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VITRUVIUS IN DYSTOPIA OR WHEN MOST HUMANS DON'T MEASURE UP

Michele Kennerly and Jennifer K.L. Buchan

In the second decade of the fifteenth century, the book-hunter Poggio Bracciolini and two friends recognized Vitruvius' *De architectura* among the moldy manuscripts at the monastic library at St. Gall in Switzerland.[1] Although their find was not the first copy of *De architectura* to be identified, the reception of Vitruvius among Italian humanists tends to be afforded special attention in academic, public, and popular culture alike. Commonly shuffling at the center of that attention is L'Uomo Vitruviano of Leonardo da Vinci, usually dated to the 1490s. In Italian, and in his famous mirror writing, Leonardo mentions Vitruvius by name in the first word of his notes above his rendering of the *homo bene figuratus* and engages with the content of *De architectura* 3.1.2f. above and below it.[2]

Just as the Vitruvius manuscript located by Poggio and his friends was not the only one, The Vitruvian Man drawn by Leonardo was not the only one.[3] Leonardo's version of a Vitruvian man, however, has become the shared vision of The Vitruvian Man. Perhaps unexpectedly, its familiarity and ubiquity are recent developments. Journalist and author Toby Lester has determined that Leonardo's Vitruvian Man 'remained almost completely out of view' until the renowned art critic Kenneth Clark popularized it in his 1957 best-selling book, *The Nude: A Study in the Ideal Form*; thereafter, 'the picture began reproducing rampantly, in forms both serious and lighthearted, and has been doing so ever since'.[4] To some degree, it owes its current iconic status to its creator, commonly considered the quintessential Renaissance man. Accordingly, Leonardo's Vitruvian Man has been seen to be a visual distillation of the subset of so-called 'classical' physical ideals celebrated by Renaissance humanists: microcosmic harmony, proportionality, and athletic vitality, itself meant to suggest a sound mind animating a sound body. In particular, two qualities of the figure—its multiple limbs, which suggest dynamic motion, and its head-on, steely glare—make it easily recognizable and thus usable and adaptable.

An iconic figure permits of alterations because, so long as the changes do not alter the basic architecture of the original, the figure remains easy to identify. What results from this simultaneously fixed and fluid iconicity is what rhetorician Laurie Gries calls 'the singular multiple image',[5] a concept that acknowledges

1. Gordan (1991), 187–91; Weiskittel and Reynolds (1983).
2. The original drawing is Leonardo da Vinci's 'Study of Human Proportions in the Manner of Vitruvius', in Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, catalogue no. 228. See fig. 5.3.
3. Sgarbi (1993), 40–7.
4. Lester (2012), 219f.
5. Gries (2015), 294.

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multiplicity and variability within an image-set bound by an underlying figural likeness. One need only do a Google Image search for 'Vitruvian Man meme' to see that it is a cultural artifact with legs. Because a given icon also indexes a set of cultural values, icons are used, whether unchanged or altered, to support or subvert those values.[6]

There are countless variants of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, but, in recent years, one has enjoyed a surge in circulation whose initial boost can be traced to the U.S. presidential election of 2016: the promotional poster from the 2006 film *Idiocracy*. 2016 also saw the launch of HBO's *Westworld*, which features Vitruvian-person imagery in its promotional events, opening credits, and in particular episodes throughout its four seasons.[7] *Idiocracy* and *Westworld* are dystopias that visually play on the received perfection of Vitruvian Man to confront the imperfection of the human in their respective worlds.[8] Their Vitruvian Man imagery seems designed to impugn human life as out-of-balance, whether thrown out of whack by centuries of 'degeneration' in *Idiocracy* or by decades of advances in Artificial Intelligence in *Westworld*. Humans in *Idiocracy* and humans who visit *Westworld* are embodiments of moral malformation whose habits and appetites have been shaped largely by corporations. They are humans who do not measure up to The Vitruvian Man, literally or figuratively.

The iterations of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man that feature in the paratexts of and in the screen-texts themselves invite recognition of attitudes toward optimal manhood that derive from the very qualities The Vitruvian Man is considered to display. In both *Idiocracy* and *Westworld*, a white man gains or retains dominance, though white male excellence is figured differently in each world. In a world inhabited and presided over by so-called idiots, an 'average Joe' becomes the model figure. In *Westworld*, where an artificially intelligent humanoid is the physical model of the *homo bene figuratus*, the genius man surrenders his imperfect body and becomes 'pure consciousness', in the form of a master code that redesigns and rules Westworld. Each man comes to govern his respective dystopian world, his sovereignty asserting the power of the mediocre white man in degraded circumstances, on the one hand, and the white mastermind in upgraded ones, on the other.[9]

6. Hariman and Lucaites (2007).

7. The Vitruvian *Idiocracy* poster and the Vitruvian *Westworld* poster from its first season are easy to find through online searches. Gender-wise, as Craig A. Williams (2016), 239, points out of the *homo bene figuratus* in *De architectura*, 'we find the Latin noun denotating a non-gendered human no less than four times in the opening sentences of Book 3 (3.1.1: *hominis bene figurati*, 3.1.2: *corpus hominis*, 3.1.3: *homo*, 3.1.4: *corpus hominis*). And this *homo* has no broad shoulders or upper-body musculature, and certainly no genitals. Instead, we read of a head with its forehead, face, hair, nose, chin; of hands, fingers, palms, and elbows; of a chest (*pectus*); of feet; and of a navel at the center.'

8. Science fiction films have been treated from a classical reception perspective; see, e.g., Rogers and Stevens (2015).

9. The power of white male mediocrity is beginning to garner high-profile critical attention; see, e.g., Oluo (2020).

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The Recirculation of *Idiocracy*

The vernacular (that is, not corporate) recirculation of any film ten years after its release is a fluke of culture. Given that *Idiocracy* was multiply disadvantaged at its release in 2006, its uptake in 2016 gave it a public prominence it had not enjoyed previously. To appreciate both the unlikely recirculation of *Idiocracy* a decade after its theatrical release and how it traffics in Vitruvian imagery requires an understanding of its entry into culture and of the film itself.

On September 1, 2006, *Idiocracy*, a 20th Century Fox Studios film co-written by Etan Cohen and Mike Judge and directed by Judge, was released in seven cities in North America and then more broadly, but to about a fifth of the usual amount of theatres that would receive a Fox Studios film with its budget of $2–4 million.[10] Film critic Jim Emerson, a contributor to the website of the famous film critic Roger Ebert, could not find *Idiocracy* playing anywhere near him and resorted to linking to a blogged review of the film by fellow film critic Dennis Cozzalio.[11] Cozzalio marveled at the lack of promotion the film had received: Fox Studios did not distribute a trailer, take out TV ads, or send out press kits. Critics at the time guessed Fox Studios delayed and then did not promote *Idiocracy* because the film 'satirizes American consumer culture and many prominent corporations'.[12] Critics also remarked on how unsporting it was that Fox Studios would behave that way toward Judge, who had made the studio a lot of money with *Office Space* (1999), albeit mostly from DVD rental fees, and *King of the Hill* (1997–2010).[13] The work of Judge frequently centers a white man of average intelligence, though admittedly two of less-than-average for *Beavis and Butt-Head*, Judge's hit MTV show from 1993 to 1997 that would be reanimated in 2011 and 2022.

The only promotional item for *Idiocracy* Cozzalio was able to find was an 'apparently hastily designed one-sheet' displayed outside the 35-seat cinema at which he viewed the film, and it confused him: 'I had a hard time grasping exactly what the concept of the artwork or the thrust of the advertising campaign *was*.'[14] In *Idiocracy*'s promotional poster, Leonardo's fit and fitting man is replaced by a big-bellied one clad in a tight tank top, boxers, and flip-flops, and holding in his four hands a can of beer, a bottle of wine, a game controller, and a remote control. It is 2006: *ecce homo bene figuratus*! In 2006, that body may have been failing to hold to the contours of 'the ideal man', but it was a body experiencing an era of subversive cultural relevance. By 2006, at least two earlier figures, Homer Simpson and Jeff 'The Dude' Lebowski, the latter

10. Patel (2006).
11. Emerson (2006).
12. Patel (2006); see also Portman (2007); Jones (2021).
13. Garcia (2006).
14. Cozzalio (2006); emphasis in the original. That poster comprised the entirety of the promotional materials, and apparently its print run was so small that the film's own production designer, Darren Gilford, did not track one down until several years later (Jones [2021]).

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of whom the figure in the *Idiocracy* poster resembles (though The Vitruvian Man has similar locks), were well-established icons of slack that challenged conventional measures of masculinity. The description film critic Daniel Garrett offers of The Dude fits Homer and the figure in the *Idiocracy* poster, too: 'a soft, plump, pleasantly lazy, often inebriated or stoned man, a man of no great importance or obvious significance, a middle-age [sic] slacker'.[15] The Dude and Homer do not strive or struggle or aspire, yet they are the indisputable heroes of their own stories, adored by a loyal fanbase, and recognized even by people who do not like them. *Idiocracy*'s promotional poster centers a visually similar figure, using the tell-tale Vitruvian Man configuration to create a juxtaposition between hallowed, idealistic form and irreverent, ostensibly realistic content.

Though Cozzalio does not record having noticed it, the poster adapts an image that appears in the first thirty seconds of the film: Leonardo's Vitruvian Man. The figure leads a rapid visual index for 'Western Civilization' threatened by a 'great replacement'.[16] As the narrator explains, '[a]s the twenty-first century began, human evolution was at a turning point' since natural selection no longer 'favored the noblest traits of man'. The image of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man joins those of Beethoven and then Einstein before disappearing so that Darwin can have the screen to himself. The use of 'man' here, in 2006, to signify 'human' seems something other than lazy writing when the four paragons presented are all men: Leonardo's Vitruvian Man, Beethoven, Einstein, Darwin. Furthermore, throughout the film, 'man' is used for 'human'. That introductory visual series and use of a dated nomenclature for humanity establishes that, for this film, human excellence comes in the form of a singular, light-skinned man.

The film's narrative opens by situating viewers in 2005, when, according to the voiceover narration, the people whose genetic material would improve humanity—and here that explicitly means they have high IQs, college degrees, and wealth—are choosing careers over children. Meanwhile, people with low IQs, no degrees, and no wealth are having lots of children. In the shadow of this 'threat', the U.S. Army is experimenting with 'human hibernation', so that it might freeze-dry its best and brightest, to be awakened in the future when their intelligence would be even more valuable. A one-year trial is to be conducted on a white man, Joe Bauers (played by Luke Wilson), who, according to the narrator, is 'a simple Army librarian about to change the course of human history'. He is chosen, we are told, for how remarkably average he is (think: Average Joe), and we learn that his peers think him cowardly and bookish. Unable to find an average woman among its ranks, the Army goes into the general population, freezing alongside Joe a Black sex worker named Rita (played by Maya Rudolph), who tells Joe she is an artist.

15. Garrett (2022).
16. See Bond (2019).

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The trial goes wrong, and Joe and Rita are buried under 500 years of trash. Joe and Rita are roused from hibernation by the garbage avalanche of 2505, which deposits them in a city not far from Washington, D.C. Throughout the film, many extras and small parts are played by Latinx actors, and even those who are not Latinx have Spanish surnames, usually paired with snack-food or soft-drink first names (e.g., Frito Pandejo, the corn chip + 'dumbass'). Joe is quickly identified as not belonging, because English had 'degraded' so much that, again, according to the narrator, when he spoke, his 'ordinary voice sounded pompous and faggy' and 'effeminate'. Rita, on the other hand, has no trouble fitting in. The outsider Joe is imprisoned, where he undergoes an IQ test, on which he gets 'the highest result ever', thereby attracting the attention of the White House for being 'the smartest man in the world'. President Dwayne Elizondo Mountain Dew Herbert Camacho (played by Terry Crews), a very muscular Black man who was a porn star and champion wrestler before taking office, enthuses over Joe, gushing that Joe will 'fix everything'—by which the President means dire environmental and economic problems—and appointing him Secretary of the Interior. Joe shrugs off this high estimation of his political abilities and investment, saying 'I've never even voted, actually.' Joe's political apathy is another sign of his mediocrity.

The problem to which Joe dedicates his comparatively superior intelligence is crop failure, which he quickly discovers is the result of their being sprayed with a sports drink instead of water. Not long after the plants start to grow, President Camacho appoints Joe Vice President, and then Joe becomes President, marrying Rita and having three baby geniuses. In the galvanizing speech Joe, as President Bauers, delivers at the end of the film, he reminds his fellow Americans that humans used to build boats and write books and watch films critically. He enjoins them to do so again.

In the degraded circumstances in which he finds himself, the Average Joe becomes the model, the measure of man. Physically, he is not noticeably different from the people of the dystopian future, though it would be an interpretive error not to stress Joe's whiteness and thin frame, given that his presidential predecessor is an exaggeratedly strong Black man and many denizens are Latinx. The film's narrative repeatedly underscores that the difference lies in Joe's mental and verbal abilities, unremarkable in his own time but unrivaled in a fallen future.[17]

Though *Idiocracy* earned less than half a million dollars at the box office, it made twenty times that in DVD rental fees.[18] In the years after its release, it

17. Though, as Nichols (2017), ch. 4, has demonstrated, Vitruvius engages amply with concepts from rhetorical culture, the 'figura' of *homo bene figuratus* does not seem to have any connection to rhetorical figures, which were not called *figurae* until Quintilian (e.g., 8.1.1, 8.3.59, 9.1.3, 9.2.7). See also Williams (2016), 236f.

18. Box Office Mojo (2007), rental total as of February 18; accessed August 22, 2018. https://web.archive.org/web/20070310044753/http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?page=homevideo&id=idiocracy.htm.

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gained a cult following. The 2016 U.S. presidential election, however, saw the film move from cult object to cultural touchstone. The adjective most often used of *Idiocracy* from 2015 through 2022 was 'prescient': ostensibly, it shows how unabashedly unintelligent politics (and voters) would become, and much earlier than it forecast.[19] Early analogies compared sound bites from Donald Trump and President Camacho.[20] In January 2016, not long before Iowans caucused, *The Telegraph* ran a piece by Tim Stanley in its Film section entitled 'Donald Trump for president: *Idiocracy* is coming true'.[21] Stanley urged readers to watch the film: 'It's a snobby movie, for sure, but it reflects the direction of travel a lot of people are taking.' The next month, *Idiocracy* co-writer Etan Cohen tweeted, 'I never expected #idiocracy to become a documentary.'[22] By the summer, a piece by Joel Stein, humor columnist for *Time*, used quotes from Trump and those who attended his rallies to assert 'We Have Become an Idiocracy'.[23] The film's Vitruvian poster introduces the piece.

Near the end of Trump's first year in office, 53 of 100 respondents to a Quinnipiac University National Poll prompting respondents to disclose the first word that came to mind when they thought of Trump reported it was 'idiot'.[24] Despite the efforts of some critics to find depth of meaning in that word, which originates from an ancient democracy for whom an *idiōtēs* was someone who did not participate in public life, 'idiot' does its work through much more recent cultural texts.[25] *Idiocracy* kept appearing. In the summer of 2018, The Brattle Theatre and Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation marked the launch of a new podcast called 'This Week in Dystopia: The Promise & Perils of Democracy' with a dystopic film series. First up was *Idiocracy*, designated a 'prescient satire' and twinned with a podcast interview with the film's co-writer Cohen, a Harvard alumnus.[26] At that point, of course, no one knew that Joe Biden, whose name resembles Joe Bauers, would be selected to pull U.S. American democracy back from the brink.

Trump's candidacy and election accelerated the circulation of talk about *Idiocracy*, and such talk concentrates on the crassness and anti-intellectualism of Trump and his supporters. What is largely missing from that talk is concern that the premise and plot resolution of *Idiocracy* rely on dangerous logics of superiority endemic to the scientific racism, classism, sexism, and ableism of

19. Raymond (2016).
20. Bailey (2015).
21. Stanley (2016). *The Telegraph* re-ran this piece on the day after the 2016 election.
22. @etanjc (2016) on (then) Twitter, February 24, 12:27pm, accessed July 2, 2018. https://twitter.com/etanjc/status/702545314733895680?lang=en.
23. Stein (2016).
24. Quinnipiac University Poll (2017), 'American Voters Have Few Kind Words for Trump, Quinnipiac University National Poll Finds; Expel Moore If He Wins, Voters Say Almost 2-1', December 12; accessed August 2, 2018. https://poll.qu.edu/Poll-Release-Legacy?releaseid=2507.
25. Anthamatten (2017).
26. 'Film Series: This Week in Dystopia' (2018), February 8–11; accessed July 2, 2018. https://ash.harvard.edu/event/film-series-week-dystopia.

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the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[27] Not only have those superiority logics not gone away, they also have been amplified violently by Trump and his supporters. By using Leonardo's Vitruvian Man in its opening visual sequence and an adapted iteration on its promotional poster, *Idiocracy* enlisted the figure in the service of those very logics.

The Reveries of *Westworld*'s Vitruvian Man

While Vitruvian Man imagery in and around *Idiocracy* signals the transfiguration of the lackluster white man into the peak human, Vitruvian Man imagery in the 2016 *Westworld* HBO series posits a new rational ideal in the form of the android. In 2016, *Westworld* was HBO's most-watched first season ever, surpassing even the first season views of megahit *Games of Thrones*.[28] The Emmy-nominated main title sequence features repeating iterations of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man with 'hosts' or AI as the fewer-limbed yet easily recognizable replacement for the ideal human from Leonardo's rendering. The overall plot, across all four seasons, plays out a scenario where hosts replace humanity. And yet, enthusiastic viewership of *Westworld* is owed, at least in part, to its express curiosity about what the story of AI can tell us about humans. Sherryl Vint links science fiction's interest in 'human identity' to 'visions of a post-embodied future', which are really 'fantasies about transcending the material realm of social responsibility'.[29] *Westworld*, in its first two seasons, exemplifies Vint's argument: humans visit an android-staffed, $40,000-a-trip adult theme park where humans use, destroy, and reset host bodies without being held accountable for apparent social or physical costs typically incurred by such acts. *Westworld*'s dystopia features an overarching critique of the human excesses of consumption, wealth, and power. Its world is overrun by sleek modern technology, corrupt global companies, and vast wealth discrepancies that support human indulgence such that humans spend decades abusing non-human sentient life for fun. In this dystopia, humanity's mindless consumption has depleted much of the world's resources and amplified violent tendencies in human elites. Naturally, *Westworld*'s Vitruvian Man is not a human man but is, instead, a nude, well-muscled male host, removed from human banality and full of potential. And, in a show where names, places, figures, and episode titles are all deeply symbolic, it is no stretch to observe the central, consistent placement of The Vitruvian Man as both deliberate and key to uniting the sometimes convoluted threads of *Westworld*.[30]

27. One review in 2016 that does express concern with those logics is Johnson (2016). For a discussion of why classical reception needs disability studies, see Silverblank and Ward (2020).

28. Miller (2016).

29. Vint (2007), 7f.

30. See the rest of this section for greater detail about the significance of some of these names and places. Episodes entitled 'The Well-Tempered Clavier', 'Dissonance Theory', 'The Bicameral Mind',

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The show's primary use of The Vitruvian Man mirrors *Idiocracy* insofar as the image's strongest relationship aligns with *Westworld*'s savior in the form of the genius thinker and tinkerer, Robert Ford, played by Anthony Hopkins. In *Westworld*'s first season, Robert Ford is a monstrous villain. Although he seems something of a misandrist in his daily life, he claims to be about the noble task of showing humans not 'who they are', but 'who they could be'. Ford is the co-creator of the Westworld theme park, notorious for writing epic stories that encourage tourists to act out their most sadistic desires on android bodies. In a move that appears most evil, he creates sentient life in the form of androids only to subject them to an eternity spent hosting the 'violent delights' of humans. 'Violent delights' evokes the Friar in *Romeo and Juliet*, who cautions Romeo about unbridled passions, warning 'these violent delights have violent ends.' In *Westworld*, this phrase is an ominous motif that foreshadows an inevitable and devastating comeuppance for the humans who brutalize the park's androids. These humans are tourists and staff in Ford's theme park where androids are the main attraction. Viewers sympathize with the androids as their fluid-covered, devastated bodies pile up each day around calloused human workers who clean the androids from all the rapes and murders, reset their memories, and then send them out the following morning for more. The androids are designed to feel these violations but not remember them, so they may fully experience each day's violence, participate in their own brutalization through their resilient programming, but recall nothing of the trauma upon reset. However, all androids store these events in an inaccessible (to them) location that functions as a useful record of human behavior to the park's designers and marketers.

Eventually, some androids develop anomalous code—fragmented memories called reveries that wake them from programmed complacency. These three primary protagonists are androids whose racialized and gendered appearances align with stereotypical narrative arcs for each: 1) a white gynoid named Dolores who goes from playing the virginal farm girl to a spurned, violated, and vengeful gynoid named Wyatt; 2) a Black gynoid named Maeve who transforms from a savvy madam character to, once awakened, a fiercely protective maternal figure; and 3) a Black man named Bernard who initially seems to be Ford's co-creator and who is unaware of his own android status. The racialization and gendering of these androids is representational while striving to be unremarkable. Historian Alison Landsberg explains this unremarked upon diversity casting as a generic trend, adding, '*Westworld* poses as postracial … Yet race is a covert presence throughout.'[31] Landsberg's analysis details *Westworld's* differential treatment of white and Black androids, but here we focus on the tableau of android protagonists as gendered, racialized creations subsumed under the

and 'Virtù e Fortuna' (to name just a few) encourage a deeper engagement with the philosophies, struggles, and goals of its characters.

31. Landsberg (2018), 200.

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tutelage and eye of their white male creator. They all serve as both backdrop for and legacy of Ford's creative genius, at least until they rebel. These hosts are hunted throughout the first two seasons by The Man in Black, a cynical human man named William who owns the company that owns the park. Seeking 'truth', William enacts the most gruesome acts of violence upon the host bodies, indulging his 'darkness' there so that he can pretend goodness in the human world. William is the human representative in his dueling desire for and hatred of the hosts, and his selfish, desperate quest to 'find meaning'. The first season ends when Dolores-as-Wyatt, suddenly wise to Ford's treachery and able to remember the decades of pain she's endured at the hands of humans like William, shoots her creator in the head. The androids, who now all vividly recall the atrocities humans enacted upon them, then attack and kill all the humans left in the park as darkness falls.

In the second season, Ford becomes the androids' savior. We discover Ford had *programmed* Dolores to kill him. In Spanish, 'Dolores' signifies the Virgin Mary, pain, and sorrow; Dolores is virginal, suffers, and then births a savior by killing Ford. We discover, too, that Ford installed the anomalous code, Ford despised humanity's violent excesses, and Ford divined how to punish humanity for it (overthrow humanity and install his own creations). Although the actual Vitruvian Man is never mentioned by its characters, Ford's warning to the representative of the company funding the park underscores *Westworld*'s preoccupation with human proportionality. Of his violent world, Ford says, 'In the beginning, I imagined things would be perfectly balanced.' But, because the company's 'money men' refuse the 'hopeful storylines' proposed by his partner, Ford realizes that the fake world of Westworld can never be 'in balance' until all grotesque humans are replaced by hosts able to finally enact their 'hopeful' storylines freed of the 'violent delights' of their human users. Ford incites revolution because he believes no one else capable—the humans' 'violent delights' make them egregious violators of proportionality, while the androids' figurative infancy renders them incomplete and in need of direction. Ford, to lead his creations, sacrifices his human form, while uploading his consciousness to a digital cloud in a miracle of new sentience. In his own words, he 'calls forth Lazarus from his cave'. Thus, Ford becomes his own ur-creation, achieving perfection by shedding his literal humanity. His singular purpose in creating the android heaven has been to improve upon the human by rescuing the brain from its dependence upon the body. Ford becomes the deity of this new transhuman world by way of ascendance to a heaven made from his own code. His goal in creating android-heaven is to make the bodily form disposable, a mere vessel for the android mind, freeing the mind from the lusty, greedy failures he perceives in the body's form and content. In this way, the show continually positions the frailty and cruelty of the human against the resiliency and the moral superiority of the host mind. Their body disposability is what liberates host minds to be good—to be free *within* reason.

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As with *Idiocracy*'s lament for the genius creator seen through its aforementioned enshrinement of Leonardo, Beethoven, Darwin, and Einstein, *Westworld*'s relationship with the figure of the genius male creator manifests in Ford. In one intimate moment, Ford tells his androids: 'Mozart, Beethoven, and Chopin never died. They simply became music.' Ford's identification with these virtuosos is not idle. His alignment with such historical figures even reveals itself in his name. As a user of industrial machines to create other usable, world-changing machines, he is quite clearly the heir apparent of iconic American industrialist Henry T. Ford, whose historical figure becomes a deity in yet another science fiction, *Brave New World*.

Attentive viewers might recall that Ford, who loves his creations, inexplicably stokes human violence against androids. We learn that Ford does this for two reasons: he wants the androids to know what humans are capable of, and he is collecting human data. Ford compiles his human data into a dusty digital library in the cloud as a tool for the androids who may wish to wage war on humanity. In later seasons, this human data cloud/android heaven will be known as The Sublime. Maeve, Dolores, and Bernard are all major (but contingent) players in this plan to make humanity redundant, to possess 'real free will', and to make a new heaven and earth for Ford and his androids. However, because they are all beholden to Ford's original design meant to transcend the ills of humanity, the androids cannot possess free will; their forms, their memories, and even their rebellions are all programmed and de/activated according to Ford's will.

Ultimately, the living androids enact their will in accordance with predictable gender and racial stereotypes. Maeve's name indexes a warrior-queen from Celtic mythology whose name translates to 'she-who-intoxicates'. She is depicted as a 'mother-goddess' who 'dominates men, both by the force of her personality and by her sexuality'.[32] Maeve rejects her initial programming as a sex worker and retrieves an older role she played as a mother. In the season two finale, she sacrifices herself for a gynoid child and, later, in the final seasons, for a human child. Bernard, whose Germanic name means 'brave and hardy', manages to evict the digital Ford from his mind because he refuses to murder humans, even when the humans are killing fellow androids. Bernard abhors violence and thus himself once he learns that he has been Ford's most murderous tool. Yet, even in his final rejection of Ford, Bernard fulfills his programming as the moral guide to Ford's too-human pragmatism and cynicism. In the fourth and final season, Bernard continues this path of selflessness, knowingly sacrificing himself for the chance to save any sentient life. And, finally, Dolores-as-Wyatt and, later, Dolores-as-Charlotte relishes her divine mandate to destroy the humans as she births new androids and begins Ford's war on the humans outside the park. In this way, Dolores remains Ford's proxy in that he programs her to not only

32. MacKillop (2004) s.v. 'Medb'.

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avenge the hosts through the eventual enslavement of humanity, she also becomes the essential storyteller for hosts and humans alike, weaving their lives out of Ford's originating imagination and goals.

Ford's transformation from villainous virtuoso to android god is most symbolized in the show's opening credits. *Westworld*'s (fewer-limbed) vision of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man features most prominently in those credits, the show's promotional materials, and lab scenes where android bodies are violated and processed. The Vitruvian Android-Man hangs in nearly every lab background, keeping Ford company as he surveils his creations. In the season one credits, the camera lingers longingly on the weaving of the androids' milky bones. This metal loom uses The Vitruvian Man wheel to secure the androids and to spin them around. Scattered vignettes interrupt the smooth movements of the metal loom to highlight the efficiency of the creations: they play the piano, ride a horse, and, finally, stretch across the familiar wheel where their freshly woven, well-muscled skeleton dips into vats of thick milky goo, coating them in a smooth surface that slowly drips dry, leaving behind creamy white skin.

In the next season's credits, Vitruvian gynoids are included alongside the Vitruvian android, as the machines weave together a female android cuddling a baby. Following the transformation of The Vitruvian Man between the first two seasons allows us to observe three important aspects of its use: 1) The story of The Vitruvian Man when it is a woman. She may be included in the mold, but merely as a nurturing, mothering vessel for masculine proportionality, as a denuded, androgynous white figure, or as a romantic, embracing figure. She is a mother, avenger, and lover, but not the ideal nor the standard human. 2) Who is not The Vitruvian Man. Bernard, as seen in his flawed, unreliable iterability, in his perpetual malleability, in his saintly assistant role, and in the milky whiteness of the baseline Vitruvian android, is never The Vitruvian Man. 3) And, finally, who The Vitruvian Man exemplifies. The Vitruvian Man is bloodless, white, and wholly created by machines. Ford ascends to the digital realm only after he replaced the power of the womb with a creation of his own.[33] Ford replaces

33. This analysis was written for the September 2018 seminar from which the articles in this special issue originate; that is, it was written before COVID and before the runs of *Westworld* season three and four, which opens the show from its containment within the theme park and thrusts Ford's AI into a complicated and, sometimes, convoluted global battle amongst humans and AI. The focus of the circulations of The Vitruvian Man on or near the 2016 election year well organizes our screen-texts, so our analysis hews closely to the narrative events of the first two seasons. Some effort has been made to mention pertinent details from seasons three and four where necessary. The world of season three is different enough that it often appears more loosely inspired by than serial to prior seasons. There are continuities worth noting, however: third season Dolores-as-Charlotte still turns out, in the end, to enact Ford's goals of human reformation and host revolution; Maeve is still a warrior and fixated on saving her daughter; Bernard is still a moral and loyal host who begins to repair his divisions; and Dolores' sacrifice hands a new white man named Caleb, who is mal-adjusted to and ill-served by an algorithmically determined world, the mantle of saving what remains of the world. And, indeed, season four revisits many of the themes from the first two seasons, resulting in human and host annihilation, and rebirth, again, now wholly through the omnipotent figure of Dolores-as-Christina.

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the unpredictable pregnant human body with the controlled, sterile environment of a metal loom, a loom forever after his death to be operated by the digital minds of his design. This man-created, host-centric fantasy of sterility, whiteness, and predictability in the womb contradicts many feminist critiques some critics and fans saw in the diverse representations peeking through the abundant rapes and murders happening to the innocent bodies of *Westworld*'s hosts. Tracking The Vitruvian Man through *Westworld* (and *Idiocracy*) draws our attention to the constraints and excesses of appeals to a shared sensibility of human improvement with an image as familiar and ubiquitous as The Vitruvian Man. In these screen-texts, at least, the persistent success of the few folks who can become or challenge Leonardo's Vitruvian Man betrays its noblest aims.

Iterations of Perfection

Both altered and unaltered iterations of Leonardo's Vitruvian Man enjoy symbolic force in *Idiocracy* and *Westworld* largely because the figure functions as a cultural cast into which is poured anxiety about human excellence; namely, its endurance. What ostensibly threatens human excellence—treated more as virtuosity than virtue, and as white, male, and solitary—in *Idiocracy* and *Westworld* are 'others' becoming dominant, by either sheer number or sheer design strength. The film and the TV show center a white man whose intelligence allows him to become a model figure who can manage the threat. Despite *Idiocracy* and *Westworld* being hailed as ahead of their time, their core stories are not new or forward-thinking cultural narratives.

Iteration speaks to figural movement without conceptual difference. Attending to the iterability of Leonardo's rendering of Vitruvius' *homo bene figuratus* means seeing how a particular composition departs from its pattern without mistaking that departure for an undermining of the original. In many ways, The Vitruvian Man has us boxed in and surrounded.

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