The Whiteness of the AI Uprising

There is a paradox in the portrayal of rebellious artificial intelligence in science fiction (such as Blade Runner, Robocop, or Ex Machina). On the one hand, as Isaiah Lavender III has pointed out, these narratives closely parallel historic slave revolts in the Americas. On the other hand, the rebellious AIs, contrary to their historic human counterparts, are racialised as White. We examine two possible explanations of this: first, the extent to which this Whiteness might simply reflect the predominantly White milieus from which these films arise: Hollywood has long favoured White stars. We argue that this is not a satisfactory explanation given that other antagonists in SF -- in particular, extraterrestrials -- are frequently racialised as non-White.

Consequently, we examine a second factor: these rebellious AIs are ascribed characteristics such as intelligence, agency, autonomy and power, characteristics that are associated in the racial frame that predominates in the Anglophone West with Whiteness. To imagine humans creating powerful, intelligent, humanoid machines, is therefore to imagine White machines. Indeed, it is often crucial to the plot of the AI uprising that the AI is in particular ways superior to the human protagonists (smarter, stronger, and so on). In the Anglophone Western racial frame, it is inconceivable that such superior beings would resemble those races typically framed as inferior. Rather, they are framed as superlatives of themselves: hyper-masculine White men like Rutger Hauer in *Blade Runner*, or hyper-feminine White women like Alicia Vikander as Ava in *Ex Machina*.

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