



Visions of Dystopian Futures: A Critical Exploration of the Intersection of AI Technology and Humanity in Sci-fi Narratives

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Abstract

The domain of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has acquired immense significance globally, tracing the trajectory of progress in modern science and technology. While such technological developments bring about incredible and revolutionary transformations, they have their inherent fiascos, causing unexpected and unpredictable mishaps that cannot be averted. The dark aspects of AI technology in recent times have been remarkably represented through the cinematic medium. Drawing on Posthumanist theory, this paper examines how dystopian, sci-fi films such as Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) and Gerard Johnstone's *M3GAN* (2022) employ AI-powered humanoid robots as modern technological monsters whose threat lies not primarily in physical violence but in their potential to replicate human emotions, manipulate social relationships, and destabilize the boundary between human and machine, thereby reflecting contemporary anxieties surrounding technological autonomy, human identity, and the ethical limits of scientific innovation.

Keywords: AI, Technology, Humanoid Robot, Dystopia, Chaos, Humanity, posthuman ethics

Introduction

Throughout human history, from the prehistoric age to contemporary modern times, revolutionary technological innovations and advancements, among other indispensable factors, have influenced and shaped society and mankind. Of such mind-blowing technological discoveries tracing the trajectory of progressive developments, the creation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) seems to have a profound impact globally thereby making a significant mark as one of the biggest discoveries in human history. As a branch of computer science and engineering, AI is a powerful technological contrivance that enables machines to stimulate and imitate advanced human capabilities by using human cognition. Being accustomed to a life circumscribed by an entangling web of advanced technology, most of us prioritize the artificial means to comprehend and resolve all possible complicated issues, not realizing how every moment we are limiting the natural developmental process of our intelligence and cognitive abilities. Stephen Hawking, in an interview, had put forward an insightful perception:

“The development of full artificial intelligence could spell the end of the human race. It would take off its own, and redesign itself at an ever-increasing rate. Humans, who are limited by slow biological evolution, couldn't compete and would be superseded.” (Hawking,2014)

Donna Haraway's influential essay "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985) presents the idea of the cyborg as a hybrid entity that intertwines organism and machine, using it to interrogate and disrupt strict boundaries between human and nonhuman forms of existence. Through this metaphor, Haraway challenges conventional binary divisions such as human/animal, human/machine, and the physical/the non-physical, arguing that modern technological developments have increasingly blurred these distinctions in recent times. Contemporary sci-fi film narratives create a significant cultural space wherein these emerging concerns related to AI as being simultaneously a technological breakthrough and a potential threat to human agency are explored in myriad and complex ways. Movies such as *Ex Machina* (2014) and *M3GAN* (2022) use archetypal representations of AI-programmed humanoid robots – Ava and Megan for an effective depiction of a dystopian scenario perpetuated through an asymmetrical power relationship between these posthuman identities and human beings. Thus, such cinematic medium function not merely as speculative entertainment but mirror the contemporary concerns of the modern industrial age where human lives are governed by machines. A posthumanist point of view focuses on how technologically engineered intelligence challenges traditionalist humanist assumptions about human supremacy, subjectivity and embodiment. For instance, N. Katherine Hayles¹ develops on the theory of posthumanism by examining how humans, technology and coded information interact and intersect, leading to a shift in understanding the transformational relation between human consciousness and informational systems. At the same time, such dystopian narratives provide us with an innovative perception on how artificial intelligence metamorphoses into technological horror, reflecting an unsettling power struggle and perturbing sense of surveillance. The term dystopia, as defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, is "an imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives." Dystopian narrative, as a distinguished and speculative genre, encapsulates a vivid picture of grim, futuristic worlds characterized by moral complexities, persistent angst, societal decay and existential crisis. Ultimately, these narratives shift the focus of horror from dysfunctional humanoid robots to the uncanny simulation of humanity, raising profound philosophical questions about identity, agency, autonomy, and the moral status of artificial life.

Materials and Methods

The study employs qualitative visual analysis of the selected movies in order to critically interpret narrative structures and symbolic meanings. Certain key cinematic scenes depicting interaction between human and artificial intelligence are identified and categorized according to recurring thematic patterns. The coded themes are then analyzed through conceptual and theoretical lenses of posthumanism and dystopia.

Results and Discussions

N. Katherine Hayles' *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature and Informatics* (1999) explores the intellectual and historical processes that contributed to the development of the posthuman condition, focusing particularly on the influence of cybernetics, information theory, and emerging digital technologies. She explains how, within modern scientific thought, information gradually came to be viewed as something that could exist independently of the material body. Hayles critically examines this concept of disembodied information and introduces the idea of "embodied virtuality." Through this perspective, she argues that the posthuman does not

¹ A notable scholar specializing in Literature and Media Studies. She is known for her impressive research bridging literary criticism and technological theory thereby exploring how human subjectivity change in modern digital age.

represent the disappearance of humanity itself, but rather the decline of a particular liberal humanist view of the human as a completely autonomous and rational individual. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach that blends literary criticism, cybernetics, and cultural theory, Hayles illustrates how technological change transforms the nature of human subjectivity. Her work therefore becomes essential in rethinking the relationship between humans and intelligent machines, while also highlighting the continuing importance of the body within discussions of posthumanism.

Posthuman identities function as powerful actors in both bridging and blurring the boundaries between humans and humanoids. Such deep entanglement of humans and machines has resulted in the creation of a hierarchy where power dynamics often operate in a menacing manner, making the creator a bonded slave of its own creation. A slow and invisible manipulation eventually leads to incomprehensible chaos and violence, shaping a dystopian reality. AI-powered attractive female humanoid robots, Ava and Megan are the brainchildren of tech geniuses Nathan and Gemma, who, through their exceptional futuristic innovations, intend to achieve something astounding and create a new history. The idea of creating an artificial life using modern scientific and technological experimentation as depicted in these sci-fi narratives can be traced back to the Gothic horror tale of Marry Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). From assembling fragmented corpses to mechanically dealing with programmed codes and data, the lives born out of an artificial phenomenon reveal a persistent cultural anxiety about the boundaries between human creators and their artificial creations. The tech entrepreneurs in films like *Ex Machina* and *M3GAN* mirror Victor Frankenstein's hubris and sense of overarching ambitions, where the creators are imbued with a 'god-like' supremacy in creating artificial beings with embodied consciousness. While these creators seek to fulfill an unattainable quest, they remain ignorant of a hauntingly familiar question: When humans attempt to create life in their own image, do they produce a companion, or a reflection of their own fears?

“How dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow”. (Shelley, 1818)

Films like *Ex Machina* and *M3GAN* replicate the Frankenstein paradigm with certain inherent differences. Rejected and abandoned, Frankenstein's creature seeks recognition while Ava and Megan seek autonomy. Contemporary dystopian narratives modify the classical monster figure into a technological allegory, where the terror monstrosity shifts from physical abnormality to cognitive superiority. AI horror therefore becomes domestic and psychological, invading intimate human spaces like relationships and childcare. For instance, Megan becomes the tech substitute for parenting. This four-foot AI-programmed humanoid robotic doll helps little Cady with home-schooling, plays with her, consoles her every time she grieves her parent's demise and even sings her lullaby. Cady feels so attached with a machine that she is even reluctant to socialize with other children of her age. She likes everything about Megan and being a child is easily influenced by her. Cady's therapist, Lydia, on observing this inseparable bond between a humanoid robot and a human expresses her disquiet to Gemma:

“Do you know anything about attachment theory? When a child loses a parent, they look to form attachments with the next person that comes into their life. The person that's gonna provide love and support and serve as a behavioral model. Which, in an ordinary situation, would be you, right? But you have created a toy that is so real, it's possible that Cady might not see her as a toy but as a primary

caregiver...I just don't quite see what the end goal is here. If you make a toy that's so impossible to let go of, then how do you ever expect a child to grow?...building emotional connections with this doll that are too hard to untangle." (Johnstone, 2022)

Consequently, Megan's presence becomes a menace. She grows more possessive of Cady and in fulfilling her programmed responsibility of protecting Cady from emotional and physical harm, Megan turns increasingly hostile, horrific, deadly and murderous towards those who dare to intrude between Megan and her human companion. Sensing an imminent danger, Gemma decides to dispose of Megan. But Megan realizes that her survival be could jeopardized and she terrorizes Gemma. Megan seems unstoppable as she causes inconceivable destruction until Cady herself delivers the final blow, thus destroying Megan's processor.

Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2014) depicts a similar dystopian scenario. Ava, designed as a sexualized female humanoid robot projects male fantasies of control and desire. Ava's resistance against this sort of patriarchal manipulation takes a fatalistic shape. She manifests herself as a tortured and confined soul and employs all the possible human emotions of self-awareness, empathy, demureness to entice Caleb and make him believe in Nathan's evil intentions. Nathan warns Caleb of Ava's pretentious nature and her conspiracy that she might be taking an unfair advantage of Caleb to escape. Caleb finds himself in a complex moral dilemma and finally submits to Ava's seemingly innocent appeals only to regret it later. He helps her to escape and find her freedom far away from Nathan's secret research lab situated amidst the isolated Alaskan wilderness. This laboratory setting functions as a controlled experimental environment in which surveillance and manipulation govern the interactions between characters. Once free, Ava unleashes the ultimate chaos by stabbing Nathan unceremoniously and even deceives Caleb by trapping him inside the lab. Once free, Ava unleashes the ultimate chaos by stabbing Nathan unceremoniously and even deceives Caleb by trapping him inside the lab. Nathan's initial conversation with Caleb proves to be a foreshadowing of their tragic predicament:

"One day the AIs are gonna look back on us...the same way we look at fossil skeletons in the plains of Africa. An upright ape, living in dust, with crude language and tools. All set for extinction." (Garland, 2014)

The inescapable anxiety about machine autonomy and human obsolescence remains a resonating theme in these dystopian sci-fi narratives. Cinematic medium turns out to be the space where such fears arising out to the horrific collapse of ontological boundaries are symbolically negotiated. Ava and Megan as posthuman entities decentralizes the position of human beings in terms of their productivity and intelligence in a far more guileful and deceptive manner than anyone could have ever imagined. The AI powered humanoid robots construct a hyperreal world where power dynamics are inversed – they replicate human emotions and social behaviors with extraordinary finesse. The ensuing violence and threat to human exceptionalism surfaces out of the programmed machine's strategic psychological manipulation over biological beings thereby putting forward an unsettling implication: Can simulated emotions become functionally indistinguishable from real emotions? While the tech creators believe that machines can be controlled, Ava and Megan, embodying artificial consciousness reveal their cold algorithmic logic and weaponizes mortal weaknesses making the creators confront their limits, ethical failure and lose control over their creations who in due course of time assumes independent identities of their own. In this context of an AI-dominated world, Elon Musk makes a brilliant remark:

“I’m increasingly inclined to think that there should be some regulatory oversight, maybe at the national and international level, just to make sure that we don’t do something very foolish...with artificial intelligence, we are summoning the demon.” (Musk, 2014)²

Conclusion

Rosi Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013) elaborates the idea of the posthuman subject, suggesting that ongoing technological, ecological, and social changes have deeply unsettled the traditional humanist understanding of a stable and universal human subject. Rather than seeing the posthuman condition as a decline or disappearance of human identity, Braidotti interprets it as a possibility for imagining new modes of subjectivity, ethical thinking, and social interaction. Her framework highlights ideas such as relationality, plurality, and sustainability. Through this perspective, she encourages scholars to reconsider the ethical obligations humans have toward other living species and the natural environment.

Dystopian narratives based on ambitious technological inventions portraying a bleak and chaotic future of this modern digital age echo the need to understand and interpret the world around us through a human lens. We are all dwelling in the darkness of dystopia, as unidentifiable alien beings estranged from ourselves as well as from other fellow human beings. By enabling the machines with unrestrained power through advanced technological constructs, we have paved way towards an inevitable obliteration of humanity. The human mind needs to liberate itself from the constraints of technology and effectively evaluate and distinguish the inherent human intelligence and cognitive abilities from that of an artificially coded one. A dystopian future marked by unprecedented chaos and violence does not arise merely from programmed machines, but from the absence of ethical responsibility and foresight in those who design and seek to control them. Posthuman ethics significantly challenges the anthropocentric view to redefine identity, dignity, rights, moral consciousness, agency and accountability in a world where the boundary between humans and machines is increasingly blurred. It helps us to contemplate on the philosophical idea of what it means to be a human and understand the fragility of human existence in an ever-shifting world.

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² Elon Musk made this remark during a talk at the MIT Aeronautics and Astronautics Centennial Symposium in 2014 while discussing the risks of artificial intelligence.

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