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INFO I101

Onesti/Paul

*Westworld* Review

*Westworld* was a movie made in 1973 that was certainly way before its time. It is set in the not so distant future at a resort called Delos. Delos has 3 realistic worlds: West World, Medieval World, and Roman World. All the worlds have lifelike robots that roam around and interact with the vacationers, even sexually. Two friends, Peter and John, decide to go to West World for 2 weeks. When they arrive, everything is normal. They are put in a hotel in the old west. The town is just like a town in the old west. There are bank robberies, salons, gunfights, and horses everywhere. Peter even shoots the android gunslinger during a bar fight. Peter and John both have one-night stands with the local prostitutes at the saloon. None of the guests are supposed to ever get hurt at West World. The human and animal robots are programmed to never actually hurt the guests. The guests have guns with temperature sensors that will not fire at anything with a high body temperature. The resort begins to have problems though. The robots begin to stop functioning properly and a virus is seeming to spread amongst them. The first sign that something was wrong was when John was bitten by a rattlesnake, injuring his arm. Then the next sign something was wrong when a robot knight killed a guest in Medieval World during a duel. It is then that the technicians and scientists in the control room realize something is wrong and try to shut down the power at Delos entirely. But the robots run on battery power. So, carnage ensues – the robots begin killing guests. John is shot and killed by the returned gunslinger. Peter narrowly escapes the gunslinger and rides off on a horse, chased by the gunslinger. The gunslinger hunts Peter out of West World and into Roman world where he finds that everything has gone wrong. He locates a tunnel down to the control room where he discovers that all the technicians have suffocated because the electronically controlled doors could not be opened. The gunslinger eventually tracks him down to the control area using his advanced optical tracking. Peter hides in plain sight as an android an operating table and throws acid on the gunslinger’s face, buying him some time. He escapes into Medieval World with the gunslinger hot on his tail. The gunslinger’s vision has been damaged by the acid, so he must use his thermal sensors to find Peter. Peter hides underneath flaming torches, eventually using them to light the gunslinger on fire when he does not realize Peter is standing right in front of him. Peter runs off into the dungeon and the burned gunslinger attacks him but succumbs to the fire damage. The movie ends with a close up on Peter’s face and the slogan, “Boy, have we got a vacation for you!”

*Westworld* certainly held my attention the entire time! It was not too much science fiction for me and was a very interesting concept. The old filter of 1973 was also something I enjoyed because I like old movies. I think that a resort like this would be fun, but I probably would have enjoyed the comforts of Roman World a bit more than West World. The movie started with an intriguing hook of the customer testimonials of Delos. Then, when Peter and John finally got to West World, it was amusing to see how John was an old hand in the town and Peter was just learning. The funniest moment, in my opinion, was when they were at the bar, John ordered a whiskey and Peter ordered a “Vodka Martini on the rocks with a twist of lemon, very bright, please.” The bartender gave him a funny look and John stepped in and said, “He’ll take a whiskey.” It was then the real intrigue happened when the gunslinger made fun of Peter and Peter shot and killed him. Then you knew West World had the potential to be dangerous. Even at the start of the movie, you knew something was going to go wrong with the android because if not there would be no plot. When the guest at Medieval World began dueling with the knight, you knew the knight was going to kill him because the snake had just bit John and things had been going wrong with the robots before. The scientist and technicians certainly should have aired on the side of caution and shut the park down at the first sign of something being wrong. They would have saved tons of lives. I wonder what the real-world repercussions from West World would have been and the countless lawsuits that would have ensued. It is no wonder HBO made a series around *Westworld* because it truly was intriguing.

I do not think West World is very feasible, even today. Android robots today still cannot entirely replicate a human – though they may try. Technologies that have been developed like Sophia, the talking android robot, that are close to being human, but not convincing enough. Even if the technology was there to create something like this, the costs and legal implications would be insurmountable. Having guest duel with knights and shoot local gunslingers is dangerous, even with the guarantee that it is not dangerous. Though the robots probably would not rise up like in the movie, the park would certainly run into malfunctions with the robots and actions from the guests that would cause problems. Also, the sexual aspect of West World would not be allowed under the U.S. government and I’m sure some people would just go for the sex. I do think a virtual reality version of West World is feasible though. The user could have VR glasses and probs like guns that they use to navigate West World. The people could be programmed to look humanlike and interact with the guests without the potential for harm. The costs for this would be tenfold less than actually creating this world. Moreover, it could be a computer or phone game that you play. Similar versions of this like Red Dead Redemption 2 have already been created. An actual version of West World is a long way away and will probably never happen because of the legal, monetary, dangerous, and unnecessary implications that come with it.

**Question 1: Westworld sits somewhere along the line through the Uncanny Valley. Describe where the park, and its robots, sits for you and explain why you feel that way.** Japanese Robotics engineer Masahiro Mori first coined the phrase Uncanny Valley saying the more human his robots appeared the more people reacted positively to them. However, when the robots can very close to humans, but not enough to be convincing – people found them to be visually revolting (Mashable). In this movie, the supposed androids were played by real humans. So, for me, West World actually sits right next to a “Healthy Person” on the Uncanny Valley graph as shown in an I101 lecture (Onesti). The unhuman like hands made the robots easily identifiable, but hands are not something that I notice when looking at a person. The one thing that puts the androids just below “Healthy Person” on the Uncanny Valley is their silver eyes. The silver eyes of the gunslinger, prostitutes, and other townspeople made them easily identifiable. But, they were still enough to be convincing as people. The fact that the prostitutes were able to engage in sexual activity with John and Peter made them even close to the top of the Uncanny Valley graph. But, the androids were programmed not to be able to hurt the guest so this once again pushes them down towards the uncanny valley. As for the town, it was very realistic. It looked like the old west would back in the day. The only thing that would put it in the Uncanny Valley is that you could walk right out of it and go to Roman World and Medieval World. If I were to wake up in West World, it would be very hard to realize what I was in was not real. But, the silver eyes of the robots would probably make me realize the situation…

**Question 2: How does the control room in Westworld try and seem futuristic? Do you think it was a good attempt? Why or why not? Are there other places in the park that attempt to seem futuristic and succeed or fail at that aim?** The control room certainly tried to have a futuristic effect – at least for the 1970s. There we so many lights and buttons, why couldn't a computer-operated module be used for those buttons. The computers in the control room were absolutely massive, it looked like the computers used at NASA’s launch control during the first mission to the moon. The movie should have followed Moore’s law though if they wanted to get in entirely right. According to a New York Times Article, “Moore’s law says that we should expect the speed and capability to increase every two years and we will pay less for them” (Markoff). In 1973, Moore’s law had just originated so it would be hard to understand how small and cheap computers could get. They should have looked at earlier computers, like the Mark II we talked about in class (Onesti). Relative to the Mark II, computers in 1973 were much smaller and powerful. They should have studied these earlier examples and used them as a model for smaller computers in the movie. The entire control area of the movie tried to be futuristic. The walls were eggshell white and the hostess all wore white, all speaking in repetitive complementary phrases that amused guests. The android had futuristic wiring that probably did hit the mark as to what the inside of an android might look like in the future. But, the androids were too far outside of the Uncanny Valley because they were played by humans. Even today, it is impossible to make androids that perfectly replicate humans like in the movie. They should have given them another distinguishing feature instead of their hands to show that they were not humans. Overall, the movie did do a good job trying to be futuristic, but it is hard when you live in the past!

**Question 3: Would you ever go to a park like Westworld? If so, why; if not, why not?** In an I-101 lecture titled “Problem Solving” talked about Cognitive Biases and how they might affect our thinking when it comes to problem solving (Onesti). A lot of those cognitive biases have serious implications. In the movie, one of those biases reared its head – or stuck its head in the ground. The Ostrich Effect is, “The decision to ignore dangerous or negative information by ‘burying’ one’s head in the sand, like an ostrich” (Lebowitz). The Ostrich Effect is exactly why I would not visit West World. The scientists and technicians knew about the problems of the androids and instead of closing the park or systematically fixing the problem decided to “bury their heads in the sand” and ignore the problem. John being aggressively bitten by a snake should have been their first indication something was gravely wrong. But they choose to put profits over people and paid for it with their own lives. If I think if I were to visit the park and something were to go wrong with the androids, the scientists may succumb to the ostrich effect. Then, my life is in danger. If assurances were in place that they would shut down the park if something was wrong, I might visit. Even then, it is hard to shut down the park and give up the $1000 a day from the customers. But in general, I think it is way too dangerous to visit a place like West World, Roman World, or Medieval World.

**Question 4: In what ways does the park humanize the robots? Do you think it is ethical to humanize robots? Should there be limits to humanization of robots?** The park humanizes robots by giving them jobs, purposes, and the ability to interact as a human would with guests. But their eyes and hands give away that they are actually robots. Also, their programming to never hurt humans gives away that they are robots – until that programming goes wrong. In an I101 lecture called Technoethics, we talked about ethics are a “set of concepts and principles that guides us in determining what behaviors helps or harms sentient creatures” and how those concepts apply to technology (Onesti). In this case, humanizing robots in West World is not entirely ethical for many reasons. For one, those robots can be exploited sexually. Second, those robots have the potential to be dangerous – and they were! Third, killing a robot that looks like a human could impose real psychological harm onto a person. The ethical question of humanizing these robots is close to another ethical question – deepfakes. According to Tech Top 10, the ability to superimpose someone’s face on to another person’s face can “ruin marriages or interfere with democratic elections” (2020 Top). If West World can make these human-like robots, wouldn’t they eventually make them like a celebrity or athlete on the outside? Perhaps the famous Western actor John Wayne would appear in West World. Would that be ethical without his consent? I think not. Moreover, the potential lies to the guest to kill and sexually abuse robot versions of people they know on the outside. Just like deepfakes, it is certainly not ethical to entirely humanize these robots and there should be limits set by the U.S. government.

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