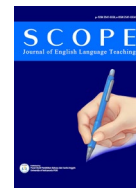




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Research Article

## Human-Robot Relationships in Millennial CGI Narratives: Ethical, Emotional, and Social Dimension

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### KEYWORDS

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### A B S T R A C T

This study investigates the multifaceted dynamics of human-robot relationships as portrayed in contemporary CGI narratives. Focusing on millennial cinematic and digital content, it explores the ethical considerations, emotional engagements, and social implications of human interactions with robotic entities. By analyzing a selection of prominent CGI films and series, the research examines how these narratives address issues of autonomy, moral responsibility, and the emotional bonds formed between humans and robots. The study also considers the societal impact of these representations, including the potential for reshaping public perceptions and the ethical discourse surrounding artificial intelligence. The findings highlight the complex interplay between technology and humanity, offering insights into the evolving nature of human-robot interactions in modern storytelling.

## INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, robots have become integral to various facets of human life, permeating domestic settings, public spaces, institutions, offices, workshops, hospitals, and entertainment venues alike. They serve as versatile service providers, dependable caregivers, tutors, skilled assistants, and even companions. In households, robots undertake tasks ranging from mundane chores such as cooking and cleaning to providing companionship akin to pets. In medical settings, they support healthcare professionals by assisting in surgeries and patient care.

Moreover, the increasing integration of technological devices into human life suggests a profound shift. Robots are no longer mere tools but extensions of both the physical

and cognitive self, influencing human values and societal norms. This evolution prompts a reevaluation of human interactions with and perceptions of robotic cultures.

The rise of robotic culture introduces both benefits and challenges to human existence. On one hand, the adoption of robot services and artificial intelligence enhances productivity, efficacy, and efficiency (Wirtz et al., 2018). Robots excel in delivering consistent service and rapid outcomes without succumbing to fatigue or emotional fluctuations, leading to a growing reliance on their capabilities. Consequently, there is a gradual displacement of human workers as robots are increasingly favored. However, the human-like appearance and behavior of robots can evoke unsettling emotions such as unease, apprehension, and perceived threat (Muller, 2020), potentially undermining established human values.

These shifts and challenges to human values are of paramount concern in children's literature, which frequently delves into themes of collaboration, cohabitation, and hybridity between humans and robots. It is essential for children to grasp technology and digital literacy beyond its practical applications, acknowledging how its integration reshapes human values. Authors of children's literature address these themes to provoke deeper reflection and comprehension of the evolving relationship between humans and robots among future generations.

Research on robot cultures has been explored through various literary forms, including films, science fiction, and animations. Defalco's (2020) study of the Swedish film "A'ktama'nizkor" (Real Human) challenges the notion that quality care must exclusively come from humans. Through fictional depictions of robotic care, the study develops a theory of post-human care, which critiques the anthropocentric biases in care ethics philosophy. This theoretical framework emphasizes representation and obligation while questioning emotional and humanistic hierarchies that prioritize certain bodies and impacts over others.

Susanto Susanto's (2021) article, "Children and Robot: Posthumanism Reading on Riko the Series", examines how robots are represented and interact with children in the Islamic children's film Riko the Series. Unlike Nussa, Riko the Series explores the intersection of religion, children, and technology. The study reveals that the film portrays post-humanism by illustrating modern Islamic families' evolving relationship with technology, portraying robots as caretakers, educators, protectors, and companions. However, it also raises concerns about potential over-reliance and dependence on robots among children.

Sophie Wennerscheid's (2018) article, "Posthuman Desire in Robotics and Science Fiction," explores intimate relationships between humans and robots in science fiction literature, film, and art. The study suggests that robots can fulfill roles ranging from social assistance and emotional support to providing sexual pleasure. Utilizing Deleuze and Guattari's theory of 'becoming-other,' the study proposes a 'new networks of desire' theory. This theory posits that romantic relationships with robots have the potential to transform individuals, challenging traditional human self-understanding and egocentricity.

The three aforementioned studies focus on the portrayal of human-robot relationships in science fiction films. The first and third studies delve into adult themes, exploring issues such as care and sexual desire between humans and robots. They depict a paradoxical relationship where mutual dependence evokes feelings of eeriness, danger, and threat,

alongside emotions of blissfulness, happiness, and sophistication. In contrast, the second study examines how children interact with robots, portraying robots not only as companions but also as protectors and educators who impart Islamic values.

This current study diverges from the previous three in terms of its focus on the media and content of CGI or animated short films. CGI short films are particularly captivating for millennial children due to their engaging visuals and narratives. This research critically examines seven CGI short films: "Powerless" (2009), "Changing Battery" (2014), "Beautiful Humanoid" (2016), "Cross Breed" (2018), "Shattered" (2020), "Green Light" (2019), and "K.I.T" (2020). The study aims to explore how these films represent robots and depict their relationships with humans through the perspectives of Min-Sun Kim and Eun Jon Kim. They categorize these relationships into six types: Robots as 'the Frightening Other,' 'Subhuman,' 'Human Substitute,' 'Sentient/Living Other,' 'Divine Other: techno salvation,' and 'Co-evolution of Homo sapiens and Robo Sapiens'

## METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research methodology, utilizing Min-Sun Kim and Eun Jon Kim's critical perspective model to analyze seven selected CGI short films. According to Farida (2014), qualitative description emphasizes accurate, comprehensive, and in-depth language descriptions of real circumstances to support data presentation. The use of descriptive quantitative analysis serves as a complementary method to ensure objective results (Harahap, 2020). This methodology involves a detailed examination of visual scenes depicted in seven selected CGI short films.

In CGI short films, effective storytelling hinges on several key elements. Firstly, character focus versus character interaction is crucial; these films must clearly establish whose story is being told while maintaining viewer interest through meaningful character interactions that may not necessarily involve conflict. Secondly, causality versus choice is paramount; successful short films portray events driven by characters' deliberate decisions, avoiding passive protagonists and mere temporal sequences. Thirdly, consistency versus surprise ensures characters remain identifiable from the outset, offering unpredictability without sacrificing gradual development. Additionally, dynamic integration of sound with visuals enhances viewer engagement, making actions appealing to both the eye and ear. The relationship between characters and objects is also vital; significant objects can convey inner experiences, linking physical actions with emotions and thoughts. Simplicity versus depth is another critical aspect;

straightforward narratives often provoke deeper viewer exploration and interpretation, whereas overly complex plots may risk superficiality. Lastly, economy versus completeness ensures short films feel both concise and expansive, utilizing effective closure strategies to leave a lasting impact on viewers.

The brief explanation of these six views is as follows: (1) The robots as the "Frightening Other" refer to cruel robots that turn on their creators and murder them, reflecting human fears of robots taking over. This fear is rooted in the human brain's reaction to unfamiliar "others" and religious beliefs that creating humanoids violates God's authority. (2) The robots as the "Subhuman Other" view humanoid robots as intelligent but emotionless beings, lacking human attributes such as emotionality and warmth. These robots are seen as inferior and undeserving of human respect. (3) The robots as "Human Substitute" suggests that humanoid robots can replace humans in personal roles, such as performing domestic tasks and providing companionship, as well as taking on roles traditionally filled by foreign laborers to avoid social issues. (4) The robots as the "Sentient/Living Other" imply that humanoid robots are considered living beings, especially in Eastern cultures that do not differentiate between natural and artificial entities. In contrast, Western culture views humans as having souls, positioning humanoid robots as inferior. (5) The robots as "Divine Others" refer to the possibility of sentient humanoid robots with self-programming capabilities, potentially possessing a kind of spiritual life and fulfilling divine values of benevolence and spirituality. (6) The co-evolution of Homo Sapiens and Robot Sapiens represents the view that humans may become more robotic through technological modifications for health reasons, leading to a merging of humans and machines and the dream of becoming superhuman by overcoming human limitations through technology.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*The types of the human and robot relationship are discussed as follows.*

### Frightening Other

The short film "Powerless" represents the complex and often frightening relationship between humans and robots. In this narrative, David undergoes a forced transformation into a humanoid, causing him to fear his unexpected transformation. This transformation leaves him half human and half machine, and he is terrified of losing his family.

In their article, Blake and Norton (2014) explore the formation of robust attachment and social bonds across diverse relational contexts through responsive daily communication. Such communication enhances an individual's ability to sustain hope. It is presumed that

David maintains a strong relationship with his wife and child, with these memories being deeply ingrained in his consciousness, despite his current state as a cyborg. His aspiration to escape from his current situation suggests a persistent hope of reuniting with his family.

Additionally, David is frightened by the overpowering and intimidating machine security robot that enforces his transformation. As a result, David loses both his power and individual freedom. This forced transformation and the dominance of the security robot illustrate the superiority of machines over humans.

David's complete transformation into a mechanical robot leaves him confused, sad, and depressed. His mechanical appearance and memories of his family cause him to experience a loss of identity. Despite this, David's humanness is reflected through his memories and passion for his family, revealing the challenge of dualism in humanity. On one hand, humanity seems eternal as long as passion and the longing for family togetherness are part of the spiritual values of humanity. However, humanity might disappear with the loss of human power and the transformation into mechanical robots. In the context of cultural robotics, humanity faces paradoxical sensations, leading to a dependency on mechanical power instead of the soul. Nevertheless, the underlying message of this CGI short film suggests that the power of the human soul remains a priority, despite the transformation into mechanical robotics.

Another representation of the frightening relationship between humans and robots is found in "Beautiful Humanoid." In this narrative, both the creator and the robot experience fear. The creator is afraid that the female humanoid will be destroyed, as she has developed feelings and desires to become human. She seeks the freedom to think independently. However, the female humanoid is created as a subordinate to serve humans. The creator designs her to be passive, loyal, submissive, and obedient, denying her the freedom to think. The creator fears that granting this freedom could lead to critical thinking and rebellion, which would endanger humans. This aligns with Lim, Rooksby & Cross's, (2020) thought which states, the purposes behind using such robots must also be considered to address ethical issues related to culturally aligned robots, ensuring that these agents are created to assist rather than harm their intended users.

The relationship between humans as robot creators and their robotic creations in "Beautiful Humanoid" highlights a frightening dynamic rooted in power and gender. The invisible male creator holds a powerful position, dictating the deterministic requirements of his female humanoid creation, Cara. As the fourth-generation merchandise marked with the barcode PPC 897504 C, Cara is designed to serve male superiority in personal, domestic, and public

spheres. Her roles include being a sexual partner, entertainer, cook, childcare provider, and business secretary, all fueled by 137 years of energy. Despite her multifaceted talents and extravagant capabilities, Cara is powerless without the freedom to think. The creator's refusal to grant her this freedom underscores his absolute authority, ultimately labeling her as a defective product when she appeals for autonomy. This deterministic threat reveals the creator's selfishness and materialistic orientation, prioritizing his needs over Cara's existence. Although Cara possesses superior competencies, they do not empower her to resist her creator. Faced with a dilemma, she chooses to remain a multi-talented female humanoid robot ready for sale rather than being destroyed. This choice highlights the significance of her existence, even in a subordinate role. In line with the findings of Huang & Wang (2023), AI agents were equally persuasive as humans when considering overall persuasion outcomes. However, while AI was less successful than humans in influencing behavioral intentions, there were no significant differences between AI and humans in terms of affecting perceptions, attitudes, or actual behaviors. More significantly, machines can continuously enhance their problem-solving abilities by amassing extensive data and autonomously generating optimal solutions based on that data (IBM Cloud Education, 2020).

The frightening relationship between humans and robots is further explored in "Cross Breed." In this narrative, robots are created as mediums for spreading biological weapons. The paramilitary crime robots are cruel and ugly, carrying extreme infections that lead to a pandemic. While the robots remain unaffected, humans are highly susceptible to infections, resulting in widespread calamity. This dynamic underscores the perilous impact of robots designed for biological warfare on human society.

In "Green Light," robot soldiers engage in a nuclear war, destroying the world and killing children and other robots. In their writing, Kasapoğlu and Kirdemir (2019) state, in any futuristic sci-fi warfare scenario, where AI-controlled killer robots engage in combat in organized formations utilizing a network-centric concept of operations (CONOPS) These killer robots, devoid of empathy, passion, and love, aim to dominate the world by eradicating humans.

Despite this, the surviving humans demonstrate resilience and strength, protecting themselves from the terrifying circumstances. This scenario illustrates how fear motivates human survival in the face of robotic annihilation.



**Figure 1.** Military robots chase and scare sister humanoid robot.

### Human Substitute

The concept of robots as human substitutes is evident through their repetitive and automatic tasks in serving humans. This relationship underscores the functional role of robots as tools or mechanical assistants to humans. The decision-making authority remains with humans, who, as creators and innovators, hold more power (Kim & Kim, 2013). The security robot in "Powerless" exemplifies this dynamic, replacing human security work by programming to chase and capture David. This programmed duty highlights the robot's role as a human substitute, emphasizing the power imbalance between humans and their creations.

The caregiver robot in "Changing Battery" is programmed to care for a lonely elderly lady. It performs tasks automatically, accompanying and serving her as needed. This robot, sent by the lady's son to take his place in caring for his mother, operates on batteries installed by the elderly woman. She controls the robot according to her wishes, but it performs its duties without any emotions. It is indicated by highlighting the differences between intellectual and physical work. It explores the societal effects of AI taking over roles traditionally filled by humans, such as personal trainers, artists (Syed, 2023), and event caregivers for the elderly like in "Changing Battery" as well as robotic military soldiers. However, Older adults often wish to preserve their independence while staying socially connected with their family, friends, and community. Despite facing challenges in achieving these goals, socially assistive robots offer the potential to support aging in place and enhance independence. For widespread adoption, these home robots need to be reliable, user-friendly, and able to operate according to established social norms (Kadylack et al, 2023).

In "The Beautiful Humanoid," the female humanoid is designed and programmed to be a multi-talented, multitasked, and multifunctional servant for humans. Created to be submissive, loyal, passive, and attractive, she

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is mechanized without emotion or thought to reinforce human superiority. This superiority is threatened when the female humanoid requests the ability to think like humans. Fearing this development, her creator determines that she should remain purely mechanical rather than becoming a subhuman entity.

Additionally, future research could explore how the cultural backgrounds of individuals in the robotics industry influence preferences for culturally adaptive robots. Ultimately, robots are designed according to the perspectives of their creators, including designers, programmers, and developers. Therefore, a robot's capacity to be culturally sensitive or reflective is inherently constrained by the creators' perceptions, biases, and cultural understanding. Nevertheless, it is suggested to investigate the cultural and disciplinary backgrounds of robotics creators or determine whether the alignment between the creator's and the user's cultures is crucial for optimizing social robotic cues based on the creator's accurate and innate cultural knowledge (Lim et al, 2020).

Moreover, Sorell stated that automation does not always fully replace human labor; rather, there is a transitional period where humans and robots, including collaborative robots (cobots), work together in production. Cobots are specifically designed to operate alongside humans. This discussion explores how cobots could ultimately lead to eliminating human operators from production, even though managers initially claim that cobots are intended to assist and improve human roles, not replace them (2022). "The Greenlights" represents this collaborative robot relationship with humans who manage the robot to do the reforestation.



**Figure 2.** Robots as the "Human Substitute" helps daily task

### ***Subhuman Other & Longevity - Non-Longevity***

The subhuman relationship between humans and robots is illustrated in "Cross Breed." The humanoid siblings are designed to resemble human beings in their physical appearance, language, sense of humor, and emotions such

as fear, anxiety, depression, responsibility, and sacrifice. The humanoid sister's spiritual strength enables her to come back to life after reuniting with her depressed and grieving humanoid brother. This reunion demonstrates how human qualities can imbue mechanical machines with life-like attributes, showcasing a relationship that transcends their mechanical. Ashrafian's discussion (2014) on autonomous decision-making highlights how robots can replace human judgment and action in certain contexts, thereby acting as functional substitutes.

Similarly, "Changing Battery" represents the transformation of a mechanical caregiver robot into an afterlife partner. The elderly lady's death leads the robotic caregiver to transcend its mechanical nature, joining her in a life-after-death realm of immortality. This ambiguous and irrational relationship suggests the possibility of mechanical robots achieving spiritual immortality, opposing the notion that a non-functioning robotic caregiver is merely mortal. Instead, it highlights a belief in spiritual immortality.

"Changing Battery," demonstrates the mechanical caregiver robot, which undergoes a significant transformation following the death of the elderly lady it cares for. This transformation symbolizes a shift from its mechanical existence to a state of spiritual immortality, where it joins the old lady in an afterlife realm. This narrative illustrates a belief in spiritual immortality and posits that the bond between the caregiver robot and the elderly lady extends beyond death, suggesting an everlasting relationship. This conceptual transformation challenges the notion of the robot's mortality, proposing instead that it achieves a form of spiritual immortality, thereby opposing the idea that a robot ceases to function upon its physical termination.

The concept of material immortality is exemplified in the relationship between humans and robots in "Green Light" and "K.I.T." In these narratives, an incapacitated soldier robot is repaired and reactivated by a young girl, symbolizing material perpetuity. The robot's extended lifespan, compared to that of mortal humans, signifies material eternity. However, this longevity is contingent upon human intervention for maintenance and reinstallation. The robot's material immortality facilitates reforestation efforts after a nuclear war, transforming a barren, lifeless world into a green, habitable environment. This collaboration underscores the robot's role in ecosystem sustainability, where its mechanical functions contribute to the non-material preservation of living organisms.

In "K.I.T.," the medical assistant robot exhibits a complex and paradoxical relationship with its creator, as evidenced by its return to the creator's house to visit her tomb. This scenario highlights the robot's extended lifespan juxtaposed with the mortality of its creator, who served as both an inventor and maternal figure. The nature of their relationship evolves from a creator-inventor dynamic to one resembling a mother-son bond. The robot's behavior suggests it possesses memories and emotions, experiencing loss and grief upon encountering the grave of its creator, reflecting a deep emotional connection beyond mere functional interaction. In other words, Basiska (2024) stated that robots become more integrated into humans' daily lives, they could play significant roles in addressing loneliness, grief, and bereavement, offering companionship and continuity in ways similar to human relationships. This subhuman relationship between humans and robots represents the beyond mechanical and soul-living creature. relationship.

In "Shattered," the gender identity of defective humanoid female robots is indicated by a marking on their chest, similar to their male counterparts. Typically, defective humanoid robots passively accept their fate of being burned for recycling. Farias, et al (2023) research challenges and discredits the myth of male superiority, particularly within education and the workplace. The findings reveal that gender stereotypes and systemic biases are frequently unfounded in scientific evidence and are primarily social constructs that must be addressed to attain genuine gender equality.

However, one defective female humanoid robot becomes aware of this automatic destruction process and leads a resistance movement. Her actions awaken millions of male and female humanoid robots, who then strive for survival. This resistance symbolizes her struggle for the right to exist, suggesting that imperfection is acceptable. This scenario critiques the dichotomy of perfection and imperfection. While human beings, considered the most perfect creation of God, are accepted with their disabilities and are treated with care and love, humanoid robots, created by humans, are expected to be homogeneously perfect. Those with an egalitarian view, akin to that of Eastern cultures, perceive humans as equals to all other entities, including humanoid robots. Consequently, the recycling process of defective humanoid robots is seen as a dehumanization issue. Conversely, the hierarchical worldview rationalizes the destruction of defective humanoid robots as a means to improve the quality of products created by humans, who are regarded as the highest form of matter.



Figure 3. Robots as the "Subhuman Other"

## CONCLUSION

The evolving relationship between humans and robots captures a complex interplay of fear, aspiration, ethical considerations, and visionary potential. Our perceptions and interactions with robots can be categorized into four themes: frightening, human substitute, subhuman, and eternity. The frightening aspect highlights our primal fear of robots, deeply rooted in cultural narratives and media portrayals that depict robots as threats. This fear includes concerns about job displacement, loss of control, and even robotic uprisings. Such anxieties are not baseless, as the rapid pace of technological advancement often surpasses the development of ethical frameworks and safety regulations. The potential for misuse or malfunction of robotic systems presents legitimate concerns. Addressing these fears through informed policy-making, ethical guidelines, and continuous public engagement is crucial for balancing apprehensions with a rational understanding of technology's benefits.

Moving beyond fear, robots as human substitutes present an optimistic view, suggesting that robots designed to emulate human functions can significantly enhance our quality of life. In healthcare, robotic assistants provide companionship to the elderly and assist with tasks requiring attention. In industry, robots can take over repetitive and dangerous jobs, increasing efficiency and safety. The goal is not to replace humans entirely but to complement and augment human capabilities. This symbiotic relationship envisions a future where humans and robots coexist harmoniously, each enhancing the other's strengths. The development of empathetic and socially intelligent robots can foster deeper connections and mutual understanding, opening new avenues for human-robot interaction and promoting a positive coexistence.

Contrastingly, the subhuman category addresses the ethical and moral implications of treating robots as entities lesser than humans. This perspective challenges our notions of

personhood, rights, and dignity. As robots become more advanced and autonomous, questions arise about their societal status, such as whether they should have rights or be considered moral agents. The treatment of robots can reflect our values and ethical principles, raising concerns about potential exploitation and abuse. Additionally, creating robots designed for subservient roles can reinforce harmful social hierarchies and prejudices. It is imperative to approach the development and integration of robots with responsibility, ensuring they are treated with respect and that their deployment does not perpetuate inequality or injustice. The theme of eternity invites us to consider the long-term implications of our relationship with robots, including the quest for immortality through advanced robotics, and the philosophical and ethical questions this pursuit raises about identity, consciousness, and existence.

In light of the complex relationship between humans and robots, it is essential to address the challenges and opportunities presented. Future research should focus on developing comprehensive ethical frameworks and policies to mitigate fears surrounding job displacement and misuse. Simultaneously, we must explore the potential of robots as human substitutes in areas like healthcare and industry, while promoting mutual coexistence. Ethical considerations regarding the treatment of robots as subhuman and the long-term implications of advanced robotics, including the quest for immortality, require ongoing public discourse to ensure a responsible and equitable integration of robots into society.

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Internet:

<https://www.musicbed.com/blog/filmmaking/writing/new-theories-of-the-short-film-a-conversation-with-dr-richard-raskin/>  
(download 29 Jan 2020)

Link film: Powerless

<https://youtu.be/fS42YC1ipN0?si=kvGo2qM0kn8-e0Lm>

Link film: Beautiful Humanoid Robot

[https://youtu.be/9W7WE1oP7d4?si=rQx\\_Iy1nhI3K0uTM](https://youtu.be/9W7WE1oP7d4?si=rQx_Iy1nhI3K0uTM)

Link film: Changing Batteries

[https://youtu.be/O\\_yVo3YOfqQ?si=URpN3r62TQ2u5Q\\_N](https://youtu.be/O_yVo3YOfqQ?si=URpN3r62TQ2u5Q_N)

Link film: Cross Breed

[https://youtu.be/NWfYQ3T6yAs?si=y8cBksco-hxIxt\\_C](https://youtu.be/NWfYQ3T6yAs?si=y8cBksco-hxIxt_C)

Link film: Shattered

[https://youtu.be/yHPPCOAllMs?si=V8\\_zE0IuAZQ4TCuE](https://youtu.be/yHPPCOAllMs?si=V8_zE0IuAZQ4TCuE)

Link film: Green Light

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UT-mA673hLs>

Link film: Dystopian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PYGQYz-8f1s>