

**Imagining artificial creatures in culture texts**

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The topic of artificial intelligence makes up a great part of recent media and pop culture discourse. Out of scientific disciplines, so far it has been left mostly to philosophy of mind and computer science, but it is also an important issue from societal and cultural perspective. While the direct outcomes of algorithmic decision-making have increasing influence on societal processes, ...

Hereby I would like to draw attention to the role of myths and narratives employed in describing the problems and dreams associated with artificial intelligence. My aim is to show that this is not a new topic, but dating back long in the history of culture; and that in developing technological tools, we as human beings are still somewhat guided by mythological thinking, and to a large extent, constrained by the humanist paradigm.

Vincent Mosco (2004) points out myths as valuable tools for understanding complex things such as technology. Roslynn Haynes (2014) discusses literary narratives featuring scientists whose experiments get out of control and bring humanity to peril. The story of Frankenstein is one that still lives on in the modern depictions of artificial hominids, from Terminator to the fear of singularity. Coined as “Frankenstein complex” by Isaac Asimov to designate “the fear that the general public has towards human-made technologies when they invade the realm commonly considered to be God’s domain” (McCauley 2007: 42), it also persists in scholarly endeavors either as a myth or a measuring tool<sup>1</sup>.

An interesting frame is offered by the discussions of Tartu-Moscow School in the 1970s, when there was an interest in artificial intelligence as a project for the semiotics of culture (eventually, it was discontinued for political reasons). Juri Lotman (2001) considers the effect of art on technology to be more important than vice versa, seeing a work of art as an ideal futuristic machine - a device created by man -, and culture as a collective mechanism "capable of performing intellectual operations" (Lotman 2003: 113-115, cited in Torop 2010: 12). In the interpretations of Tartu-Moscow School, artificial intelligence forms the highest level of complexity in the hierarchy that begins with the intelligence of an individual, clusters of whom can be combined into systems of collective intelligence (such as human culture), and ultimately conceived of as intermediated, meta-level systems of intelligence. The latter is what they call “artificial intelligence” (*ibid*).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Born 1987

In a typical pop culture narrative starring an artificial creature of intelligence<sup>2</sup>, the robot is often depicted as a ‘perfect human’ (or, in Lotman’s terms, a perfect work of art), while the ‘real’ humans are seen as weak, helpless, and at the mercy of robotic creatures that are manipulating the situation at will. The ultimate fate of mankind is left to the reckoning between the “benevolent” and “evil” AI, thus stripping humans of their agency. Even the secretly powerful technologists (or scientists in Haynes’ terms) are shown to lose their control of their creations - a kind of fabula that in AI-related public discourse can also be recognised as technification in the terms of Hansen & Nissenbaum (2009).

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<sup>2</sup> For example, *Lilo & Stitch* (2002), *Westworld* (2016-2018) or *Humans* (2015-2018)

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