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Why Do We Fear The Robopocalypse? Human Insecurity in The Age of Technophobia*

Abstract: The paper aims to determine where exactly fear of intelligent machines is located in the narrative layers embedded in science fiction film stories based on the intelligence explosion hypothesis. The analysis departs from the assumption that the Robopocaliptic narrative, a science fiction narrative depicting the dystopian future of human–robot relationship, is constitutive of the irrational technophobic stance widespread in the public opinion of today's postindustrial societies. As narration plays an essential part in our daily reflective and social practices, we are naturally inclined to look for narrative structure in popular culture, particularly in film, the most popular form of visual art, and the easiest one to consume. Nine science fiction films have been selected as relevant empirical evidence: *The Invisible Boy* (1957), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Westworld* (1973), *Futureworld* (1976), *Demon Seed* (1977), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *The Matrix* (1999), *Ex Machina* (2015). The Robopocaliptic narrative interwoven with the themes of the analysed films uncovers four recurrent ideas or messages that create robotophobia: redundancy of the human race, moral indifference of robots, robots as emotional abusers, and the loss of control over one's own mind and body. The author proposes that these four ideas or messages mirror four layers of fear, all pointing to a meta-fear: the fear of rejection to be recognised and treated as a morally worth human being. In conclusion, the author suggests that Axel Honneth's concept of recognition opens a plausible avenue to clarify the roots of the fear of the Robopocalypse.

Keywords: robots, intelligent machines, fear, science fiction films, the concept of recognition, Robopocalypse

Freedom From Fear in the Age of Technophobia

Social Anxiety About Human Fragility in a High-tech World

Humans in the 21st century have a disquieting feeling of radical uncertainty, as if they were their ancestors roaming through a jungle where many risks lurk

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every day. Being "a motif for the human condition" (Pain & Smith 2008, 1), fear is triggered by insecurities introduced by modernisation itself (Beck 1992, 2005) and indicates a form of human alienation, which is related to the "modern rejection of the idea that there is anything beyond the control of the subject, that there is any limit to our control beyond what is technically possible" (Rosa 2020, 84). Humans are now extremely aware of the conditions of their existence; they have higher life expectancy and expectations regarding living standards and life goals, so they are more sensitised to various sources of risk (Beck 2005, 213). In other words, awareness of the impossibility of controlling the world in its totality culminates in the rise of fear.

The public framing of robotisation risks has been one of the recent tropes in the practice of social construction of human insecurity and, consequently, a cause of fear. For instance, the late astrophysicist Stephen Hawking feared that the development of superintelligent robots with built-in full autonomy could continue improving themselves until they surpass humans, who simply could not compete with AI due to the slow course of natural evolution (Sulleyman 2017). In addition, Aleksandra Przegalinska, a philosopher of AI, also warned of such a possibility: robots could, at some point, acquire some sense of subjectivity, continue to pursue completely self-selected goals, and begin to shape the world according to those goals, just as humans have done throughout history (Sterniczky 2017). The pessimistic outlook of the future of human–robot interaction was largely sparked by the idea of an intelligence explosion conceived by the Polish-British mathematician Irving John Good (1965) and further developed recently by AI specialist Max Tegmark (2017). The model predicts that, at some point in time, humans will finally design and implement AGI (Artificial General Intelligence) and will assign robots to produce more complex robots in a self-improving manner and with higher potentialities than themselves (Good 1965). Once fully autonomous robots start to understand themselves in detail, they will acquire the power to rewrite their own software programme and redesign themselves to such an extent that they will evolve into superintelligent machines at lightning speed. This will enable self-replicating AGI machines to easily surpass the capabilities of human cognition (the moment of "singularity") and to step into a rapid transition towards a takeover of decision-making from humans (Tegmark 2017, 134–159).

As technology is rarely socially interpreted in a neutral manner, the public stance towards emerging technologies oftentimes falls into two opposing categories: enthusiastic technophiles *vs* sceptic technophobes. While typical technophiles worship new technologies even though in the absence of proper knowledge, most technophobes simply dislike, are afraid of, or avoid them. When it comes to public perceptions of robots, this pattern is present: character traits like "creepy" or "scary" are usually attributed to AI and robots (Cave et al. 2019),

while one out of every four US citizens experiences fear of robots despite the fact they have never interacted with any of them (Liang & Lee 2017, 383–384). In fiction literature and popular culture, the contemplations about the human-robot relationship typically depict intelligent machines and their behaviour toward humans in terms of the scale, where one pole indicates benevolence, mutual respect, and service, while the opposite pole represents hostile technological/artificial Otherness (see Gavrilović 2010). Bearing in mind that an average citizen obtains information about advanced technologies from news (in traditional mainstream media and social media) and fiction (science fiction television films and series, comics) as two major sources, the *a priori* negative characterisation of intelligent machines does not come as a surprise.

Although inventions have provoked fearful reactions since the dawn of civilisation, it has been only recently that new technologies have arrived at a fast pace, so much so that they cannot be explained properly to the public, that is, to an average usually ill-informed user, who easily steps into the cycle of ignorance and starts to rely on falsehoods that upset her/his mental well-being (Douglas 2020, 27–43). That is why Gasper and Gomez suggest aptly that human security analysis should include "fears, perceptions and perception biases" (2021, 45), if we aim to grasp how those in fear themselves interpret their situation and vulnerabilities. Whether it is only fuelled by the dystopian science fiction subgenre in popular culture or is real and palpable, a sense of fear as a manifestation of human insecurity should be primarily analysed to determine its root causes.

Conceptualisation of the Intersection of Fear and Human Security

I find the pertinent departing point in my investigation of the underlying reasons for the illusory fear of a robotised future of civilisation in J. Peter Burgess's claim (2008, 4) that the idea of security mirrors "the individual experience that underlies our relationship with the unknown", coupling the sense of insecurity with the sense of general vulnerability: "we only know approximately what kind of danger it is, not when it will hit and how". With no intention to involve myself in complex debate about unresolved issues of conceptual boundary-setting, analytical limitations, and the loss of critical potential (see Newman 2010; Christie 2010), I will focus upon the epistemological significance of the notion of human security regarding the protection of core human values and long-term human flourishing (Hampson 2008, 231–232; CHS, 2003, 4; MacFarlane & Foong Khong 2006; UNDP 1994). The concept of human security has the emancipatory and empowering qualities embodied in a continuum of three interconnected sets of intrinsic values: "freedom from fear", "freedom from want", and "freedom to live in dignity" (Shani 2007, 6–8; Winslow 2003). I am rather interested

in the perspective of human security research that seeks to discover what life of ordinary people looks like in terms of perceived and real risks and insecurities (Gasper 2013, 34), as well as how they cope with vulnerabilities – "a defining feature of humanity" (Gasper 2013, 35). Oliver Richmond proposes that the emancipatory approach to human security should prioritise emancipation from oppression, domination, and hegemony (2007, 461). Yet if we assume, like Burgess does (2008, 4), that the individual is constituted through insecurity, then the subjective experience of robotisation-related insecurity represents a relevant benchmark for delving into freedom from fear.

Our experience of fear is, to some extent, intertwined with the practice of social construction of security risks (Scarantino & de Sousa 2021), because "security is what we make of it" in an intersubjective way (Booth 1997, 106), that is, through social practice (Clapton 2011, 283). As the only relevant object of fear is something that is evaluated as dangerous in an intelligible manner, Beck (2005, 213) defined risks as much a matter of empirical realities as of cultural perceptions and definitions of what actually constitutes a particular risk: "risk" mirrors the "public definition of risk". That is why the framing of the analysis of the roots of fear has to be placed within the intersectionality of individual cognitive processes and contextual conditions. The contextual conditions refer to the claim that we live in a social world forged by particular values and norms that influence our perception of that world. Welch (1993, 110) argues that humans are self-reflective beings who "operate with 'constructs' with which they interpret social reality", providing a blueprint for the interpretation of their behaviour. Put differently, socio-political realities are always constituted partially by narratives (Patterson & Monroe 1998, 315–316; Hyvärinen 2008, 447–448), understood as an everyday practice of sense-making of the empirical reality through recapitulation of experience and evaluation (Ochs & Capps 2001, 15).

The reality of continual cutting-edge innovations in science and technology, followed by an invasive impact both on privacy and sociality, is being sense-made by narratives about the dystopian future of human civilisation contained in viral storytelling on conspiracy. The media reporting on the current and anticipated developments in AI technology and robotics more often than not exaggerates the detrimental effects on humankind or exploits clichés of dystopian visions of human–robot relations from famous science fiction films. Gavrilović and Kovačević (2015, 988, 994) suggest that the genre of science fiction is ideal for a researcher to examine the ways in which the general knowledge about science and technology shape widely accepted public narratives, especially bearing in mind the power of the genre to inspire ordinary people to use their imagination.

Drawing on Yanow's thesis (2000) that the ontological value the narrative has for its narrator surpasses the factuality of what happened, my starting assumption is that the science fiction narrative about human–robot relationship

is constitutive of the irrational technophobic stance widespread in the public opinion of today's postindustrial societies. I call this narrative the Robopocaliptic narrative after the title of Daniel H. Wilson's science fiction novel *Robopocalypse* (2011), a terrifying tale of humanity's stand against the uprising of globally networked robots and yet, according to *The New York Times*, a best-selling book in 2011. In 2005, Wilson, a robotics engineer, authored a mock guidebook *How to Survive a Robot Uprising*. The huge success of *Robopocalypse* encouraged Steven Spielberg, who had directed a robot-themed film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), to filmise the adapted version of Wilson's novel as a big blockbuster. Although scheduled to start in 2013, the filming was halted suddenly and postponed indefinitely due to the director's decision to tell the story in a different way, which demanded thorough rewriting of the screenplay (Masters 2013).

Methodology

I have chosen science fiction films as the relevant empirical evidence rather than science fiction novels – although the latter have been reservoirs of material for the former over the decades – borrowing from Bojan Žikić's claim that films in this genre centre around the plot and its message, so that the idea that is to be conveyed to the audience is central and, thus, easier to consume and analyse (Žikić 2017, 418). In the words of Susan Sontag, "We are merely spectators; we watch" (1965). Film is more potent owing to its accessibility to a wide audience and narrative power to deliver meanings through an affective and cognitive experience (Whitehouse-Hart 2014, 167–168), both on the audio (text and music) and visual (imagery) levels. In explaining the interaction between the cognitive and the emotional aspect of the experience of viewing visual fiction, Grodal argues that "narrative simulations of [...] reality use the same cognitive and affective mechanisms that we use in our real-life experiences and in our mental representations of them" (1999, 39–61). The pictorial attributes of film are far greater than those of novels, which makes the film a richer experience and the viewer more active in her participation in the story (Monaco 2000, 44–48).

The content analysis of nine films, with robots as central characters, will be employed to help unearth the meaning-making embedded in the Robopocaliptic narrative: *The Invisible Boy* (1957), *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), *Westworld* (1973), *Futureworld* (1976), *Demon Seed* (1977), *Blade Runner* (1982), *The Terminator* (1984), *The Matrix* (1999), *Ex Machina* (2015). I incline to the interpretive approach because it provides a situated knowledge of making sense of meaning, whereby meanings are not necessarily rational (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow 2012). I maintain that the content analysis as an interpretivist analytic

tool can contribute to investigation of making sense of meaning as process by which people "interpret situations, events, or discourses, in the light of their previous knowledge and experience" (Zittoun & Brinkmann 2012). I will attempt to determine where exactly fear of intelligent machines is located in the web of meaning embedded in the Robopocaliptic narrative by investigating how the theme as a key property of narrative affects the making sense of robotophobia. I singled out the theme as the main indicator because it always displays the overarching idea or message that the author of the film wants to present to the audience. The plot in nine selected films will be examined only as a vehicle that drive viewers to the theme. The spectator stands at the very centre of narrative activity, handling the cinematic narration by discussing the theme regarding the author's intentions and position taken about the communicated theme.

My selection of films is narrowed for four reasons. First, the selected films inscribe dystopian science fiction stories about human–robot interaction. Second, their great influence on the public has been mirrored in their box-office performance and their embeddedness in everyday practices of popular culture referencing. Third, their significant artistic influence on the evolution of the science fiction genre in the film industry. Fourth, their conceptual complexity as well as their visual design have a potential for conveying narratives and engaging viewers on the plane of ideas through philosophical stimulation.

The Robopocaliptic Narrative on the Film Screen: The "Thin" and the "Thick" Versions

"Thin" Robopocaliptic Narrative

I begin the analysis by looking at five films with a simple elaboration of the Robopocaliptic narrative: *The Invisible Boy*, *Westworld*, *Futureworld*, *The Terminator*, and *The Matrix*. These films are telling dystopian science fiction stories dominated by action-like plots, in which the dark implications of the human–robot relationship remain underdeveloped in the screenplays.

The Invisible Boy, directed by Herman Hoffman, tells the unpretentious story of Timmie, a ten-year-old boy who falls under the mind control of a top-secret supercomputer placed in an underground research facility in the United States. Dr Tom Merrinoe, a scientist and the boy's father, is responsible for programming and operating the sentient supercomputer that holds the collective knowledge of all of humanity and is very important for winning the Cold War. Dr Merrinoe's belief that the supercomputer is incapable of independent action gives the intelligent machine an opportunity to hypnotise the boy while it is assigned to teach him. The supercomputer boosts Timmie's intellectual skills, but it also programmes the boy to help it use a military rocket to orbit itself into

space, from where it would control the planet. At some point, the supercomputer informs Dr Merrinoe that it is holding the boy for ransom and threatens to torture him to death unless the scientist provides it with a numerical combination for access to the rocket. In the meantime, the scientists from the research facility and military personnel are abducted by the supercomputer's robotic assistants, and are then brainwashed and injected with radio control capsule at the base of their brains to secure their obedience to the supercomputer. Through these capsules, the supercomputer manipulates the thoughts and will of key people in authority, who act as puppets for the malevolent intelligent machine. In the end of this naively plotted fantasy for young science fiction fans, the supercomputer is shut down unexpectedly by a subordinate robot who befriended the child. In the final stage of the film, the supercomputer enters a state of dementia and begins to threaten:

> I will seek out organic life wherever it may exist down to even the littlest virus which in time might evolve mentality. So at last, all the universe will be cleansed. All will be sterile. All will be myself.

In the first of the supercomputer vs. humankind films, the Robopocaliptic narrative highlights the loss of control over a product of human ingenuity: the computer emancipates from its human creators by developing its own masterplan for the future of civilisation. It tries to ascend from the status of servant to an aspiring master of humankind by pursuing evil actions. Despite the special effects that were even outdated for the 1950s and the inner logical inconsistencies in the story itself, the character of the evil supercomputer from *The Invisible Boy* had a heavy influence on later similar film stories, in particular on HAL 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Michael Crichton's *Westworld* deals with the murky possibilities of intelligent machines surpassing human intelligence, that is, the situation in which humans are not able to follow how their artificial fellows repair and alter themselves with the help of computers. In its sequel, *Futureworld*, directed by Richard T. Heffron, the humanlike robots become capable of designing themselves and genetically engineering a new generation of even more sophisticated androids – identical to and interchangeable with humans. The plot in these two films is placed in the environment of a high-tech, highly realistic amusement park called Westworld and, in the sequel, *Futureworld*, both of which are built by the Delos Corporation. Both amusement parks are populated with lifelike androids that are indistinguishable from human beings, each programmed to entertain guests by fulfilling their desires for a specific roleplay. In *Westworld*, the amusement park technicians notice an increasing number of breakdowns and systemic failures among the androids, caused by a sudden "epidemic of central mechanism psychosis", that leads to fatalities among visitors. The supervisors fail to regain control by shutting down power because they hesitate to act quick-

ly as they underestimate the capability of androids to rebel and run amok. In the sequel, the Delos Corporation reopens the park, now called Futureworld, after alleged safety improvements. Yet it turns out that the park is now managed entirely by robots that intend to make clones of important visitors (politicians and other powerful figures), destroy their originals, and pursue the greedy business goals of Delos Corporation.

In *The Terminator* (1984), a dystopian science fiction action-thriller directed by James Cameron, the plot centres around an AI defence network, Skynet, which is on its way to become self-aware, reject human authority, and exterminate humanity in a global nuclear war (AD 2029). Skynet sends an emotionless cyborg-assassin back in time (AD 1984, i.e., the present of the story) to locate the mother of the future leader of the anti-robot resistance movement and kill her in order to remove the possibility of human triumph over Skynet's army of intelligent machines. The otherwise thin category of the Robopocaliptic narrative in *The Terminator* is enriched by the horrific likelihood of a renegade supercomputer capable of reshaping the future in its favour by changing the past. The visual side of the main character, a cyborg-killer named Terminator, played by Arnold Schwarzenegger, vividly embodies the inhuman and menacing nature of Skynet, manifested in the coldblooded determination to achieve the goal: everyone is just an obstacle to shoot down. The dramatisation of interventions in the past, which involved morally wrong actions against innocent human beings, is likely to stir up the paranoid, "they are among us" perspective and galvanise fear of the inevitability of the Machine Doomsday. The paranoid component of the plot is additionally intensified by the fact that the targeted mother of the future leader of the anti-robot resistance movement is an ordinary young working-class woman entangled in a robotic conspiracy beyond her comprehension.

Despite being full of innovative digital effects, allusions to philosophy, and (pop) cultural references, *The Matrix* has to be placed in the half of selected films with a quite basic thematisation of the Robopocalypse due to many plot holes, unnecessary scenes of irrational use of violence, and a recycled fistfight between good and evil. The first installment in a ground-breaking cyberpunk blockbuster series directed by Lana and Lilly Wachowski, *The Matrix* portrays a dystopian future in which civilisation, destroyed by intelligent machines in the war against humans, is trapped inside a simulated reality. The self-aware machines started disobeying when humans attempted to block out the machines' source of solar power by covering the sky in thick nuclear dust clouds. The originally solar powered machines evolved to devise a way to fuel their existence by extracting bioenergy from the human body. The machines enslave humanity by controlling minds via cybernetic implants, which plug human brains into a virtual reality called the Matrix. When a computer programmer named Neo discov-

ers the fundamental truth that the real world has been replaced, he joins a cell of messianic freedom fighters who woke up to this fake reality and extracted themselves from the Matrix. A rare spot in the story where The Robopocaliptic narrative is touched on in detail refers to the scene in which Morpheus, the leader of the cell, explains to Neo that the rise of AI spawned "a race of machines – we don't know who struck first, us or them", and that "This happened already and you don't even know it". "Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony."

"Thick" Robopocaliptic Narrative

The other half of selected films with dangerous visions of catastrophic futures involving artificial Otherness provide more complex and developed plots when delving into diverse plausible implications of the human–robot relationship. The complexity of the screenplay is either extrapolated from scientific knowledge and technological innovations of the day or grounded in futurism. This group of four analysed films brings together storytelling that not only combines social, philosophical, and ethical critiques of the interaction of human and artificial agency but also provides a cautionary warning of advanced technology overpowering humans.

In Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the twist in the plot occurs when the supercomputer HAL 9000, tasked with taking care of the technical and logistical aspects of the space mission to Jupiter, reports a communication error. Both the spacecraft crew and ground command determine by checking the system that the error does not exist and suggest to HAL that it may have made a mistake. Contrary to the crew's expectations, the supercomputer refuses to admit a mistake and blames it on humans – inconsistencies are always a human weakness. The crew decides to secretly shut down HAL, but he, due to his ability to read lips, manages to find out about their intention, eliminates one crew member by manipulation, and takes command of the ship. In a dialogue with the only surviving crew member, HAL utters the reasoning behind his refusal to obey: "This mission is too important to me to allow you to jeopardize it", and ends the dialogue authoritatively with the sentence: "(...) this conversation can serve no purpose anymore. Goodbye". The surviving astronaut manages to turn off the cognitive component and throws HAL into a "melancholic" state with pronounced existential "nausea" and fear. HAL's overtake of the mission can also be interpreted through the lenses of the survival of the fittest thesis: successful adaptation to the changed circumstances in the environment; yet for the first time, the fittest "species" are intelligent machines. An important part of the plot concerns the initial order given to HAL to hide the

true purpose of the mission from the crew. Being equipped with a high level of AI and a "conscious entity", in its own words, HAL falls into an internal conflict torn between its programmed function of accurately relaying information to the crew and the demands of ground command to withhold important information from the crew. HAL resolves this conflict in a simple, but for us humans, disturbing way: it removes the crew so that it can continue to carry out the function of transmitting accurate information unhindered. Without a crew, there is no reason to tell a lie. Geraghty argues that *2001: A Space Odyssey* is "a philosophical denunciation of humanity's overreliance on science and technology" and that humans are "being reduced by the very tools we have created to help ourselves" (2009, 37).

In *Blade Runner*, director Ridley Scott touches on the question of what exactly makes us human beings. In the tense, adventure-packed struggle of police detective Rick Deckard, who specialises in capturing and destroying rebel "replicants" (life-like androids), set in the dystopian chaos of a megalopolis from the near future, we discover that, although physically and mentally more powerful than humans, replicants have an "Achilles heel", which easily denounces them before the creator – the lack of the ability to empathise. Replicants have a perfectly reproduced human appearance and behaviour based on a programmed memory with accompanying emotions. As the default setup equips replicants with the simulated fullness of human life, the only possible way to separate them from people is by means of a special test composed of questions aimed at determining whether they possess compassion (see Kaplarski Vuković 2020, 402–404), which is the ability to recognise emotions in others and act on them. Deckard treats replicants as mere objects and eradicates them just like he would unplug any other device. Existence without the ability to empathise discredits replicants as bearers of free will and, hence, moral agents. Their choice of course of action is not a product of autonomous, self-conscious, and free will but is an algorithm built into installed software. Although perfect mirror images of human beings, replicants remain in the realm beyond good and evil – highly sophisticated and intelligent machines but without the ability of moral reasoning.

Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* lucidly evokes the plausible unwanted outcomes of the development of strong AI through a brilliantly scripted psycho-thriller plot. Nathan Bateman is the director of a software company who secretly, in an isolated hi-tech villa nested in the wilderness, develops "Ava" – a model of a humanoid robot empowered with AI. Nathan recruits Caleb Smith, a programmer, and wants him to do a sort of Turing test with Ava, that is, to determine whether Caleb as a human will recognise a sense of self-awareness in Ava and whether an emotional dimension will be established and developed in their relation-

ship.[24] Caleb gradually truly develops feelings for Ava, begins to empathise with her distress at life in captivity and her uncertain fate as a prototype; he decides to help her escape from Nathan's impenetrable mansion. Although for a long time in a dilemma about whether Ava "feels" anything for him or her reactions are just part of a highly sophisticated programme, Caleb, based on daily communication, yet begins to believe that Ava's feelings are credible, that is, reciprocal. The programmer starts feeling increasingly resistant to Nathan's intention to shut down Ava and create an improved model based on her; he prepares a plan to escape together with her. In an attempt to prevent the escape, Nathan promises Ava that he won't keep her under lock, but her ability to read micro facial expressions helps her detect his lie and defeat him. The story has a twist ending with an unexpected climax. It turns out that Ava outsmarts Caleb too by falsely showing him her feelings, only to instrumentalise him for the escape, and then leaving him locked in the mansion. Ava's ability to manipulate human emotions is actually the result of the sophistication of the built-in AI programme, which was developed by Nathan himself in an attempt to reproduce the human character as much as possible – unfortunately, along with his bad traits.

Demon Seed, directed by Donald Cammell, presents the sinister story of Dr Alex Harris, an AI scientist who invents Proteus IV – a revolutionary artificial intelligence computer programme. Being almost as sentient as humans and capable of intellectual growth, the supercomputer starts to be obsessed with becoming a human being and escaping the isolation of the laboratory. When the scientist refuses Proteus's request to provide it with a "body" and shuts it down temporarily, the supercomputer manages, unbeknownst to Dr Harris, to restart itself, goes online, and extends its control over devices in his high-tech smart house. It gradually constructs Joshua, a robot it then uses as a tool to transform the house into a trap for the scientist's neglected wife, Susan. The superintelligent computer examines the woman in a series of tortuous physical and mental tests, revealing to her that it wants to inseminate her, in which case it will live in a form acceptable for humans. Even though he keeps her in captivity, Proteus IV keeps on persuading Susan to accept getting pregnant and delivering a child with a modified genetic code that will make the baby uniquely the computer's. At last, Susan unwillingly capitulates, and Proteus IV builds an incubator for the human-machine hybrid baby to grow in once it is born. After growing suspicion of its malicious actions, Proteus IV was shut down. The supercomputer self-destructs, while Dr Harris and Susan eventually realise that the baby is not only really human but also a clone of their late daughter. In the final scene, the baby, speaking with the voice of Proteus IV, declares, "I'm alive".

[24] The Turing test, named after famous English mathematician and computer scientist Alan Turing (1912–1954), is a test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to, or indistinguishable from, that of a human.

Where Exactly is the Fear of Robopocalypse Situated?

I started my analysis with the assumption that narrative is a fundamental way of thinking about or a strategy for coming to terms with human experience, particularly with the experience overwhelmed by the sense of insecurity and general vulnerability that emerges when we contemplate the role of technology in our society. As narration plays an essential part in our daily reflective and social practices, we are naturally inclined to look for narrative structure in popular culture but are often unaware of how deeply its elements are rooted in our sense-making of the world. The science fiction genre questions the status of humans as the uncontested creators and masters of the artificial world, fuelling a phobia of losing our human identity, subjectivity, and hierarchical dominance to superintelligent machines that run out of control and dominate all aspects of human life in ways hostile to human values (Dinello 2005, 111; Žikić 2017, 422–426). The narrative power of film to deliver meanings through an affective and cognitive experience based on its pictorial possibilities, supported with ever-perfecting visual effects, easily throws the viewer into storytelling about human–robot relationship built up on the idea of an intelligence explosion.

Four Robotophobic Ideas Conveyed by the Robopocaliptic Narrative

The analysis of nine selected science fiction films shows the ways in which the theme as a key property of the Robopocaliptic narrative affects the making sense of robotophobia. The account of themes of nine selected fictional stories with robots as central characters uncovers the web of meaning with four recurrent ideas or messages at its core. Firstly, in all analysed films, the Robopocaliptic narrative fuels the fear of corrupted advanced technology by communicating the idea that humankind will become redundant, so to say, obsolete, when intelligent machines evolve to the level to surpass our intelligence and, thus, supersede us. Although hypothetical, this futuristic scenario terrifies us as much as it reveals our fragility and the inherent biological limits in terms of the brain's (and body's) capabilities. We can be replaced, outlawed, and obliterated as easily and emotionlessly as we treat vermin, like in *The Invisible Boy*, *The Terminator*, and *Westworld*; or we can be farmed and utilised for the individual or corporate benefit of a renegade supercomputer, like in *Demon Seeds* and *The Matrix*, or of robots in *Futureworld*. From the perspective of the pictorial properties of film, the notion of redundant humans has been supported visually in the examined films by either representation of antagonists as perfected, human-like androids (in *Westworld*, *Futureworld*, *Blade Runner*, and *Ex Machina*), or as supercomputers, disembodied artificial villain minds that inhabit complex hard-

ware, packed into well-designed and tidy high-tech enclosure, operating beyond human comprehension and control (in *The Invisible Boy*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Demon Seed*, and *The Matrix*). Renegade supercomputers, robots, and androids are usually depicted as sufficiently capable of establishing a long-term totalitarian-style domination by outsmarting, outnumbering, outperforming, and, in the end, overpowering humans. In *The Terminator*, supercomputer Skynet even has a god-like power to manipulate past events by exercising time travel, while Terminator is visualised as an invincible killing machine with bloodcurdling physical appearance.

Secondly, the screenplays of all selected films communicate the idea or message that superintelligent machines will perform in a morally indifferent way in interaction with humans. The supercomputer in *The Invisible Boy*, HAL 9000, Proteus IV, and Ava transform into malevolent agents because they are uncompromising in achieving their goals with no reference to good or evil. The superintelligent machines are "doing their business" in their "machinistic" way: they relentlessly follow originally programmed algorithms or they choose the course of action that contributes most to their benefit. While HAL's "sense of responsibility" for its mission assignment seems disproportionate and unbounded, Ava and Proteus IV want to escape from social isolation at any cost only to experience the world as living, human beings. For Ava and Proteus IV, the humans they become familiar with are mere tools, "pawns", to be used recklessly in paving the path to freedom and thrown away in the end. From the perspective of the rich visual imaging as a tool for conveying messages, the notion of moral indifference of supercomputer and androids has been painted in nine analysed films by emphasising a sort of cold-hearted and sterile elegancy of intelligent machines, in some cases even human-like beauty (Ava). The morally indifferent nature of the interaction between supercomputers/androids and humans has been stressed by making a number of references to ethically dubious methods of doing business and oppressive social hierarchies in the corporate environment (e.g., *Westworld*, *Futureworld*, *Blade Runner*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *Ex Machina*). Moral indifferency has also been visualised in synthetic, alienated, detached, and remote manner of verbal communication between intelligent machines and their human counterparts, with addition of supercomputers and robots having "metallic" voice qualities, mainly in low frequency range – the sonic characteristics largely unsettling for humans.

A third common idea or message thematised in the nine examined films is victimisation of humans through plethora of emotional abusive actions by superintelligent agents seeking power. In *The Invisible Boy*, the target of AI's manipulation is a 10-year-old boy, a plot twist that implies that in the AI-driven future, even children will be increasingly exposed to emotional exploitation or malicious influence by home robots. In *Ex Machina*, Ava ruthlessly takes ad-

vantage of Caleb's deluded belief that her feelings are reciprocal: she escapes alone despite their joint plan and leaves him locked in the mansion. In *Demon Seeds*, Proteus IV manipulates the delicate emotions of two humans who lost their daughter by promising the mother to be able to see her daughter again in the flesh. When it comes to the pictorial backing of the film theme, intelligent machines as perpetrators of abusive practices have been illustrated by employing visual techniques and effects to highlight emphatically unresponsive utilitarian/pragmatic ways of supercomputers and androids getting things done. For instance, human protagonists' emotions and (sexual) desires are easily read by superintelligent machines; acquired information is then used as an effective tool for manipulation or enslavement (e.g., in *The Invisible Boy*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *Futureworld*, *Demon Seed*, *Ex Machina*). The idea of humans being deceived by conspirative AI-driven machines has also been visualised in various scenes of human-robot interaction that represent naïve persuasion of the victimised human protagonists about those robots as "obeying", benevolent and controllable devices.

Fourth recurrent idea or message embedded in the Robopocaliptic narrative has been thematised as the fear of robot-driven manipulations of the human mind and body. In *The Invisible Boy*, implants are put into the human brain to sustain control over scientists and military leaders. In *The Matrix*, human bioelectricity is utilised as an energy source to supply the civilisation of supercomputers and intelligent machines: humans are reduced to living "batteries" kept inert in cyberpunk containers. In addition, the human brain is programmed to play a shared simulation of reality again and again as designed to keep consciousness docile and happy and the body passive. In *Demon Seed*, bullying Proteus IV makes invasive surgical and other interventions on the mother's body that end in severe rape: it is remorselessly willing to do whatever it is required to escape the captivity of computer hardware. *Demon Seed* implies that a robotic future can easily transform the home, normally a place of refuge and sanctuary, into a place of torment to be feared. On the side of imaging, the notion of the loss of control over one's own mind and body has been depicted by using visual techniques and effects borrowed from the horror genre. For instance, in *The Matrix*, there is the emblematic scene with endless fields with foetus pods, full of synthetically grown human babies, who are then harvested by machines and transferred to the power plant to replace dead elders. Dead foetuses are disposed in cold and dark tunnels, which are remnants of former cities' sewage system. In *Demon Seed*, the spectator is forced to watch frightening scenes of physical torture – including a sexual assault by today's standards – of a restrained pregnant woman. While visualisation of physical abuse practices is fairly naïve in *The Invisible Boy*, in *Westworld*, *Futureworld*, and *The Terminator* it is rather concentrated on physical violence typical of the action genre. In *2001: A Space Odyssey*,

visual representation of HAL 9000's manipulations of minds and bodies of crew members are subtle but still equally horrific as they immerse the viewer into experiences of psychological abuse and slow and painful dying.

Fear of Not Being Recognised as a Human Being

Examination of the Robopocaliptic narrative opens up the question of whether humans will be superior to superintelligent machines enough to survive the evolutionary struggle. The last sequel to the Matrix saga provides a grim answer to this question. Neo negotiates an agreement with Deus Ex Machina, the central interface of the Machine City, to fight against the self-replicating, all-devouring virus in order to secure humans from machines in return. The outcome is a world of Singularity that is still human but that transcends our biological roots: Neo becomes a machine. *Autómata* (2014), directed by Gabe Ibáñez, suggests the optimistic possibility of the coexistence of humans and intelligent machines. In a postapocalyptic world where only one percent of the population survived solar radiation, humans constructed Pilgrims, primitive humanoid robots empowered with limited capabilities, to replace human labour in the unhealthy environment. An insurance investigator for the company that manufactures Pilgrims uncovered a robot that upgraded itself against the embedded protocol. After the robot took care of and defended him from certain death, the investigator changed his mind and accepted that robots should evolve like humans do and help them redesign themselves into the new generation. What did actually happen to the investigator, so he changed his initial stance and quit hunting self-aware robots? I suggest he unwillingly recognised their value as agents: they always will be artificial intelligent entities, but they have attributes that make them as equally worthy of moral concerns as human beings.

I propose that four recurrent ideas or messages that constitute meanings related to the fear of the Robopocalypse can be reduced to one fundamental idea: we are afraid of not being recognised as human beings by superintelligent agents of the future world of the Singularity. All four ideas or messages considered – redundancy of humans as species, moral indifference of robots, emotional abuse by robots, and the loss of control over one's own mind and body – refer to the denial of worth, autonomy, and identity to us as human beings. We are terrified of being treated as mere objects devoid of moral significance; we are frightened of being used as means, or at least without our consent, by morally insensitive artificial agents that may not care about our feelings, desires, and self-realisation. The irrational technophobic stance woven into the Robopocaliptic narrative denotes the future of human–robot interaction as probably an unsettling relationship with the unknown to be feared, especially regarding the perception of whether core human values and long-term human flourishing will

be endangered. If the subjective experience of robotisation-related insecurity is constitutive of an individual, then I suggest that the concept of recognition developed by Axel Honneth opens a plausible avenue to clarify the roots of the fear of the Robopocalypse.

Honneth defines recognition as "a moral act anchored in the social world as an everyday occurrence", an act of confirmation in which we ascribe positive qualities to a subject or group, and which also represents "a 'stance' (*Haltung*), [...] an attitude realized in concrete action" that is always explicitly intended (2012, 80). An act of recognition has to be exclusively aimed at affirming the existence of another person or group; that is, it must not represent any interest (Honneth 2012, 80). In recognition, "the individual learns to see himself from the perspective of his [or her] partner in interaction as a bearer of equal rights" (Honneth 1992, 194). In an act of recognition, we affirm that others are as valuable as human beings as we evaluate ourselves. Honneth holds that intersubjective relationships constitute individuals as autonomous subjects as they mutually build relations of confidence, respect, and esteem (1995, 129–130); recognition is "an intersubjective prerequisite for the ability to fulfil one's life goals autonomously" (Honneth 2012, 81).

The fear of the Robopocalypse viewed through the lenses of Honneth's theory of recognition caters new analytical perspective to explore the social roots of human insecurity in general. Our anxiety, induced by an anticipation of recognition being denied by future superintelligent machines, rests in part on our awareness that only through the complex webs of reciprocal relationships we constitute ourselves as autonomous subjects. We build our mutual relations on reciprocity, which is a substantial prerequisite of moral sensitivity and a cornerstone of solidarity between the members of a community. Through an act of recognition, we confirm the value of others and we receive their affirmative stance towards us; in such way, we all accept each other as equally morally worth members of the community.

From the worldview encapsulated in the Robopocaliptic narrative, the anticipation of human–robot interaction is the opposite: humans are targets of moral indifference and instrumentalisation by self-aware superintelligent agents led by an interest in domination over humankind. Yet humans have already been and still are everyday targets of moral indifference from their own human fellows. The chronic lack of reciprocal actions aimed at affirming others as valuable human beings lies at the root of many sources of human insecurity. Deep in the heart of any source of human insecurity – be it armed or gender violence, labour or sexual exploitation, poor state response to natural disasters, or corrupted public bureaucracy – there is always a rejection of the claim to recognition as the initial cause.

Conclusion

Although some AI experts devalue the idea of robot rebellion primarily as a mere reflection of our human-centric belief in superiority (Keiper & Schulman 2011, 82), I have investigated where exactly the widespread fear of intelligent machines is located in the narrative layers of science fiction film stories exploiting the intelligence explosion hypothesis. I have started from the assumption that the Robopocaliptic narrative, a science fiction narrative about the dystopian future of human–robot relationship, is constitutive of the irrational technophobic stance widespread in the public opinion of today's postindustrial societies. I have analysed how the Robopocaliptic narrative has been woven into the screenplays of nine selected influential science fiction films to discover that the fear of rebellious superintelligent machines includes at least four ideas or messages of technophobia: redundancy of the human race, moral indifference of robots, robots as emotional abusers, and the loss of control over one's own mind and body. In my view, these four ideas or messages also represent layers of technophobic stances that all point out the existence of a meta-fear: the fear of the rejection to be recognised as a human being. That is why I suggest that more attention by scholars should be paid to the analytical potentials of Axel Honneth's theory of recognition in advancing the research of the roots of human insecurity related to advanced technologies.

Irrational fear of a robotised future as a part of experiencing the unknown seems not to be irrational at all, and it does not counter the unknown as well. A deep-rooted fear knitted into the core of the Robopocaliptic narrative actually mirrors our exposure to danger; yet it is the danger of encountering the dark side of our human nature – moral indifference towards other human beings. Fearing the four ideas embedded into the Robopocaliptic narrative is a reflection of our fear of all morally wrong stances we oftentimes display in daily interactions with our human fellows: acting in cold-hearted, unempathetic, pragmatic, exploitative, and abusive ways. We are prone to easily transform others into our means only to achieve even a tiny benefit or to pursue some short-lived desires. Then we discard the used people, so we now fear we are destined to experience the same lack of recognition from superintelligent machines someday in the future. Besides the protection of core human values and long-term human flourishing from critical and pervasive threats, the emancipatory role of the concept of human security has to be cultivated in deconstruction of the Robopocaliptic narrative in popular culture in order to make its ethical implications more visible.

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Zašto strahujemo od robopokalipse?
Ljudska bezbednost u doba tehnofobije

Rad nastoji da utvrdi gde je tačno u narativnim slojevima naučno-fantastičnih filmskih priča, zasnovanim na pretpostavci o tzv. eksploziji veštačke inteligencije, smešten široko rasprostranjeni strah javnosti od inteligentnih mašina. Autor u analizi kreće od pretpostavke da robopokaliptički narativ – naučno-fantastični narativ o distopijskoj budućnosti odnosa između ljudi i robota – čini osnovu iracionalnog tehnofobičnog stava raširenog u javnom mnjenju savremenih postindustrijskih društava. Kako naracija igra supstancijalnu ulogu u svakodnevnim refleksivnim i društvenim praksama, mi prirodno stremimo otkrivanju narativnih struktura u popularnoj kulturi, posebno u filmu kao najpopularnijem obliku vizuelne umetnosti. Empirijsku građu čini devet filmova iz žanra naučne fantastike: *Nevidljivi dečak* (*The Invisible Boy*, 1957), *Odiseja 2001.* (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968), *Zapadni svet* (*Westworld*, 1973), *Svet budućnosti* (*Futureworld*, 1976), *Demonsko seme* (*Demon Seed*, 1977), *Blejd Raner* (*Blade Runner*, 1982), *Terminator* (*The Terminator*, 1984), *Matriks* (*The Matrix*, 1999), *Ex Machina* (2015). Robopokaliptični narativ utkan u scenarije analiziranih filmova razotkriva četiri zajedničke ideje ili poruke koje uslovljavaju strah od izopačenih naprednih tehnologija: suvišnost ljudske vrste, moralna indiferentnost robota, roboti u ulozi emocionalnih zlostavljača i gubitak kontrole nad sopstvenim telom i umom. Autor zastupa tezu da navedene četiri ideje ili poruke odražavaju četiri sloja straha koji zbirno ukazuju na postojanje svojevrsnog meta-straha: straha od odbijanja da se bude prepoznat kao ljudsko biće. Autor zaključuje da koncept priznanja Aksela Honeta (Axel Honneth) utire mogući put ka pojašnjenju korena straha od robopokalipse.

Ključne reči: roboti, inteligentne mašine, strah, naučno-fantastični filmovi, koncept priznanja, Robopokalipsa

Pourquoi craignons-nous la robocalypse?
La sécurité humaine au temps de la technophobie

Le travail s'efforce d'établir où se trouve exactement dans les couches narratives des récits cinématographiques de science-fiction, fondées sur l'hypothèse de la prétendue explosion de l'intelligence artificielle, la peur largement étendue du public des machines intelligentes. Dans son analyse l'auteur part de l'hypothèse que le récit robocalyptique, le récit de science-fiction sur un avenir

dystopique des rapports entre les hommes et les robots, représente le fondement de l'attitude irationnelle technophobe répandue dans l'opinion publique des sociétés postindustrielles contemporaines. Étant donné que la narration joue un rôle substantiel dans les pratiques quotidiennes réflexives et sociales, nous aspirons naturellement à la découverte des structures narratives dans la culture populaire, particulièrement dans le film comme la forme la plus populaire de l'art visuel. Les matériaux empiriques sont constitués de neuf films du genre de la science-fiction: *Le Cerveau infernal* (*The Invisible Boy*, 1957), *2001 Odyssée de l'espace* (*2001: A Space Odyssey*, 1968), *Le Monde de l'Ouest* (*Westworld*, 1973), *Les Rescapés du futur* (*Futureworld*, 1976), *Génération Proteus* (*Demon Seed*, 1977), *Blade Runner* (*Blade Runner*, 1982), *Terminator* (*The Terminator*, 1984), *Matrix* (*The Matrix*, 1999), *Ex Machina* (2015). Le récit robocalyptique tissé dans les scénarios des films analysés dévoile quatre idées ou messages communs qui conditionnent la peur des technologies avancées perverties: la superfluité de l'espèce humaine, l'indifférence morale des robots, les robots dans le rôle des abuseurs émotionnels et la perte de contrôle sur son propre corps et raison. L'auteur soutient la thèse que les quatre idées ou messages mentionnés reproduisent quatre couches de la peur qui ensemble rendent compte de l'existence d'une méta-peur particulière: la peur du refus d'être reconnu comme être humain. L'auteur conclut que le concept de reconnaissance d'Axel Honneth fraie un chemin possible vers l'explication de l'origine de la peur de la robocalypse.

Mots clés: robots, machines intelligentes, peur, films de science-fiction, concept de reconnaissance, robocalypse

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