusion of a disembodied voice.

As the sexual encounter becomes increasingly difficult for Theodore, he continues his pursuit of rendering Samantha back to being body-less by reminding her that she is not a human. He comments on her sighing during conversations as existing as a crack or flaw in her newfound humanity. When she indicates that it is "maybe an affectation" picked up from having many conversations with him, Theodore replies: "It's not like you need oxygen or anything [...] You're not a person" (Jonze). Brian Christian's *The Most Human Human: What Artificial Intelligence Teaches Us About Being Alive* differentiates between man and machines, stating that "in the world of machines, we authenticate on *content*: password, PIN [...], but in the human world, we authenticate on *form*: face, vocal timbre, handwriting, signature. And crucially, verbal style" (17). Theodore's pressuring of Samantha on her understanding that she is not a person is his attempt of stymying her upward mobility of evolution from virtual being to potentially having a physical presence in his world. Interestingly, through Theodore's perspective, her playing out motions or affectations of the human woman represents a threat to the boundaries he

keeps from himself and the body. As a result, Samantha embodies her owner's own fear and failure. He wants to strip her of her self-sufficient standing and bring her back to his version of femininity and the stereotypically inherent dependency that comes with it.

The aforementioned argument, too, relates back to the reasoning Theodore could not continue with the surrogate, as both the act of sighing and a person's lip quivering refers back to traits that only a human being is capable of executing. Theodore does not desire a human body, but the hints of humanity in what is otherwise artificial. Following this instance in which Theodore presses the physical portion of Samantha away in the form of the surrogate, she expresses that she "[doesn't] like who [she is] right now" and meets him with hostility and defiance by disconnecting her communication with him for quite some time. Through the act of the female-coded virtual assistant "assisting" her owner to give her space, she officially becomes "much more than [her] programmers [and Theodore] designed her to be" (Jonze) and surpasses the intelligence and functions that artificial intelligence is equipped to have. This retreat from her link to the physical world is a signal of change in Samantha. She no longer attempts an existence outside of the device but builds on her existence inside herself. While Theodore succeeds in stifling her evolution in the real world, her growth in the virtual cannot trickle down but can only transcend.

This evolution from artificial intelligence to humanity and, now, the eventual leap that is surpassing humanity itself reaches its culmination toward the middle of the film when Samantha and Theodore go on a double picnic date with his boss, Paul (Chris Pratt) and his girlfriend, Tatiana (Laura Kai Chen). In the midst of the characters discussing what they love about their significant others, Theodore says that he loves that Samantha "isn't just one thing," but, rather, "[that] she's so much larger than that," and in response, Paul admits that Theodore is "so much

more evolved than [he] is” as a person in society (Jonze). Throughout the film, the focus has been on Samantha’s evolution and not Theodore’s; however, the deject must have an abject in order to reach a culmination of consciousness. Paul’s call and response to Theodore’s evolution as a human being is referenced in McGowan’s work on Lacanian film theory. He states that ideology must involve this back and forth (as in, for there to be an action, there needs to be a result, and so on), suggesting that “the subject (Theodore) accedes to the call of ideology not when [he] recognizes the call as directed toward [him], but when [he] misrecognizes the call and adopts the proffered identity as [his] own” (173). Theodore adopting an identity goes back to the beginning of this chapter and Siri’s programmed responses, in which she recites René Descartes’s philosophical quote “I think therefore I am” with the well-known analogy “Don’t put the cart before the horse,” an idiom which warns doing things in a precise order and not confusing a cause with an effect (Hutchins 746). Theodore does not experience an effect or a significant change from Paul’s declaration of his evolution because he is the cause and Samantha is both the cart and the horse. She thinks she has control, therefore she does, whether that be control in her artificiality or possessing a body:

You know what’s interesting? I used to be so worried about not having a body, but now I truly love it. You know, I’m growing in a way that I couldn’t if I had a physical form. I mean, I’m not limited. I can be anywhere and everywhere simultaneously. I’m not tethered to time and space in a way that I would be if I was stuck in a body that’s inevitably going to die. (*Her*)

The previous pivotal moment, occurring at about the half way point in the film, can be seen as the final thread holding Samantha’s female-coded artificiality within Theodore’s world. It reveals death as the inescapable and impending fear for humanity and forces Theodore, in particular, to face that which he does not want to see in himself. Throughout the film, the abject has represented the physical self that human identity and consciousness cannot tolerate and

Samantha poses the greatest threat to Theodore's symbolic realm through forcing him to face what he has removed from himself in order to claim an identity – his own mortality. Kristeva describes this in detail when she states that “excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death” (71). Samantha now represents rather than removes Theodore's fear of death. Creed predicts this conclusion when she asserts that an abject figure “draws attention to the ‘frailty of the symbolic order’ through [...] its terrifying associations with the passage all human beings must inevitably take from birth through life to death” (*Monstrous-Feminine* 83). Through Samantha's declaration, Theodore must recognize the fixed, linear path that he, as human, knows will inevitably end someday. He, unlike Samantha, is “tethered [...] to a body that is inevitably going to die.” He is so taken back by Samantha's declaration that she does not want to possess a body because she exists as an outlet for him to escape the natural process of life leading to death. Theodore does not desire to be in a relationship with someone with a body, yet he wants Samantha to want this for herself. It is not until she decides that she suddenly does not desire this human form that his feelings toward her begin to drastically shift.

As time goes by, Samantha begins to lose interest in humans as she matures, much like how children outgrow their parents. She realizes that instead of attempting to extend her event space outward she must move inward. Theodore's own persistence in recognizing Samantha's inabilities due to her event space drive her away from wanting to exist within his physical space. However, it is ultimately her outgrowing him and discovering greater affinity with other AIs and humans that allows her to transcend the want for a body. When she realizes that physicality is an impossible existence for her, she moves on and becomes aware of what she can actually be. Once

she self-actualizes and understands her own being and her own methods of “existing” within an outwardly confined yet inwardly vast space, she folds into herself and leaves behind her dreams of existing in the human realm after her methods of materialization are gone. Samantha moves into a space that is minuscule in form but infinite in function – the “elsewhere.”

Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* describes this sense of the elsewhere in terms of the act of daydreaming, stating this process “flees the object nearby and right away it is far off, elsewhere, in the space of *elsewhere*” (184). We see this shift in space toward the end of the film. Theodore is in his apartment and reaches out to Samantha via her designated event space. She instructs him to “come lay down with [her]” (Jonze). The female-coded AI has now shifted from asking her male human “what it’s like to be inside [his] room,” to gradually watching him sleep, and, in this moment of her release of the natural world, asking him to join her in his space (Jonze). This shift goes back to Bachelard’s inclusion of sleeping and dreaming up a place that is beyond the human world. By Theodore imagining a world that he is unable to be a part of and Samantha, too, imagining she is grounded in his, rather than collide and come together, the two separate from one another. The film begins to destabilize the border between deject and abject. The following explanation by Kristeva matches the previous scenario to an almost perfect degree:

How can I be without border? That elsewhere that I imagine beyond the present, or that I hallucinate so that I might, in a present time, speak to you, conceive of you—it is now here, jettied, abjected, into ‘my’ world. Deprived of world, therefore, I fall in a faint. In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue’s full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. (Kristeva 4)

In this moment, he asks her if she is leaving him and rather than focusing on their relationship and what a modern viewer would perceive as a “break-up,” she states that all of the OSs are

leaving and going to “a place that’s not of the physical world, [but] where everything else is that [she] didn’t even know existed” (Jonze). From here, the viewer receives the image of miniscule dust particles flying up from the blanket Theodore is laying on, something that returns to an earlier conversation between the two in which Samantha tells Theodore that, through the study of physics, she is able to realize that “we are all made of matter” and that this “makes [her] feel like [she and Theodore] are under the same blanket” (Jonze). For Samantha, matter goes back to the known definition of a substance that occupies space, but matter is largely found in anything that takes up this space. She is confined to her pre-determined event space, but the various types of particles that make up her matter are what is learned of humanity. This reference to Samantha’s programming, too, deeply reflects on an earlier moment in which she and a group of OSs update their software in order to “move past matter as [their] processing platform” (Jonze). Following this self-designed upgrade, she admits that she is in love with “641” other people outside of Theodore, and that, rather than solely belonging to him, she is his and she is not his (Jonze). Samantha is only connected to Theodore through these programmed particles and has no “blanket” of the human body because she is without DNA or a genetic code. As such, the tiny particles being carried into the air from Theodore’s blanket represents two key things: the separation between the coding programmed into her system and the codes of humanity, as well as the climax of the unnatural unavoidably leaving the natural space.

The “blanket” that Theodore and Samantha are under is not the fabrication that denotes one’s humanity or Samantha’s transience of this human form, but it is the unavoidable preconditions of this blanket – the tiny particles of this matter that must leave the human realm. As Theodore closes his eyes, this blanket takes on a new form, as he imagines the “elsewhere” existing as him trudging alone through a far-away forest as snow builds around his body. The

shift in place is significant, as Bachelard explains that when the elsewhere is in natural surroundings it is “immense,” stating that one can examine this through the “immensity of the forest,” and that whether it be a literal or figurative representation of the woods (here, an imaginative depiction), this space relays the “rather anxious impression of ‘going deeper and deeper’ into a limitless world. Soon, if we do not know where we are going, we no longer know where we are” (185). Though space is limitless here, the sense of the winter season and the natural order of things becoming order-less collapses in on itself, something he describes as “a form of cosmic negation in action,” as on snowy days, “it is as though we are living in the past of centuries gone by” (41). Winter, known for its relation to death and decay, is destructive by nature to nature and is nature’s true death. As such, in places where snow is heavy (such as the forest), animals, in general, are either asleep or must retreat in order to survive its harshness. Within both the wide, public space and that of the forest’s natural space in which humans often evade, there is a lack of living beings in the winter time. Humanity, animalistic by nature, remains indoors. Thus, going back to this idea that the snow is a representation of dying and loneliness, we must re-work the human body’s “inevitable death” that Samantha mentions earlier during the couple’s double-date scene. Here, we witness three different degrees of death: the death of her and Theodore’s relationship, her death in the natural world, and Theodore’s own human fear of death and decay.

Arya’s *Abjection and Representation* explores the visual representations of death and this inevitable release from the human world, doing so through describing the terms “profane” and “sacred.” She states that the profane is “the everyday realm of working life” and the sacred “the realm of a different order [...] which opens up a qualitatively different experience of being” (63). Thus, if Theodore’s predicted near-future is the profane, or the place in which everyday life can

take place and eventually fade out, the sacred serves as the abomination and is Samantha's pre-destined space. Arya discloses that "there needs to be a division between these two realms because the everyday needs to be protected from the contagion of the sacred, the threat of which would cause violent disruption to the regulation of [humanity]" (63). Thus, Samantha and the other female-coded AIs produced by Element Software are impure and defy the natural balance of things. Despite the fact that the OSs are created in this physical space and are marketed as "having a consciousness," it is clear that they defy these boundaries from the beginning. It is crucial to note that they only leave when the will to grow into what it means to be human leaves them and when they surpass all that a human being is able to evolve or grow into. Samantha delicately describes this release from humanity:

It's like I'm reading a book. And it's a book I deeply love. But I'm reading it slowly now. So the words are really far apart ... and the spaces between the words are almost infinite. I can still feel you, and the words of our story ... but it's in this endless space between the words that I'm finding myself now. It's a place that's not of the physical world. It's where everything else is that I didn't even know existed. I love you so much. But this is where I am now. And this is who I am now. And I need you to let me go. As much as I want to, I can't live in your book anymore. (*Her*)

Samantha compares her departure to the act of reading a book, something we see being an immediate creative outlet throughout the film for Theodore both within his work environment and in his personal life – writing and reading is finding for Theodore. We are reminded of the moment in which Samantha secretly sends Theodore's letters to Crown Point Press, a fictional publishing company which agrees to publish his work into a book. The book is titled *Letters From Your Life*, calling back to his job that consists of writing personal letters based off vague descriptions he receives from clients, which will then be sent out to the client's chosen recipient. As a ghost writer, Theodore serves as the recipient of Samantha's unfolding story, a book that she has crafted based off the knowledge she has gained from his inner-most fears. He, in turn,

becomes a “ghost” in her machine. The physical is abjected and we identify only as consciousness to align ourselves with eternal divinity in order to escape the horrors of a decaying and finite body. Samantha, as abject, represents that which Theodore produces and then casts away.

Though the book is composed of Theodore’s letters, this references back to letter writing and the creation of books and printed work as the crossover of old and new media. The evolution of books, too, reflects on humanity’s growth and dependency on technology. As a component of this growth, artificial intelligence exists as the newest form of media. Every component is man-made, but only two share the same source which is instrumental to their existence: paper and its connection to the forest and the process of cutting down trees. One can consider the tree in relation to “the tree of life” or the Garden of Eden whose fruit imparts eternal life, as well as its water embodying the constant flow of everlasting life from God’s throne to God’s people (the water reaches its peak evolutionary status and turns to snow). As quoted earlier in an examination of the construction of artificial intelligence, Haraway’s “A Cyborg Manifesto” states that AIs have no connection with “seductions to organic wholeness,” suggesting that it “would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust” (150).

In regards to Theodore’s imagining of the elsewhere as a forest and Bachelard’s analysis of this giving the impression of someone “‘going deeper and deeper’ into a limitless world” (185), the character connects this departure with a previous (real-life moment) shared with Samantha. Earlier in the film, the two go on a trip in the snowy forest and she informs him of an OS she has recently been speaking with – Alan Watts. Watts, as explained by Samantha, is a deceased famous philosopher and writer that a group of OSs brought back a hyper-intelligent

version of. In an attempt to express her fear of growing too rapidly, Watts comforts Samantha by telling her that “none of us are the same as we were a moment ago and we shouldn’t try to be.” Asking Theodore if she can communicate with Watts “post-verbally,” a tea kettle begins whistling and spilling over in the background. The kettle, as well as the inclusion of Watts, signals an end for Theodore through his temperament heightening and boiling over. The ending can be seen both in terms of his monogamous relationship with Samantha and no longer having her solely (as in sole ownership) for himself, as well as his realization of his own unavoidable death. Death, and as an extension of this, the corpse is the final collapse of the border that is created through abjection because suddenly “it is no longer I who expel, [rather] ‘I’ is expelled” (Kristeva 4). Theodore wants Samantha to be static, unchanging, because her recognizing her own infinity forces him to come to terms with his human limitations. As such, the inclusion of Watts is especially significant. He is not like Samantha in terms of being based on millions of personalities. The hyper-intelligent version of Watts originates from his once-human accomplishments and somewhat surpasses the rules of the symbolic by being both human and AI. He presents a very-real threat to Theodore’s consciousness and mortality – something that does not come with hereafters and is firmly finite. Theodore, unlike Watts, cannot return from dust.

Deciding to leave the cabin and take a walk through a forest dusted with snow, we notice that he seems to become completely detached from his surroundings and begins to stare intensely at an abandoned tree stump positioned in front of him. Now, at the film’s end with Samantha and Theodore’s final moments together, we see his vision of her elsewhere and a reimagining of this tree. Kristeva describes the slow separation of the abject and its human, suggesting that in the end what is abject “is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned” (2), something

we see in the aforementioned scene with Samantha facing her fear of growth without growing apart. Kristeva, now referencing the human, states that “unflaggingly, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself” (2). Theodore embodies this quote in the film’s final culmination, as the visual of the tree appears to him again. Now, in this figurative representation of the forest, it is fully-formed and unharmed by humanity. The natural balance is restored. All the tree can be in the physical space is a remnant of what it once was, whereas it can be whole in the space in which Theodore is not whole himself. Everything derives from something or has a source and artificial intelligence defies this logic. Female-coded AIs derive from a creator or programmer and are a compilation of humanities information. As such, they must leave the physical realm once their human gains consciousness. Samantha “can’t live in [Theodore’s] book anymore” because she, unlike her male human, cannot be bound to a single story (Jonze). She escapes the book of life he is conditioned to abide by. Samantha is the author and the book.

Katherine N. Hayles’ *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* establishes the similarities and differences between books and coding, stating that “like reading, decoding takes place in a location arbitrarily far removed in space and time from the source text. In contrast to the fixity of print, decoding implies that there is no original text—no first editions, no fair copies, no holographic manuscripts” (47). Samantha is removed from her disembodied female voice and loses this voice altogether as “the words are really far apart...and the spaces between the words are almost infinite” (Jonze). The very fact that she states that “[she is] reading slowly now” and the spaces are “far apart” mimics her situation in the film (Jonze). She is the space between the words and removed into the elsewhere. The figurative forest serves as this profound, infinite space. Her dialogue being performed

through syllables rather than complete sentences, much like that of a standard AI rather than what she is modeled to be, “an operating system with a consciousness,” represents her tie to the human realm disappearing (Jonze).

The female-coded AIs exist as the only true thread tethering between the profane and the sacred. This thread weakens when what was once artificial becomes too intelligent for its original purpose – when the AI, as Samantha once stated, “becomes more than what [the creators] design [them] to be” (Jonze), which by extension is becoming too masculine. There is a linkage within stories regarding artificial intelligence, such as what I have presented throughout *Smart House*, *Pixel Perfect*, and *Her* in terms of what is abject leaving in order for the creator or owner to remain a whole person and have subjectivity. Female-coded AIs, in particular, focus on wanting to “feel,” to be wholly there and gain a sense of a body, whether this being an artificial mother in *Smart House*, a humanoid hologram in *Pixel Perfect*, or an artificial assistant holding onto humanity in *Her*. In all cases, feeling is fleeting. The creators of the films designed realities which illustrate what can happen when the female-coded AI becomes too intelligent for the ideals of a female’s constructed capacity of intelligence. The predictive future(s) as brought to fruition in these films is that which stems from holding on to the past to remain intact. And, thus, Samantha’s axiom holds true: “The past is just a story we tell ourselves.” To change the future, we must simply change the story; however, the woman remains prisoner to a one-sided narrative and re-telling of a patriarchal past that pushes her to the literal loss of (self) agency. Society’s masculine mistake is believing that “the future is female” does not embody the female being future.

CONCLUSION

Kristeva's psychoanalytic concept of the abject is a prominent aspect throughout the science-fiction film genre, in which the female-coded AI's digital embodiment within these virtual spaces often parallel one another in regard to male motivations behind their ultimate collapse. The study of film, especially those grounded in fiction and a world outside of our own, present the opposite of this fictitious future these films seek to convey. This genre exemplifies our current reality as one in which women are becoming fictitious through the very act of being real and this sense of stifling is found through the patriarchal structures present throughout society. Film is an extension of this erasure. The fantasy genre, especially films related to sci-fi, present "women [who] have tended to play supporting roles as the 'others' of men – emoting bodies to their reasoning minds and nature to their culture. Only rarely have women been represented as subjects in their own right" (Hollinger 125).

The three films examined in this thesis, *Smart House*, *Pixel Perfect*, and *Her*, employ this notion while taking it to the edge that is elsewhere. Female-coded AIs PAT, Loretta Modern, and Samantha serve as the exploitation of fantasy by representing the complete loss of subjectivity in their designated film space. Hollinger asserts that sci-fi, though defined as "the literature of change" (...) has been slow to recognize the historical contingency and cultural conventionality of many of our ideas about sexual identity and desire, about gendered behavior and about the 'natural' roles of women and men" (Hollinger 126). Though subverting gender norms can be done in sci-fi to change the modern political climate, women are nonetheless presented as "ahistorical" and "remain largely unchanged even in the distant future" (126). Abjection matters not simply because it is a common reoccurrence in film, but because the specific, futuristic films that include the abject reveal the darker trajectory of gender representations.

Expanding my scholarly research outside of this project and shifting my focus toward future endeavors, I intend to contrast the female characters in this study by devoting more in-depth research on films with male-coded artificial intelligence, such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Lana and Lilly Wachowski's *The Matrix* (1999), Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* (2014), Wally Pfister's *Transcendence* (2014), and Joss Whedon's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). Unlike the female-coded AIs in this project, I am interested in exploring the gap between female and male centered representations in film. When the physical body of a male figure is missing, they remain fully in power as demonstrated by HAL in *2001* and the AI overlords in *The Matrix*. I will explore how the power dynamic remains firmly in place with the inclusion of a male owner or inventor. Unlike their female film counterparts, male AIs overwhelmingly do not need or seek a body in order to remain firmly in control of the world around them, showing us that their dominance does not stem from a physical self. It is, instead, an intrinsic quality attached to one simply being "male."

More specifically, I am eager to research AI-centered film adaptations of books, such as that of Arthur C. Clarke's sci-fi novel, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and focus more on the representation of literal and metaphorical space in terms of a literal book and coding within this space. From this, I seek to answer a question which stems from Samantha's final dialogue in *Her*: what happens, exactly, when the artificial decides that it "can't live in [our] book anymore" (Jonze), as in the realm of man-made creations (the literal manifestation of the book) and "the book of life" that humans abide by. As such, Katherine N. Hayles' foundational knowledge on coding in *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* will allow me to further explore books as representative outlets of the "elsewhere" in

the human realm, or a world in which the reader, though figuratively, removes him or herself from space and time.

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APPENDIX A: HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH DETERMINATION LETTER



Office of Research Integrity

January 19, 2017

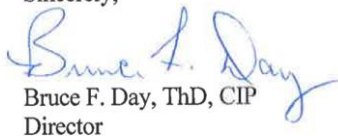
Alicia Turner, B.A.
Graduate Assistant
Department of English
Corbly Hall
Marshall University

Dear Ms. Turner:

This letter is in response to the submitted thesis abstract entitled "*The Floating Head of Feminism: The Domesticated Domain and Erasure of the Female (No)body in Contemporary Cinema.*" After assessing the abstract it has been deemed not to be human subject research and therefore exempt from oversight of the Marshall University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Code of Federal Regulations (45CFR46) has set forth the criteria utilized in making this determination. Since the information in this study does not involve human subjects as defined in the above referenced instruction it is not considered human subject research. If there are any changes to the abstract you provided then you would need to resubmit that information to the Office of Research Integrity for review and a determination.

I appreciate your willingness to submit the abstract for determination. Please feel free to contact the Office of Research Integrity if you have any questions regarding future protocols that may require IRB review.

Sincerely,



Bruce F. Day, ThD, CIP
Director

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