STUDIA I SZKICE

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Affective Response Beyond the Gothic: Romancing with the Machine from *The Sandman* to *Uncanny*

– Do you love me?
– I love you.
– Do you trust me?
– I trust you.

Rachael and Deckard in *Blade Runner*

Introduction

The traditional – logical and computational – approach to artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer sufficient. As evidenced in recent American and British films, AI is increasingly portrayed as capable of manipulating human affect and as itself subject to affect. The paper discusses romantic relationships between AI agents and humans depicted in three films: Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* (2015) and Matthew Leutwyler's *Uncanny* (2015). It analyses the ideas presented in the above-mentioned motion pictures about the crucial role of emotions/ affects for recognizing, understanding, and communicating with AI agents.

The analysis of the portrayal of romantic relationships between AI agents and humans is situated in the context of affect studies. Crucial

for my research is Silvan Tomkins' theory of affect, in the spirit of which I will try to interpret the film portrayals of romantic encounters between humans and AI agents. Affect is understood as unconscious motivational force operating in a cybernetic model (in a "feedback loop") that can be implemented in the machines as well.

Another important category is the Turing test. Its "affective" version as a form of testimony to one's emotional response to one's interlocutor is discussed here. Turing test's essense is a parrhesiastes's testimony rather than an objective criterion of distinguishing between humans and AIs. The Turing test hinges on the human judge being convinced that she or he is speaking to another human; the test's basis is therefore as much affective as it is rational. Such affective dimension of the Turing test is especially useful for analyzing the said films due to the fact that the human protagonists are very clearly placed in the specific situation of "witnessing" and "giving testimony" about AIs being convincing and, specifically, being both lovable and capable of love, or at least of authentic-seeming emotion. The film heroes, while interacting with humanoid robots, give witness to the affect arising in them in response to their encounter with the machine. Moreover, they understand their own affect empathically, as mirroring analogous affect in the machine. In this way, affect seems a necessary and integral part of AI.

Quite recently, considerable attention has been paid to affective capabilities of AI agents. *Blade Runner,* the earliest of the three films covered in this paper, is treated here as a milestone in presenting love relationships between humans and AI agents. It is the first widely recognized film to question the distinction between humans and androids to the point where mutual intimacy among androids (or between humans and androids) seems believable. When the earlier gothic imagination focused on humans falling in love with mechanical dolls, as in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman* and also, in a metaphoric sense, in G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the delusion that these artificial creatures were love-worthy was in the eye of the beholder. The contemporary post-humanist imagination posits the reverse possibility that AI agents may fall in love with people and with other AIs, or at least pretend to love in a convincing manner. By the same token, humans are stripped of their uniqueness when it comes to the capacity to love, and hence imagined as reducible to a machine-like status. The recent films extend this similarity of humans and machines by focusing on romantic scenarios involving both.

The mechanistic grasp of affects is both implied and thematized in *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny*, where a sense of the peculiarly human persists in romantically inflected versions of the Turing test. The notion that machines can be convincing at the game of love shows that affects are increasingly understood as crucial to our understanding of AI. Conversely, this notion also suggests that distinguishing between the peculiarly human and that which machines are capable of is more problematic than ever.

Film representations will be also briefly interpreted in the context of post-humanist studies that put at the center of attention not only human, but also other agents and elements of the fictional universe. As the most inspiring post-humanist reflections I recognize: Donna Haraway's thoughts on late twentieth-century "disturbingly lively" machines[1], David Levy's notions on noticeable affective reactions of AI agents and people's responses to them, as well as some interpretations of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's theories by Rosi Braidotti.

Phobia Before Romance

Human-AI romantic relationships in cinema have scarcely been investigated from the affective point of view. Earlier research on AI in film was focused primarily on situating AI in the science fiction area, with all the consequences. Films featuring AI were easily classified as belonging to the science fiction universe, and examined within this milieu. This means that machines and robots were in most cases just one alluring component of the realm presented in science fiction tales. Endowed with a mechanical life, an artificial creature seemed to be some kind of fulfillment of the utopian dreams of mankind about having a perfect slave. A cybernetic being was supposed not only to free the representatives of the homo sapiens trapped in imperfect bodies from the hardships of physical work, but also to take care of them, watch over their health and, when necessary, provide all sorts of social entertainment. For example, *Star Wars* droids C3PO and R2-D2 are inextricably linked to the iconography of science fiction. They are just a pleasing, comical addition to the *Star Wars* universe without playing any crucial role within it, except supporting humans and fulfilling their wishes[2]. Equally often the science fiction machines endowed with human

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[1] D.J. Haraway, *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century*, [in:] *Sex/Machine. Readings in Culture, Gender, and Technology*, ed. P.D. Hopkins, Indiana University Press 1998, p. 437.

[2] S.J. Konefał, *Smutny los automatów. Sztuczni ludzie w dystopijnej ikonografii science fiction*, "Panoptikum" 2010, No. 09.

shapes awakened negative feelings which could be described in terms of technophobia – people's fear of a sudden, unstoppable advancement of technology[3] – which resulted in treating machines as the enemy or regarding them as inherently inferior.

However, not all of human-machine relationships are examples of this negative model. A relation based on partnership and equality can be found in the early twenty-century play *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw. Even though it does not feature any robot *per se*, it depicts the complicated status of both a human creator and his creation to the point where a "statue" seems to be more human than its maker. We will come back to *Pygmalion* later on.

Partner relationship between a man and a robot based on affective feeling can be observed in recent films as well, and also be situated in a post-human universe. Donna Haraway remarked in her *Cyborg Manifesto* that the gap between machines and humans in the late twentieth-century is almost impossible to notice:

> The second leaky distinction is between animal-human (organism) and machine. Pre-cybernetic machines could be haunted; there was always the specter of *the ghost in the machine* [my emphasis – J.Ł.]. (…) basically machines were not self-moving, self-designing, autonomous. They could not achieve man's dream, only mock it. They were not man, an author to himself, but only a caricature of that masculinist reproductive dream. To think they were otherwise was paranoid. *Now we are not so sure.* Late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert[4].

Rosi Braidotti points to the decreasing importance of what may be termed the human factor in the contemporary world:

> (…) in contrast to the modernist idea of the robot as subservient to the human, as exemplified by Isaac Asimov's 'three laws of robotics' formulated in 1942, we are now confronted by a new situation, which makes human intervention rather peripheral if not completely irrelevant[5].

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[3] D. Dinello, *Technophobia! Science Fiction Visions of Posthuman Technology*, University of Texas Press, Austin 2005.

[4] D.J. Haraway, *op. cit.*, p. 437.

[5] R. Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Polity Press 2013, p. 43–44.

Braidotti reflects further on the necessity to take into account the new forms of post-human subjectivity[6], which include technological creations as well. According to both scholars, in a post-human world the boundaries between natural and artificial are blurred; the machines start to resemble humans, and vice versa. David Levy, an ardent proponent of love and sex between humans and their technological creations, also points it out in his groundbreaking book *Love and Sex with Robots*, however, in a slightly different context. He reflects on the ability to feel love and desire by both humans and the machines towards each other. This means that humans and machines will start to resemble each other regarding the affective, inner states. Levy states explicitly that the fact that a robot *behaves* like it has feelings of love should be enough for potential observer to *believe* in the sincerity of this phenomenon. In Levy's words:

> Just as a robot will learn or be programmed to recognize certain states – hot/cold, loud/quiet, soft/hard – and to express feelings about them, feelings that we accept as true because we feel the same in the same circumstances, why, if a robot that we know to be emotionally intelligent, says "I love you" or "I want to make love to you", should we doubt it? If we accept that a robot can think, then there is no good reason we should not also accept that it could have feelings of love and feelings of lust[7].

The affective behaviour of a robot, according to Levy, should be enough for its human partner to believe that the robot experiences some romantic sentiment. Levy's recognition of authentically affective state in a machine marks a remarkable departure from the earlier SF approach. It portends the growing awareness that the affective capacity of artificial may be crucial in understanding and communicating with AI.

In a Cybernetic Loop

Let us now focus on affect itself. The burgeoning area of affect studies contains a growing number of definitions and interpretations of this term. One of the most important theories is that of Silvan Tomkins – an American psychologist and philosopher[8]. The cybernetic provenance of affect in

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[6] Ibidem, p. 187.

[7] D. Levy, *Love and Sex with Robots: The Evolution of Human-Robot Relationships*, Duckworth Overlook, London 2009.

[8] According to him, man is born with a set of nine affects: 1) interest-excitement, 2) enjoyment-joy, 3) surprise-startle, 4) distress-anguish, 5) anger, 6) fear, 7) shame-humiliation, 8), disgust and 9) dissmell. During the course of one's life some of them can be strongly developed, and the other ones can be used less often. Affects are being developed in a "feedback loop" model. Thanks to the virtually infinite numbers of encounters with the stimuli from

Tomkins' theory provides an especially interesting context for discussing affective behaviour in robots. Affects, according to Tomkins, are something of both biological and cultural provenance that motivates the actions of the organism, and thanks to the so-called "feedback loop" (a term drawn from cybernetics) they help us to respond to the world that surrounds us. Feedback loop works as follows: stimulus (from the outside) → affect (in our body/mind) → reaction (to the stimulus). Our personality is the result of this process taking place an infinite number of times during our life[9]. The cybernetic model described above does not limit the existence of affect to humans; on the contrary: it does not exclude the possibility of existence of the affects in robots. If there is a possibility to create a feedback loop in the machine's natural environment, we can assume that there is a possibility of a birth of affect, especially when we think about the machines in terms of having "cybernetic" and "mechanistic" provenance themselves. This mechanistic grasp of affect is thematized in *Blade Runner*, *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny*. In my opinion, in these movies affect can be observed in both machines and robots. It makes us think in terms of growing similarities between the man and a machine, and the ultimate impossibility of distinguishing between them, which are, of course, the already-mentioned signs of a post-human imagination.

Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth understand affect slightly differently: as a force that is beyond the conscious control, which drives the bodies toward movement (action), suspension ("not-doing"), and thought[10]. Central here is the concept of a body due to its capacity to experience affect, and to be "affected." Gregg and Seigworth emphasize the possibility of affective flickering or shimmers between the bodies. The flickering between film protagonists (humans, androids, robots...) in their romantic relationships is readily noticeable, and will be discussed further.

The possibility of inducing affect in the machine was not always obvious. Mutual affective flickering between two main protagonists of a story, one human and one robotic, was typically absent from the gothic imagination. The affective response was not something expected from a machine at all, and the automatic dolls were important not as separate, individual entities but rather as the mirrors for (almost always male) human interior.

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surrounding reality, a human develops within himself the automatic responses to different life situations, which results in developing one's personality.

[9] E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, A. Frank, *Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins*, [in:] *Shame and Its Sisters. A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, ed. E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, A. Frank, Duke University Press 1995.

[10] G.J. Seigworth, M. Gregg, *An Inventory of Shimmers*, [in:] *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. M. Gregg, G.J. Seigworth, Durham 2010.

In Love with a Doll

Artificial objects – most often female androids called "automatons" at the time – were one of the important elements of the imaginative universe found in some of the novels and short stories referred to as "gothic". In the nineteenth century, the age of mechanization and automation, the mystery of the artificial objects and the forces controlling them were a subject of reflection. Mechanistic conception of humans and animals having "machine-like" interiors – developed, inter alia, by Descartes – influenced the imagination of the masses, as well as writers, thinkers and inventors, for example, Edgar Allan Poe and Thomas Alva Edison. In the realm of the gothic imagination, a human can fall in love with a machine, as illustrated by gothic stories where a man grows desirous toward an artificial woman. In Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam's 1879 symbolist novel (nowadays criticized for misogyny) *L'Ève future* we meet a scientist and his creation – a mechanical woman powered by electricity. Another example is an 1857 short story by Champfleury *L'Homme Aux Figures de Cire* exploring a topic of love for a female statue made of wax. It is worth noting that these examples focus on the male protagonist falling in love with a female statue, and never vice versa, which makes us consider the importance of gender issues in these stories.

Another typical narrative of this kind is Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, where the male protagonist – Nathanael – falls in love with Olimpia, a mechanical doll, a product of a genius inventor. Sigmund Freud presented the most famous interpretation of Hoffmann's short story in his widely known essay *Das Unheimliche* where he reads *The Sandman* as illustrating neurotic repression according to his theory of psychoanalysis[11]. Clearly, the possibility of a truly affective response from a machine was absent in the gothic imagination. Every affective response that one received from a machine was merely in the eye of beholder who invariably was a male figure in these stories. Love for a robot was understood either as a sign of mental illness, a symptom of insanity[12], or as a sign of projection, which is a mechanism related to paranoia[13]. The automaton was surely not an autonomous subject; it always had a role to play – and in most cases, it was a role written by a male character, or the role of a mirror for a male's interior. As Eve Kosof-

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[11] S. Freud, *Das Unheimliche*, [in:] *Idem, Gesammelte Werke*, B. 12: *Werke aus den Jahren 1917-1920*. Fischer Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1972.

[12] K. Bajka, *Szaleństwo jako metafora. Interpretacja opowiadania Der Sandmann E.T.A. Hoffmanna*, "Humaniora. Czasopismo Internetowe" 2015, No. 2(10).

[13] E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, Methuen, New York and London 1986.

sky Sedgwick noted, "it takes one to know one"[14] – the male subject needs a mirroring self-transformation of himself. Nathanael projects his own feelings onto his lover, the mechanical doll Olimpia, who became the vessel for his traumatic experiences from childhood and adolescence. Olimpia herself does not have much to say at all, both literally and figuratively speaking. She only gives short responses with a sighing voice (like "Ah, ah!" or "Oh, oh!") to Nathanael's passionate confessions. She cannot lead the conversation in a convincing manner. Nathanael's friends are not misled by Olimpia's appearance and behaviour, finding her human-likeness not very convincing, which reiterates the point about projection. Actually, Nathanael does not require any involvement from his beloved; he is perfectly content with Olimpia's muteness. According to Sedgwick, "of all forms of love, paranoia is the most ascetic, *the love that demands least from its object*"[15]. It is Nathanael who is misled – but not by the sophisticated craftsmanship of advanced technology but by himself. The love of Olimpia, a young sentient girl full of emotions, was only true in his head; Nathanael simply confused the machine with a real person in a neurotic or paranoiac way, as Freud and Sedgwick respectively believe. Moreover, a female automaton can be seen as a metaphor of women being "enigmatic" in general. Sedgwick calls a female character in gothic stories "hieroglyphic" which indicates that a female is a mystery that cannot be easily resolved or deciphered.

One step toward understanding the relationship between a human and a machine as based on equality and partnership is George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*. Here, the situation is more complicated than in the above-mentioned gothic stories. Although in the play we do not find any machine or robot, it is based on the myth of Pygmalion and Galatea, which was very popular in the Victorian era. Here, falling in love with an effigy is a leitmotif. Professor Higgins tries to "carve" Eliza from scratch by providing her with the education that is supposed to "humanize" her. However, during the play we start to have doubts about who is actually conducting the process of "humanization" or "enlivening" on whom: is it indeed professor Higgins who is sculpting Eliza, or maybe it is she who, during their life together, is changing professor Higgins to a more "human" being? What is worth noting here, this question forecasts the post-humanism perspective and shows the possibility of establishing partnership between male protagonist and his statue. Here, a woman is not merely a mirror for male's projections; she is just as much of an acting subject as her partner. Again,

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[14] Ibidem, p. viii.
[15] Ibidem, p. xi.

the difference between the man (male character) and a machine (statue; female) is blurred. It looks like the man and the machine are switching places in the course of the story, while developing mutual love feelings for each other. Soon, science fiction films will start to raise similar issues.

Intertwined Realms in *Blade Runner*

I will now briefly focus on Ridley Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* as another harbinger of this change – especially in its depiction of the romance between Rachael and Rick Deckard.

Significant numbers of articles and books were written about *Blade Runner*, and it is not my intention, of course, to cover all interesting and important threads that this movie is certainly rich in. I am only focusing on the romantic plot involving Rachael and Deckard because, in my opinion, this thread is a milestone in presenting love relationships between humans and artificial agents.

First of all, we are not sure about the ontological status of either Rachael or Deckard. Clear boundaries between "human" and "non-human" are blurred; which can be read as a sign of post-humanist imagination. Deleuze and Guattari abolish the traditional distinction between the "human" world and the "natural" world. Man is no longer at the centre of the universe, which means that he is no longer the measure of all things – as the Vitruvian man of Leonardo da Vinci's drawings was. The new entity is now on a par with the other elements of the universe, or, as Agnieszka Jelewska puts it, of the subject's phenomenological and biological "sensorium"[16]. The human subject is defined through its ability to form links in a complex, nearly infinite network of the senses. Non-human objects (plants, animals, minerals, but also artificial ones: cyborgs, machines…) occupy a position next to man, and life – understood not as strictly human *bios*, but as non-human, non-personal *zoe* – is the subject of post-humanist reflection. Such approach to reality gives us the opportunity to think about various entities as "having permeable boundaries, which are the combination of impersonal and heterogeneous forces, sometimes cooperating, and sometimes clashing in a turbulent manner"[17].

We cannot be sure if Rachael and Deckard are both machines; one of the unsolved mysteries of *Blade Runner* is whether Deckard is an android or a human. This posits the possibility of a romantic relationship between

[16] A. Jelewska, *Sensorium. Eseje o sztuce i technologii*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, Poznań 2012.
[17] J. Bednarek, *Przedmowa do polskiego wydania*, [in:] R. Braidotti, *Po człowieku*, trans. J. Bednarek, A. Kowalczyk, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2014, p. 29 [translation mine – J. Ł.].

two machines, or else between a human and an artificial creature. Either way, the romance strips man of his uniqueness. Man has traditionally (and anthropocentrically) reserved the right to be the only creature on Earth capable of experiencing the passion, the drama, and the joy of deep, true love. This fact was supposed to separate us from animals and other non-human objects. However, *Blade Runner* undermined this kind of thinking by presenting mutual intimacy among androids that seems authentic. Here, the robot is no longer an artificial doll that has nothing to say except worshipping his/her creator or nodding to his/her admirer.

The film's main protagonist, Deckard, starts to feel lost in the world that demands from him constant readiness to kill others. His need for something stable and firm in the place where everything seems to fall apart pushes him to leave his comfort zone and re-evaluate everything he believes in. He finds, though maybe only for a moment, something stabilizing and satisfying in a relationship with Rachael. Her artificiality/humanity is not the most crucial factor in their relationship. It is the fact that she replies to Deckard's longing, which makes her his "soul mate". They may be living in separate realms as man and machine but, thanks to their affective relationship, these realms can be intertwined.

In a deeply moving love scene between Deckard and Rachael the mutual fascination but also the doubts about the appropriateness of this affection are clearly visible in their behaviour. Moral ambiguity straight from the *noir film* serves here a clear purpose – it designates the shadowy grey zone that all non-human agents in the story occupy. They are not wholly humans, but also not dead, unaffected bodies – actually, they seem to be full of life energy, even if it is not *bios* but "only" *zoe*.

The "flickering between the bodies" of main protagonists in the love scene is a manifestation of affect as understood by Seigworth and Gregg:

> Affect is in many ways synonymous with *force* or *forces of encounter*. (…) Affect marks a body's *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world's belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging* (…)[18].

Affect is regarded as something different than clear, named emotions; the latter ones have their socially and linguistically stable representations, while affects are more ineffable and unspeakable. We call them shimmers, after Seigworth and Gregg, revealing themselves during encounters between the bodies of Deckard and Rachael. Let us now focus on another

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[18] G.J. Seigworth, M. Gregg, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

encounter where the affective reactions of both judge and the tested object are essential – on the Turing test.

Many Turing Tests and Few Gender Roles

Alan Turing proposed his test in 1950 as a method of assessing a computer's ability to think like a human[19]. In the original Turing test we have a judge and two hidden players. The judge's task is to recognize which one of them is a computer, and which one is a person. In later versions of the Turing test, also these presented in the movies, we have a slightly different situation – with two people only, one judge and one machine. The verdict in the Turing test is based on the judge's subjective feelings and impression, without any objective criteria that need to be spelled out. This determines that the Turing test is itself based on affect.

The affective version of the Turing test as a form of testimony is thematized in both *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny*. In *Ex Machina* we have Ava – a female-gendered android endowed by her creator with an incredibly brilliant artificial intelligence and a beautiful, voluptuous body – and Caleb, her judge in the test, whose task is to assess her viability as a successful AI. In *Uncanny*, the main heroine is a journalist named Joy Andrews who is supposed to write an article for a scientific magazine, giving testimony to the world's "very first perfect cyborg". The main protagonists of both movies are sent to the laboratories of famous researchers where they are supposed to see with their own eyes the most technologically advanced AI agents and conduct a Turing test on them.

Affect is closely related to the Turing test in both stories. It is exactly love that is a final (positive) answer in the Turing test. During long talks with Ava Caleb starts to fall in love with the android. The same happens with Joy and the cyborg named David – they even end up having sex. The only difference is that Joy falls for David without actually knowing that he is a cyborg, misled as she into thinking that David is the cyborg's maker. Joy is subjected to a vicious manipulation by the male heroes of the story (the owner of the company specialized in artificial intelligence and his researcher named Adam whom Joy mistakes for a cyborg). These men want to find out if a real person can fall in love with a robot without being aware of it. Joy obviously confuses the human with the machine, allowing herself to be seduced by the latter. In *Ex Machina* we have a similar situation. Nathan, Caleb's employer, constantly observes Caleb during his talks with Ava because

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[19] A. Turing, *Computing Machinery and Intelligence*, "Mind" 1950, Vol. LIX, No. 236.

he wants to find out if Caleb would fall in love with her. Thus, the "official" judges in the Turing tests (Caleb and Joy) are also the subjects of Turing meta-tests conducted by the "hidden" judges (Nathan in *Ex Machina*, and both male heroes in *Uncanny*). This complication makes us question the difference between man and machine – if both the machine and the man are subjected to the Turing test, is there any difference between them at all?

However, we are sure that the "official" judges, Caleb and Joy, show (consciously or not) that they do not treat their beloved ones (Ava in *Ex Machina*, David in *Uncanny*) as passive, non-living, emotionless machines. The judge certifies that the machine is sentient and it is equipped with an affect that changes the robot from a passive object to an object of love that is able to induce affection in the human judge. All in all, the machines made the testers fall in love with them – and not only thanks to their external attributes, the outer shell (like in Hoffmann's *The Sandman* where the doll was a beautiful but passive, mute object) but thanks to their intelligence (the ability to talk to the partner, to create the bond, etc.). The machines are far better in imitating human discourses than were the passive gothic dolls. As we noted, this was already anticipated in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, where a relationship based on mutuality and partnership was recognized as essential.

What is also interesting is that most of the judges in both films are males, and the objects (Ava, Joy) are females, which for sure influences the test verdicts. According to Tyler Curtain[20], the judge in the Turing test will never be able to think about the testing object as a genderless one, therefore the object will always be identified as "male" or "female". According to Tyler, "intelligence and humanity can't be defined outside of sexual difference and the phenomenology of the sex-gender system"[21]. The distribution of gender roles is striking in both films. The woman is either "fooled" and turns out to be a "fake" judge (Joy is a judge outwardly, but in fact she is deceived by the men who are playing her), the subject of a test (Ava) or of a meta-test (Joy). Despite the fact that these films are progressive in the sense of recognizing affect within a machine, they are also somehow conservative in terms of gender. Portrayals of males and females reproduce the stereotypical roles – some of them already known from the gothic universe. These stereotypes depict the woman as: 1) an enigma, a "hieroglyphic" character uneasy to decipher (e.g., Ava, whose actions seem to be very mysterious and not well explained); 2) a mirror for male's projections (Ava is

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[20] T. Curtain, *'The Sinister Fruitiness' of Machines: Neuromancer, Internet Sexuality, and the Turing Test*, [in:] *Novel Gazing. Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. E. Kosofsky Sedgwick, Duke University Press, Durham and London 1997.

[21] Ibidem, p. 142.

built based on Caleb's porn website searches); 3) an object of desire, used for her qualities that can be attractive for a man, especially her sexually attractive body (both Ava and Joy). Gender-wise, the most progressive of the three films analysed here is *Blade Runner* because it portrays man and woman equal in the relationship. In this respect, as well as in its blurring of the boundary between man and machine, *Blade Runner* is closest to the post-human understanding of subjectivity.

Human or Machine?

Matt Walst, a lead singer of the Canadian rock band Three Days Grace, reflects on the importance of features that constitute a human in a well-known song *I Am Machine*: "Here's to being human / All the pain and suffering / There's beauty in the bleeding / At least you feel something". In the analysed films affect (or, the ability to feel) ceases to be a feature that belongs only to human beings, which makes human protagonists question their own humanity. Bleeding as a proof for being a human seems of great importance for Caleb from *Ex Machina*. First of all, he simply cannot understand why he fell in love with a robot (it seems strange and suspicious), and he desperately needs something to confirm his own human uniqueness. Secondly, he is aware that Nathan is constantly observing all his actions, and maybe manipulating him, which could easily mean that Caleb himself is an object (meaning: a machine). For Caleb, this possibility is too much; that is why he cuts his wrist in a bathroom to see blood and the flesh under the skin. Caleb clearly cannot accept that his status is "machine-like", and that machines may resemble a real person. It is the same with Joy from *Uncanny*: she breaks down after finding out that she fell in love and slept with a cyborg, unable to cope with this shocking situation.

A technophobic note seems present in the portrayals of human-machine romantic encounters in *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny*. According to the stories depicted in the analysed films, there could be a situation when we choose the machine rather than a human (like Joy), or consciously fall in love with a machine (like Caleb). In both these situations humans are fighting a losing battle – Caleb is left by Ava in a closed room and exposed to certain death, and Joy suffers a nervous breakdown, and is left pregnant with a baby of unknown provenance (it seems that the semen used during the sexual intercourse between her and David belonged to one of the men who planned the whole scheme). The only movie that points to the possibility of establishing an authentic love relationship between a human and a robot is *Blade Runner*.

Another answer to the question what makes the difference between a human and a machine can be found in *Uncanny*. Here we have two opponents in a duel where Joy's love is the main prize: David – a cyborg (Joy thinks he is a real person), and Adam – famous AI researcher (whom she takes for a cyborg). Both of them try to win the metaphorical game of chess and "capture the Queen" before the other one does. This spectacle seems very real for Joy who is not aware of the whole intrigue. The movie is an obvious chess analogy, with more than one game going on. The players are changing the positions, the strategies, and even objectives, in direct response to their opponents' moves. Adam reckons while playing a game of chess with David (and losing it on purpose) that "being a human" means to have the ability to consciously switch between multiple, hidden goals ("Primary objectives can be redefined every moment. Isn't that what it means to be human? To constantly shift one's priorities?"). Having a hidden objective and adjusting the strategy to the current situation are traditionally understood as qualities typical for human being (a sign of human intelligence). At first glance, this does not seem true anymore since cyborgs can also deceive people (David misled Joy) and convince them about having goals going beyond strictly logical thinking, engaging "emotional tactics". However, these are just appearances. In *Uncanny*, technology still serves man's purpose because ultimately David is a tool in Adam's capable hands. On the other hand, Adam (who is human) may be a tool in the hands of his employer (presumably another human), or perhaps vice versa, since Adam breaks the security protocol and thus acts against his employer's wishes so as to gain a pretext to dismantle David after Joy has been impregnated. In this way, being a tool in the hands of another is not necessarily that which defines the difference between a human being and a machine. Conversely, competition between people (here: between men) is implicitly about which one of them is more human (and more masculine) as opposed to being more like a machine (and thus more feminine).

Conclusion

In this paper, I tried to show that affect, which is recognized in the Turing test, is a crucial element in portraying the romantic encounters of humans and AI agents in contemporary cinema. Analysed films testify to the growing interest in affective capabilities of AI, as well as the opportunities and fears associated with it. Androids fall in love with each other or with humans; humans fall in love (consciously or not) with machines – all these situations can be placed beyond the earlier gothic imagination,

which focused only on mechanical female automatons being a mirror for men's desires. However, the depictions of human-machine relationships in *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny* are rather conservative; they apparently cannot abandon the stereotypical gender roles, nor mute the technophobic note. Of all analysed examples it is *Blade Runner* that most fully recognizes the new forms of post-human subjectivity.

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Joanna Łapińska

Affective Response Beyond the Gothic: Romancing with the Machine from *The Sandman* to *Uncanny*

In recent American and British films emotions/affects are recognized as crucial for creating, recognizing, understanding, and communicating with artificial intelligence (AI) agents. AI is increasingly portrayed as capable of manipulating human affect and as itself subject to affect. The paper discusses romantic relationships between AI agents and humans in *Blade Runner* (1982), *Ex Machina* (2015) and *Uncanny* (2015), situating their portrayal in the context of post-humanism and affect studies. It also discusses the Turing test as a form of testimony. When the earlier gothic imagination focused on humans falling in love with mechanical dolls, as in E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Erzählungen* and G.B. Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the delusion that these artificial creatures were love-worthy was in the eye of the beholder. The contemporary post-humanist imagination posits the reverse possibility that AI agents may fall in love with people and with other AIs, or at least pretend to love in

a convincing manner. By the same token, humans are stripped of their uniqueness and imagined as reducible to a machine-like status. The recent films extend this similarity of humans and machines by focusing on romantic scenarios involving both. The mechanistic grasp of affects is both implied and thematized in *Ex Machina* and *Uncanny*, where a sense of the peculiarly human persists in romantically inflected versions of the Turing test. The notion that machines can be convincing at the game of love shows that affects are increasingly understood as crucial to our understanding of AI. Conversely, this notion also suggests that distinguishing between the peculiarly human and that which machines are capable of imitating is more problematic than ever.

Keywords: Hoffmann's *The Sandman*, affective response, gothic, *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott), *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland), *Uncanny* (Matthew Leutwyler)

Słowa klucze: *Sandman* Hoffmanna, reakcja afektywna, gotyckość, *Łowca androidów* (Ridley Scott), *Ex Machina* (Alex Garland), *Uncanny* (Matthew Leutwyler)