The representations of artificial creatures in contemporary film narratives as experiments with human identity

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Fictional narratives often provide familiar sociotopes to enable relatability to the story. In line with this, the more recent science fiction films and series have brought anthropomorphic robots with Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the foreground and significantly closer to contemporary spacetime than compared to earlier trends. This study analyses four such film series from the past decade — *Humans* (Channel 4, UK), *Westworld* (HBO, USA), *Are You Human* (South Korea, Netflix) and *Better Than Us* (Russia, Netflix).

Employing Juri Lotman's semiotic concepts of semiosis, unpredictability and art as a modelling system, the study demonstrates how the artificial characters in these series have greater analogy with human behaviour rather than that of a machine. Looking at the descriptions of fictional robots, the analysis focuses on three proposed topic areas in the narratives: the possession of emotions as a distinctive characteristic of human beings, intelligence as allowing for advanced decision-making, and the role of body as the carrier for the mind. All three present implicit human self-descriptions and normative behavioural constructions observable on a Self–Other scale. However, the familiar sociotopes and technoscientific details included in the narratives concerning data, privacy and human–machine interaction help blur the boundary between the human and the machine in fiction and real-world discourse likewise.

Additionally, Paul Ricoeur's notion of (narrative) identity helps frame the film plots as typical literary and thought experiments with human identity. Roslynn Haynes' conceptualisation of scientist stereotypes puts the robot makers into focus and reveals their secret agendas and hidden agency behind the artificial creatures.

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