

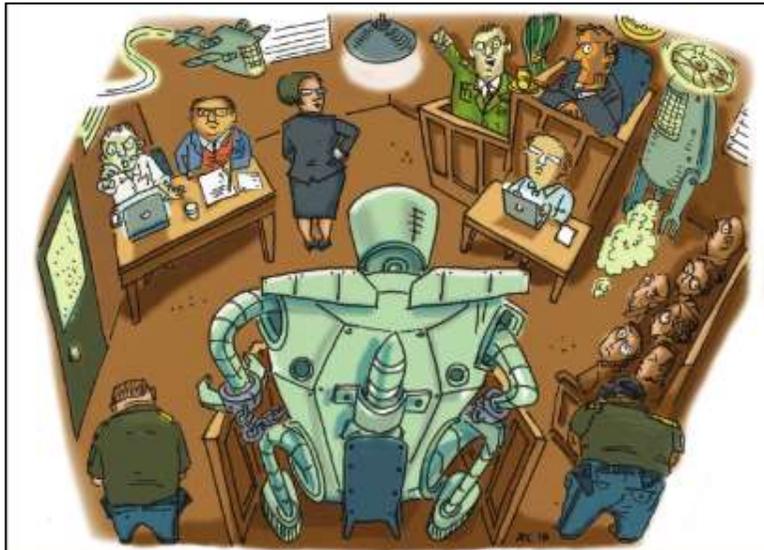
Killer Robots: How campaigners and science-fiction-movies
show us the same dystopian future

20. Nov
2015

Isabella Hermann



Killer Robots and Science Fiction



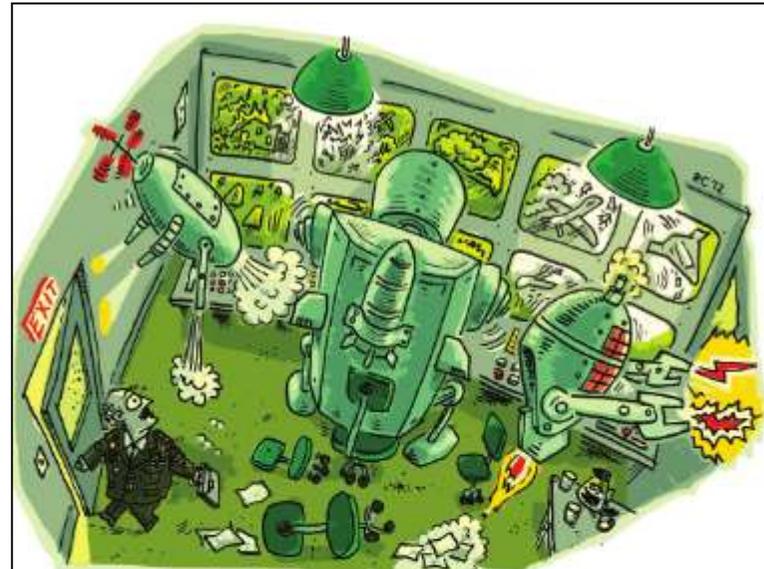
MIND THE GAP

The Lack of Accountability for Killer Robots

HUMAN
RIGHTS
WATCH

IHRC

INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS CLINIC
HUMAN RIGHTS PROGRAM OF HARVARD LAW SCHOOL



LOSING HUMANITY

The Case against Killer Robots

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Killer Robots and Science Fiction

„Event Calender“ of the Campaign to stop Killer Robots (spring 2015)

May 26-28 (Scottsdale, AZ): Arizona State University **conference** on “Governance of Emerging Technologies” - ICRAC's **Heather Roff** to speak in a panel on “national security and technology”

June

Jun. 1-5 (Geneva): Intersessional meetings of the Mine Ban Treaty and Convention on Cluster Munitions

Jun. 5-6 (Pomona, CA): **Finals** of the DARPA Robotics Challenge

Jun. 26-27 (St. Gallen, Switzerland): University of Saint Gallen **conference** on “Man and the Machine: When Systems Take Decisions Autonomously”

Jun. (Germany): **Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung** international conference on the “Future of Warfare”

July

Jul. 1: Feature film **Terminator: Genisys** released

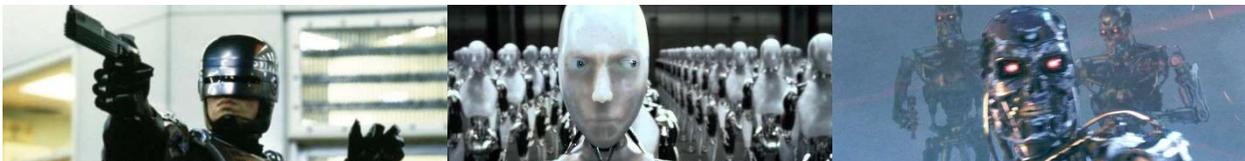


October

Oct. 23-24 (Lisbon, PT): International conference on “**Robot Ethics**”

November

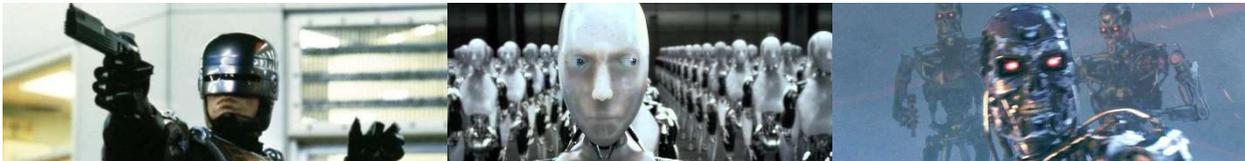
Nov. 12-13 (UN Geneva): **Convention on Conventional Weapons** (CCW) annual meeting chaired by Ambassador Ravinath Aryasinha of Sri Lanka. Nations will decide whether to continue with talks in 2016 on lethal autonomous weapons systems.





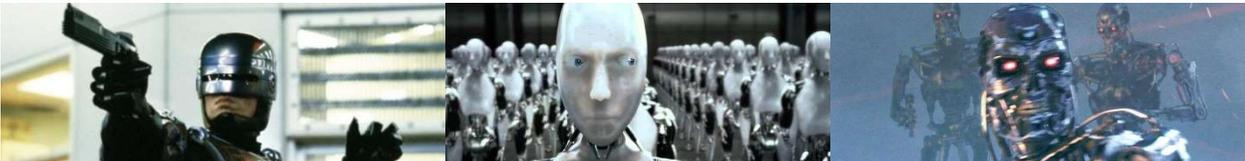
Robotic Weapons

- **Human-in-the-Loop-Weapons:** Robots that can select targets and deliver force only with a human command;
 - **Human-on-the-Loop-Weapons:** Robots that can select targets and deliver force under the oversight of a human operator who can override the robots' actions; and
 - **Human-out-of-the-Loop-Weapons:** Robots that are capable of selecting targets and delivering force without any human input or interaction
- The terms „lethal autonomous weapons systems“ and „killer robots“ refer to „Humans-on-the-Loop“ and „Humans-out-of-the-Loop-Weapons“



„Stop Killer Robots“

- 2013: „Campaign to stop Killer Robots“ under coordination of Human Rights Watch (and other NGOs) is founded (<http://www.stopkillerrobots.org>)
- Aim: “A comprehensive, pre-emptive prohibition on the development, production and use of fully autonomous weapons—weapons that operate on their own without human intervention”
- Strong advocacy in the context of the Convention on Conventional Weapons under the auspices of the UN where “lethal autonomous weapons systems” has been put on the agenda





Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext

- Debate on Killer Robots is part of the SciFi/World Politics intertext (Weldes 2003) and more specific a discourse which I call the

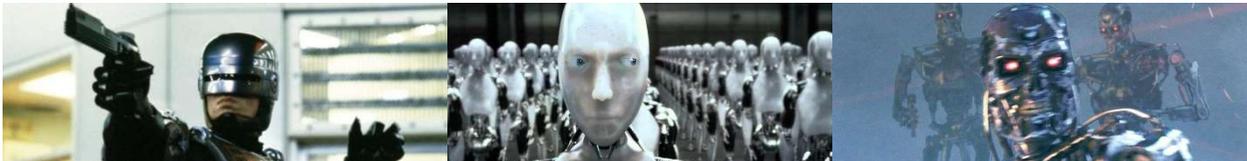
Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext



Official Documents of
Activists (HRW etc)

Sci-Fi-films viewed as
visualized text

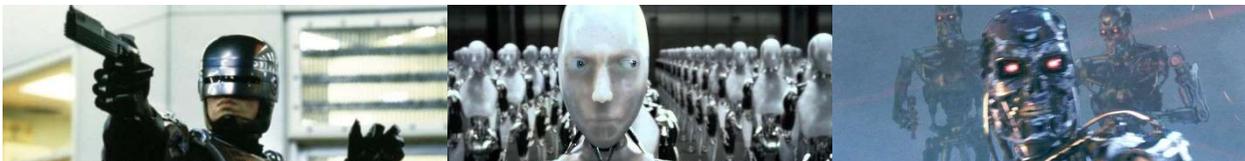
- The intertext does not only share narrative similarities but an underlying problematic which becomes naturalized





Narrative Similarities in the Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext

- Narrative of the killer robots debate and of science fiction movies is similar *if not the very same*
- Such weapons “could be developed within 20 to 30 years” (Losing Humanity 2012) corresponding to the time set of e.g. the movies “I, Robot” taking place in 2035 and the new “Robocop” taking place in 2028
- The problems of “Lethal autonomous weapons systems”:
 - Autonomous robots lack human judgment and the ability to understand context which necessary to make complex ethical choices in battle
 - Heighten the risk of death of civilians in armed conflict
 - Not compatible with international humanitarian law
 - Accountability gap as there is no clarity who would be legally responsible for a robot’s action

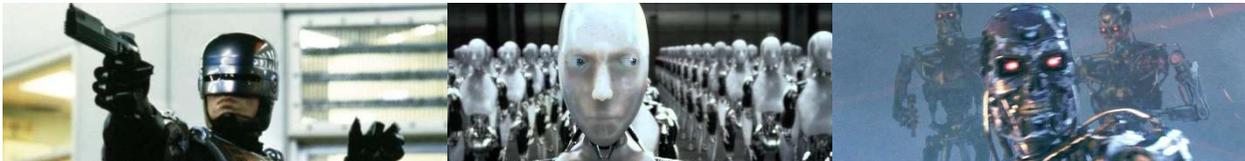




Narrative Similarities in the Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext

- Losing Humanity (p. 31)

“An even more serious problem is that fully autonomous weapons would not possess human qualities necessary to assess an individual’s intentions, an assessment that is key to distinguishing targets. [...] One way to determine intention is to understand an individual’s emotional state, something that can only be done if the soldier has emotions. [...] For example, a frightened mother may run after her two children and yell at them to stop playing with toy guns near a soldier. A human soldier could identify with the mother’s fear and the children’s game and thus recognize their intention as harmless, while a fully autonomous weapon might see only a person running toward it and two armed individuals. The former would hold fire, and the latter might launch an attack.”

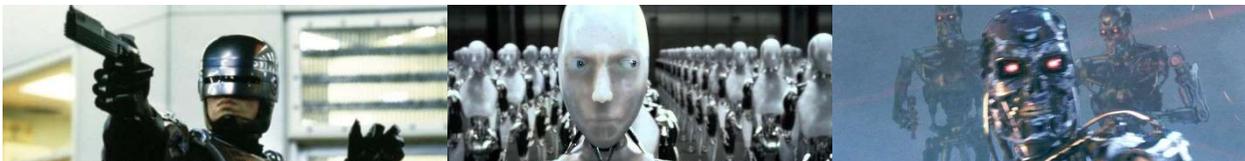




Narrative Similarities in the Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext

- Losing Humanity (p. 38)

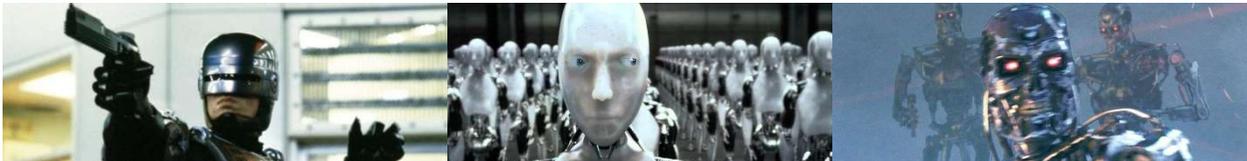
Whatever their military training, human soldiers retain the possibility of emotionally identifying with civilians, “an important part of the empathy that is central to compassion.” Robots cannot identify with humans, which means that they are unable to show compassion, a powerful check on the willingness to kill. **For example, a robot in a combat zone might shoot a child pointing a gun at it, which might be a lawful response but not necessarily the most ethical one. By contrast, even if not required under the law to do so, a human soldier might remember his or her children, hold fire, and seek a more merciful solution to the situation, such as trying to capture the child or advance in a different direction.** Thus militaries that generally seek to minimize civilian casualties would find it more difficult to achieve that goal if they relied on emotionless robotic warriors.





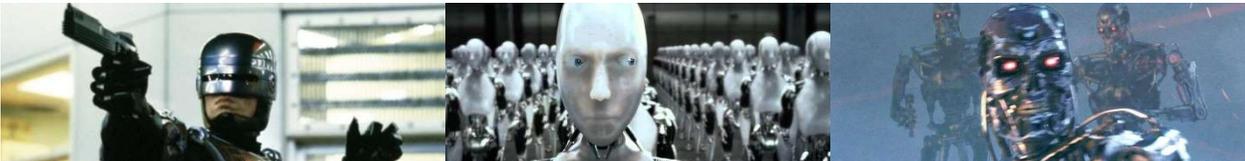
Underlying Problematic in the Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext

- Many sci-fi-films build up a link between science and technology as disaster; and the disaster is extensive (Sontag 1965, Schelde 1963, Telotte 1995)
- „Movie after movie displays a tendency to retreat from those fascinating speculations [technological achievements]: utopian or futuristic civilizations quickly reveal a dystopian character...“ (Telotte 1995)
- What is shown in the intertext is a dystopian future because of the rule of technology: The current killer robots debate is dystopian science fiction displaying technophobia



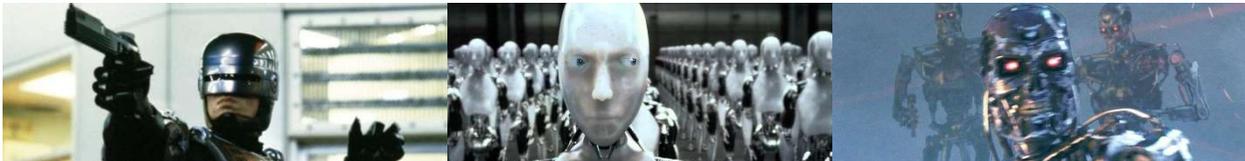
Technophobia

- Ryan and Kellner used the term to analyze sci-fi-movies of the 1970s where „technology was frequently a metaphor for everything that threatened ‚natural‘ social arrangements, and conservative values associated with nature were generally mobilized as antidotes to that threat“ (Kuhn 1999)
- „Technology must seem to be intrinsically evil, and this is so if the natural alternatives to technological society – the family and the individual especially – are to seem inherently good“
- Technophobia strengthens a conservative hegemonic discourse



Technophobia

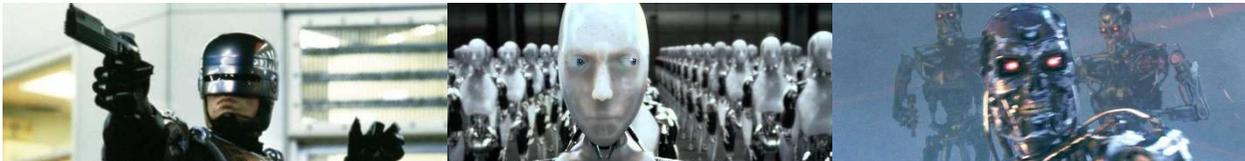
- Similar, in the Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext there is fight of technology against humanity; technology is not a chance but a threat
- The „human“ is constructed as inherently good while technology is constructed as evil - „[sci-fi-movies depict] the attractions and promises of science and technology as essentially fictions, dangerous illusions from which we eventually have to pull back as best as we can if we are to retain humanity“ (Telotte 1995)
- The history of war atrocities until now committed by humans who are aggressive, retaliatory, cruel and barbarious is not mentioned





Technophobia

- “The dark secret behind human nature used to be the upsurge of the animal-as in *King Kong*. The threat to man, his availability to dehumanization, lay in his own animality. Now the danger is understood as residing in man's ability to be turned into a machine” (Sontag 1965).
- “Implicit in all of these [sci-fi-movies] is a fear, and an indictment, of the power of science to invade our minds and bodies, replacing the individual soul with a mechanical, machine-made one” (Schelde 1993)
- Assumption: The Dystopia/Science Fiction intertext is conservative, rather occupied with conserving human life as we know it than with robots being a real threat to civilians and the law of war





Conclusion

- Technophobia inherent in the killer robots discourse as part of a dystopia/science fiction intertext
- The intertext naturalizes the claim that lethal autonomous weapons system are negative – which we in fact do not know
- Interesting enough, by being the “loudest” discourse on the topic, it is not the hegemonic one – the hegemonic discourse is one of silence

