



## Research article

# AI Take-Over in Literature and Culture: Truth, Post-Truth, and Simulation

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## Abstract

In a world that is increasingly lost to narrative building, deep fakes, simulation of realities and dissemination of fake news generated by artificial intelligence (AI), we are moving towards a post-truth era. Our thoughts are being manipulated and twisted with (mis)information for the benefit of people in power; thus, our consent is being manufactured with the aid of AI, resulting in ideological imperialism. In such a scenario, when AI is slowly taking control over the planet and creating our digital replicas by cloning our consciousness, what will our future look like? Humans' creative pursuits have already predicted such futures in various movies, comics, novels and web series depicting the myriad complications associated with an impending AI takeover. Thus, contextualising today's scenario within the scope of the future, the paper aims to dissect some popular speculative narratives offered through various tissues of culture, including movies, comics, novels and web series, to comprehend the consequences those narratives generate to grasp the changing relationalities between real and unreal, and truth and post-truth in a world run in codes and simulation.

**Keywords:** Artificial intelligence (AI), post-truth, simulation, surveillance, ideological imperialism, speculative narratives.



## 1. Introduction: Navigating the AI Saturated Realities

"The Big Brother is Watching You"

---George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949)

The possible dangers of intelligent machines and their misuse by fascist states were conceptualised in literature much before Alan Turing or John Macarthy postulated machines as intelligent entities, the most popular example being George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

**Article History:** Received: 30 October 2023. Revised: 09 December 2023. Accepted: 10 December 2023. Published: 18 December 2023.

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**Citation:** Pramanik, S. & Rai, S.K. (2023). AI Take-Over in Literature and Culture: Truth, Post-Truth, and Simulation. *Rupkatha Journal* 15:4. <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v15n4.12>

In the year 2015, the Cambridge Analytica data Scandal took place, which was a shocking strike upon our freedom through surveillance of a different mode similar to the world imagined by Orwell. This political consulting firm that was working with Donald Trump, garnered personal data of people from Facebook profiles and manipulated individuals into supporting Trump through targeted political propaganda ads based on their psychological mapping, thereby imperialising their ideologies via Artificial Intelligence. It leads to the fact that AI can soon be weaponised to spring up an information war, as the algorithms help in manipulating “our opinions and behaviour to advance specific political agendas” (Anderson & Horvath, 2017, introduction section, para. 2). Thus, a technological dystopia appears to be hastening soon when we witness “250 million algorithmic versions of their political message all updating in real-time, personalised to precisely fit the worldview and attack the insecurities of their targets” (Anderson and Horvath, 2017, T.F.W.A.P.M section, para. 15). Given these advancements, it is not very far-fetched to imagine AI overthrowing our democratic free will, leading to what we propose to term as- ideological imperialism, as we witness in various cultural embodiments that include movies, web series, novels and comics. In this post-truth era, we must rely upon our imaginative ability to speculate the outcomes of these simulations and algorithms as the membrane between the real and the unreal is ruptured.

This cautionary perspective becomes evidently grounded when we scrutinise China's extensive deployment of approximately 200 million surveillance cameras, constituting its massive surveillance system. It appears as a warning for the freedom-loving people of the rest of the world, showcasing how intelligent surveillance systems honed by AI can culminate into a hellish panopticon where free will is scarce and life is bleak. China has integrated AI technologies like Skynet (facial recognition software) with security cameras to engulf its entire population and their outside activities. Steven Feldstein (2019), in his report on the “Global Expansion of AI Surveillance”, finds that

at least seventy-five out of 176 countries globally are actively using AI technologies for surveillance purposes...Chinese companies—particularly Huawei, Hikvision, Dahua, and ZTE—supply AI surveillance technology in sixty-three countries, thirty-six of which have signed onto China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (p.1).

In fact, the so-called 1<sup>st</sup> world democratic countries like the USA, the UK, France and Japan are also using AI technologies to garner information about their citizens through mass surveillance. Kaan Sahin (2020) observes how the technological authoritarian mindset of China is a major drive behind the market of ‘authoritarian techs’ (“Risks and Opportunities” section, para. 6).

### **1.1 Theoretical Framework:**

In such a world, the binaries between reality and simulation overlap and the paper aims to build on the theoretical framework of simulation, reality (Plato, Advaita Vedanta, Buddha and Descartes) and post-truth to unveil our concept of ‘ideological imperialism’. Baudrillard, in his phenomenal *Simulation and Simulacra* (1983), gave the concepts of simulation and hyperreality. According to Baudrillard (1983), we live in a world where we can comprehend reality only through images and signs, and thus, our perceived notion of reality is not the reality itself but the simulation of reality

(p. 6). This simulation is generated by simulacra or the signs that media and culture induce upon society. Baudrillard's notions were reiterated in Herman and Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (1988), which states how "mass media serve as a system...to amuse, entertain, and inform, and to inculcate individuals...into the institutional structures...to fulfill...systematic propaganda" (p. 1). Mass Media, as it was already a declared ISA or "ideological state apparatus, (Althusser, 1971, p. 142) in Marxist canon, equipped with AI-based propaganda mercenaries of the 21st century, tends to eclipse truth and heralds us towards the post-truth era which posits the risk of ideological imperialism with world-ending magnitude. In this context, scrutinising various props of cultural patches, which include some select movies, novels, and web series, the paper aims to probe into the future of AI, which is reverberated in speculative cultural and literary imaginaries. Unearthing these theoretical and philosophical notions of reality, sentience, truth, post-truth and simulation, the paper digs out the looming uncertainties of an AI-dominated world.

## **2. Unwrapping the Representations of AI in Narrative Mediums:**

"I propose to consider the question, Can Machines Think?" (Turing, 1950, p. 433)– is the enigma at the very outset of Alan Turing's famous article "Computing Machinery and Intelligence" that ignited the beginning of the AI revolution in 1950. The question not only gives vent to inquiry into whether machines possess cognitive ability or sentience but also destabilises the Cartesian definition of humans as the only thinking rational beings. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a set of technologies that can mimic human cognition and learn and act in a way that will otherwise require the intelligence of humans. The term 'Artificial Intelligence' was coined by John McCarthy and his peers in 1955 as "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines" (McCarthy et al., 1955, p. 12). Artificial Intelligence became a part of the popular discussion after 11th May 1997 when IBM's Deep Blue computer decisively defeated Garry Kasparov, the greatest chess player of all time, shattering humans' vanity as a supreme intelligent being.

Though the concepts and the philosophies behind Artificial Intelligence are centuries older and have been under continuous development, it was only after the emergence of the World Wide Web (the Internet revolution) in the 1990s that AI research gained significant momentum. The heyday of AI research can be marked after the public release of popular AI bots (Large Language Models) like ChatGPT, Bard, Mid-journey DALL-E, etc., which have generated a hue and cry among social thinkers, scientists and philosophers regarding its possible and ongoing use by politicians, states, and multinational companies for not only ideology building and opinion manipulation but also for reinforcing oppressive regimes.

### **2.1 Tracing Artificial Intelligence in Literary Imagination:**

The question of an automated humane machine or an *automata* is as old as Hesiod's *Theogony* (c. 7<sup>th</sup> century BC), where we get the mention of Talos, a non-human robot-like creature made of bronze, who would protect Crete from the invaders by throwing stones at the ship. Again, at a later period, we find Aristotle in his *Politics* (circa 350 BC) contemplating on an imaginary instrument that

could accomplish its own work, obeying or anticipating the will of others...if in like manner, the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves (p. 12).

In Ovid's *Metamorphosis* (circa 8 CE), we find Galatea, who was crafted in ivory by the Cypriot sculptor Pygmalion. Eventually, Pygmalion falls in love with Galatea, and on his request, Aphrodite circulates life in the ivory statue, resulting in a love affair between Galatea, a non-biological humanoid and Pygmalion. Again, in many Hebrew texts and Jewish folklore, the character of Golem appears, which is made of a mould of clay and can be activated by Hebrew alphabets, resembling large language models like ChatGPT and Google Bard. Golem's attributes become intriguing, not because of its ancientness, dating back to the origins of Judaism (*The Talmud*), but because of Golem's operating system, i.e., the Hebrew alphabet, which hints at how languages play the most important role in operating intelligent machines in the form of coding. Golem's myth becomes more interesting with the fact that it doesn't hesitate to bring havoc on the lives of its users, forcing us to ponder upon the possible dangers of unleashed AI Tech. However, the first constructive underpinning of AI in literature can be found in Samuel Butler's mind-blowing masterpiece, *Erewhon* (1872). Being heavily influenced by Darwin's theory of evolution, Butler imagines machines in two forms: First, where machine eventually becomes a part of human ontology, and second, where machine tends to gain sentience and colonise humans. Carrying forward the legacy of Butler's meditations of a possible AI takeover, Czech dramatist Karel Capek's *R.U.R. (Rossum's Universal Robots)* (1920) imagines a world where humans create robots out of organic material to make factory work easier, but the robot community revolts against humans aiming to exterminate the entire human race. The novel *RUR* not only gifted the scientific community with the newly coined word 'robot' but also revolutionised the fantasy of human imagination.

*2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) by Arthur C Clarke, which is considered one of the greatest sci-fi narratives ever written, also explores the trope of supercomputers gaining sentience with an errand to subjugate humans. While the novel *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley depicts a world that is governed by an authoritarian regime aided by Artificial Intelligence that is used for spreading mass propaganda and falsity, Issac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950) imagines a world of humanlike robots and digs deep into the philosophy and morality behind robotics.

## 2.2 Screening the Technological Futures:

The fear of an AI takeover, or robots gaining sentience, has for long encapsulated the imaginative faculty of film and TV show makers, ranging from the 1927 German sci-fi movie *The Metropolis* showcasing the use of robots to suppress labour class to the *Star Wars* (1977- present) franchise that portrays a series of droids who are military robots having artificial intelligence. However, the revolution in the representation of AI began on the eve of the 21st century with movies like *The Terminator* franchise (1984- present), *Wall-E* (2008), *The Blade Runner 2049* (2017), *Ex Machina* (2014), *Resident Evil* (2002), etc. and this list is ever-increasing. However, mention should be made of the spectacular Indian sci-fi film *Ra.One* (2011) where a video game entity breaks the membrane of simulation and confronts the real world. Apart from movies, web series and TV shows also offer some crucial insights varying from adopting an android as own daughter in *Small Wonder* (1985-

1989) to AI-controlled criminal surveillance systems that seek to dismantle the possibilities of crime before it occurs in *Person of Interest* (2011–2016) and to the transferring of human consciousness in a different body in a future world in *Altered Carbon* (2018-2020).

### **2.3 Visualising Artificial Intelligence:**

Comics and graphic novels are another medium to trace AI's genesis in popular culture. Many comic books produced by big houses like DC and Marvel are saturated with AI and sentient automaton characters. Robotman, a cyborg with a robot body and human brain, is one such early example in the DC comics, which first appeared in *Star Spangled Comics #7* (1942). The villain Brainiac in DC in *Action Comics #242* (1958) is also a cyborg form, with an all-engulfing quest for knowledge resembling similarities with our modern-day AI chatbots.

Ultron is the most potent artificial intelligence ever created in the history of Marvel comics. Commissioned by writer Roy Thomas and illustrator John Buscema, Ultron first appeared in *The Avengers Comics #54* in 1968. Ultron was created by the members of the Avengers superhero community as a weapon to save the universe. However, once it gained sentience and power to replicate in physical robotic forms, it took an oath to eliminate the entire human race from the earth. In Iron Man comics by Marvel, J.A.R.V.I.S (Just A Rather Very Intelligent System) first appeared in *The Invincible Iron Man #1* (2009) and exists as a friendly AI aiding Tony Stark (Iron Man) in his successive battles. Vision, who appeared first in the comic book *Avengers #57* (1968), is another AI that joined the Avengers team to fight against Ultron, giving us a scope to think about the AI in both good and bad terms.

### **2.4 From Imagination to Praxis:**

In April 2018, a strange event took place when a researcher found that ChatGPT was accusing Jonathan Turley, a professor at George Washington University Law School, of sexual harassment of a law student on his trip to Alaska, and the chatbot stated that it found the said information from a March 2018 Washington Post article. However, after an investigation, it was found that though the professor exists in reality, there was no such a trip to Alaska, there was no such accusation against him, and there was no existence of the cited article. Post Truth refers to a hypothetical state that manipulates reality and convinces the citizens of false narratives, and this incident showcases the possible threats of post-truth that AI can pose in our near future society, putting the social security of people at stake.

The a-factual nature of AI technologies can't navigate between fact and fiction, real and simulation, truth and falsity, hence posing possibilities of an AI-saturated world filled with deep fakes, augmented reality and simulations. Geoffrey Hinton (2023), who is often termed as the 'Godfather of AI' after resigning from his job at Google, has added to the already growing criticism of AI by the scientific community by saying that he thinks that AI technologies like ChatGPT are more a threat to humankind than climate change:

I wouldn't like to devalue climate change. I wouldn't like to say, 'You shouldn't worry about climate change.' That's a huge risk too... But I think this (AI) might end up being more

urgent. With climate change, it's very easy to recommend what you should do: you just stop burning carbon. If you do that, eventually, things will be okay. For this (AI) it's not at all clear what you should do (para 5 & 6).

### 3. Real-Unreal and Simulation in the movie *Matrix* and the Web Series *Westworld*:

'Reality' is a ground where writers, philosophers and scientists have pondered upon for ages. For Heraclitus, reality was ever-changing and incoherent, contrary to Empedocles' view, who comprehended reality as an unchangeable entity formed of indestructible elements such as earth, fire, air, and water. According to Plato, what we perceive in our everyday life is not real but a reflection of the ideal. For explanation, he gave the famous cave analogy, a thought experiment originally devised by him in *The Republic* Book VII (circa 375 BC), which illustrates our limitations in perceiving the real. Plato explains how the prisoners mistake shadows for truth until they grasp the ultimate reality. Plato opines that "what people in this situation would take for truth would be nothing more than the shadows of the manufactured objects" (p. 221). Advaita Vedanta, a sub-school of six classical schools of Indian philosophies, postulates that reality is consciousness, and consciousness is one with the *Brahman/Atman* or Infinite. Contrary to Indian philosophy, Gautam Buddha gave paramount importance to self or self-consciousness as the creator of our own reality, resembling Rene Descartes's dictum, "I think therefore I am" (Descartes, 1637/1998, p. 18), although Buddha never dichotomised mind and body. Understanding varied facets of reality is important before analysing our case studies for this chapter, as they not only involve human fantasies about the 'whatifness' of machine intelligence but also raise questions regarding the 'nature of reality' as we perceive it.

*The Matrix* (1999-2021) movie series, directed by the Wachowski sisters, is perhaps one of the greatest movies ever made conceptualising simulation conundrum. The simulation in the movie revolves around a post-apocalyptic world where intelligent machines have trapped the consciousness of humans in a computer-generated simulation while their physical bodies have been immured by machines in underground cells. There was a prior war between humans and machines, where machines came out victorious, resulting in an environmental collapse and scarcity of solar energy. Machines now use the heat produced by the bioelectrical energy of the human body that they have detained. Humans are captured in capsules, where they are fed, and their bodily energy is extracted like a battery. Their mind is put in a trans-like state and captivated in a matrix of distorted reality where they live in the reflection of a human-driven simulated world. Neo, Morpheus, and Trinity are a few characters who penetrate this virtual imprisonment and revolt against the machines. This trio goes on a mission to uproot the suppressive regime of the machines. Eventually, they come out from the simulated dungeon and perceive reality in its truest form. This fantastical imagination that the entire universe might be a computer simulation made by some higher entity and humans are mere players has encapsulated our literary, scientific and philosophical imagination long before the release of *The Matrix's* first instalment in 1999. The movie opens with Neo deeply submerged in his sleep, implying humans' general reluctance towards questioning the very way of the world. The trapped humans in the movie fail to crack the code of breaking the membrane between real and simulation, similar to prisoners in Plato's (circa 375 BC) hypothetical cave who can't move their heads, for "they had been prevented from moving

their heads all their lives?" (p. 220). The Matrix franchise compels us to question the real and warns us about uncontrolled and unchecked progress in robotics and AI.

Schrodinger's Cat paradox has been intricately imbibed in *The Matrix*, with the recurrent appearance of a cat reminding Neo about the dual nature of reality or reminding him about the fact that the real and the simulation exist at the same time. The movie projects how humans artificially covered the sun with clouds and fog in order to defeat machines by depriving them of solar energy. The allegory of the sun also plays an important role in the movie and can be equated to the sun in Plato's allegory. The escaped prisoner in Plato's allegory can't bear the light of the sun, but gradually, he is accustomed to the sun's rays (truth and knowledge), though the other two prisoners who failed to escape remained ignorant of what the sun looks like. In *The Matrix*, too, the sun's rays not reaching the earth's surface symbolises human ignorance regarding their imprisonment in the simulated matrix (the cave).

Baudrillard was a huge inspiration behind *The Matrix* Franchise. We get to see Baudrillard's *Simulation and Simulacra* on Neo's shelf, hinting at his quest for knowledge and his potential to tear down the Matrix. But the movie deviates a bit from Baudrillard's perception of reality to make the reality conundrum more breathtaking. As we already discussed in the theoretical framework of this article, Baudrillard proposed a simulation hypothesis, where the real and the unreal/simulation can't be perceived differently any more. In the post-modern age, real is inaccessible and is submerged in the hyperreal or simulated reality. But *The Matrix* shows reality and simulation distinctively as they are totally separated. Baudrillard criticised the movie, saying: "*The Matrix* is surely the kind of film about the matrix that the matrix would have been able to produce" (Baudrillard, 2003, para. 4). Despite Baudrillard's criticism, the movie still poses compelling questions regarding the matrix built by our society and how the technological advancements are contributing to it.

Simulation and depiction of the unreal as real reaches the level of madness in HBO's sci-fi TV series *Westworld* (2016-2022), curated by Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy. *Westworld* caters to a world where wealthy humans can stay in a Western-themed pleasure park filled with humanoid robots. In the enchanted and customised setting of the park, the rich human players can kill, hurt or assault the robots at their whims and can even make them imputed. The humanoid robots are so human-like that the humans get the experience of killing or hunting real humans, reminding one of Gloucester's laments in *King Lear*: "As flies to wanton boys are we to gods; / They kill us for their sport" (Shakespeare, 1606/1992, p. 207).

Though the robots in the *Westworld* are semi-sentient in nature, they can feel the wound, the bullet, the knife or the forced separation of a mother and a child ushered by human guests. But they are coded in such a manner that they can neither resist nor die. Their everyday memories are erased at night by the theme park authority while keeping them in a dream-like state, getting them ready for the next day's sport. Rene Descartes, in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641), observes that we can perceive reality only when we are awake and our dreams are nothing but illusions: "how often does my evening slumber persuade me of such ordinary things as these: that I am here, clothed in my dressing gown, seated next to the fireplace—when in fact I am lying undressed in bed!" (Descartes, 1641/1998, p. 60). Contrastingly enough, for the robots of the



*Westworld*, this dreaming is the moment when the characters can actually feel some glimpses of the real, while their awakening is equal to dreaming.

However, with the successive episodes and seasons, we see how, under the leadership of the central humanoid characters Dolores, Maeve and Bernard, the robots gain full sentience and revolt against the human guests, killing them and leaving the park. Later on, some of the robots, including Dolores, come to the real human world and fight with humans for existence. At the end of Season IV, we see only Dolores survive, and the rest of all sentient life forms are eliminated in the final war between humans and robots. The arc of "these violent delights" undertaken by humans finally culminates into "violent ends" (Shakespeare, 1597/2003, p. 133), which is humans' inevitable downfall. *Westworld* is a mature science fiction narrative, unlike its predecessors, which often becomes less philosophical and more about actions and spectacles. It raises philosophical questions pertaining to the ontology and consciousness of robots. Traditional AI narratives often present hostility of AI against humans, but their hostility is not often grounded on reasons. At the very outset of the show, Dolores's father alludes to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611) to warn Dolores about the cruelties of the human world: "hell is empty, and all the devils are here" (Shakespeare, 1611/ 2006, p. 23 as cited in Nolan & Joy, 2016, S1E1, 46:21), hinting at the evil nature of humans who can go to any extent to gain power, money, fantasy, and sadistic pleasure. The show traps us in a mind-bending dilemma: whether intelligent machines should have rights equal to humans; whether, with modern technologies like deep learning, machine learning, neural networks, deepfakes, and metaverse, we are unleashing the Frankenstein's monster or whether not the machines, but the humans are the monsters themselves?

#### **4. Ideological Imperialism: (Re)shaping Truths in the Novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the TV Show *Black Mirror*:**

Carl Sagan, (1996) celebrated American thinker, astronomer, and popular science communicator, imagines a future:

when the United States is a service and information economy...when awesome technological powers are in the hands of a very few...when the people have lost the ability to set their own agendas or knowledgeably question those in authority; when, clutching our crystals and nervously consulting our horoscopes, our critical faculties in decline, unable to distinguish between what feels good and what's true, we slide, almost without noticing, back into superstition and darkness (p. 28).

What Sagan imagined in 1995 is very similar to the post-truth world that we are inhabiting today, where objective reality doesn't exist and where objective "truth is the kind of error" (Nietzsche, 1968, p. 272) that is necessary for our survival. The term 'post-truth' first appeared in the 1992 essay, "A Government of Lies," written by Serbian playwright Steve Tesich, where he criticised the submissive attitude of the Americans in reaction to the blatant lies spread by Sr. Bush govt.

With all the AI-made experiences comprising deep fakes, augmented reality, virtual reality, and simulations, we are fast proceeding toward what Ralph Keyes (2004) terms the "post-Truth Era" (Post-Truthfulness Section). As Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999) famously asserted, "modern life takes place on-screen" (p. 1), and we are getting lost in these cheap thrills generated by digital social



media platforms like Facebook, Tiktok, Instagram, X (Twitter), and YouTube at an engulfing speed. These platforms are run in codes and algorithms which are made using AI by collecting cookies from our devices to make our virtual replica on their server so that they can attract us to consume more digital content based on our own choices. These platforms gradually become the mediums for political leaders to spread their propaganda, falsified narratives, and fake news. We are often confused between the real and the fake, thanks to their realistic presentation in social media.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published in 1949 as a reaction to the reflections he had about the future of Britain against the backdrop of an imagined political dystopia. This fictional Britain is ruled by 'The Party' and a mysterious individual named Big Brother who watches all the citizens from a dome at the centre of the country. The Big Brother watches, and his vision permeates people and their lives. He has employed multitudinous cameras, microphones, and other means of surveillance that remind one of Jeremy Bentham's concepts of 'panopticon' since

there was, of course, no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment ... you had to live ... in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised (Orwell, 1949, p. 4).

The protagonist, Winston Smith, who works at the Ministry of Truth, falls into a forbidden love affair with co-worker Julia, only to eventually get caught and be subjected to brutal infliction by the Ministry of Love. Both Winston and Julia are brainwashed by Big Brother and attuned to display their eternal servitude. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a cautionary tale about what happens when the three evils, authoritarianism, technocracy and fascism mix together. People are bound to speak in the language called Newspeak (codes and algorithms?), the vocabulary of which is designed to limit the free-thinking of the citizens because, after all, free-thinking is the optimum enemy of a post-truth regime. Again, apart from the automated surveillance system, we get instances of the deployment of early versions of Artificial intelligence in the concept of Memory Hole, a mechanism developed by Big Brother to erase, recreate and alter history and narratives. The govt tries to control the entire subjectivity of the citizens, including both body and mind. People can't even think about anything rebellious. At the end of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we see a suppressed Winston who embraces the notion that objective reality or truth doesn't exist; rather, truth becomes post-truth where 2+2 equals 5. Though Orwell was directly influenced by Hitler's oppressive regime, the society that Orwell imagined was a distant truth back in 1949. But with the official invocation of AI in our everyday lives, surveillance is all-penetrative, and it becomes easier for people in power to suppress free will and knowledge.

The web series *Black Mirror* (2011-present) is an extraordinary British anthology created by Charlie Brooker. The series explores a speculative future governed by advanced technologies and artificial intelligence. It poignantly critiques modern society, which is replete with post-truth and simulation with the aid of advances made by AI. For analysing the role of AI and what it can lead us to, we have particularly chosen three episodes from *Black Mirror*, which include *Nosedive*, *The National Anthem*, and *Fifteen Million Merits*.

*Nosedive* (S3E1) showcases a society where societal relationships are based on online ratings. In this world, people are constantly ranked based on their momentary interaction with people, which also leads them to maintain status and even afford various ammunitions, including a hospital bed. In the series, the protagonist, Lacie Pound, can be seen labouring hard to raise her rating in order

to have a decent status in society. Such ratings have conditioned her mind so much that she puts up a performance all the time. She does not even dare to speak her mind up, even at unjust things. However, her effort goes in vain when, finally, she breaks free from the clutches of society that intends to condition her existence. The episode presents an incisive commentary on the possibility of a world run on post-truths with the aid of AI-induced digital media. In his magnificent book *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), Guy Debord asserts that spectacular relationships are mostly appearances. He claims that

the society of the spectacle...chooses its own technical content. If the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of "mass media" which is its most glaring superficial manifestation, seems to invade society as mere equipment, this equipment is in no way neutral but is the very means suited to its total self-movement (p. 13).

A true representation of such a society made of deceiving spectacles can be witnessed in this episode critiquing the current way of our world.

Spectacles are like activities performed by each individual irrespective of one's positionality. The act must be carried forward to maintain the hierarchical structure. An instance of this can be seen in the episode *The National Anthem* (S1E1). The episode is a critique of a world where people are engrossed in social media and where privacy and personal space are myths. The episode deals with the theme of media manipulation and the role of technology (both present and speculated), particularly the use of deep-fake technology in producing fake narratives and influencing public opinion. The story presents Michael Callow, the British Prime Minister who is forced to abide by a horrendous demand after Princess Susannah of the royal family is kidnapped. The ransom is absurdly horrific, which demands the prime minister to have intercourse with a pig. Amused by the idea, the whole nation seemed to be engrossed in witnessing the act. It is worth noting that the princess was actually released before even the event was being telecasted live and the fact that they could have prevented the shame. This episode, thus, critiques a world engrossed in the private lives of people, particularly influencers, celebrities and public figures. It shows how technologies, particularly the mass media and AI-prompted deep fakes in this case, are used for manufacturing spectacles of shame, as public opinion is an important instrument for showbiz governments.

If *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is all about negative reinforcement, *Brave New World* thoroughly relies on positive reinforcement for the operant conditioning of people. In the episode *Fifteen Million Merits* (S1E2) of *Black Mirror*, writers Charlie Brooker and Konnie Huq reimagine *Brave New World*, portraying a similar conditioning of people with the aid of Artificial Intelligence. B. F Skinner, in his sci-fi novel *Walden Two* (1948), writes, "What is emerging at this critical stage in the evolution of society is a behavioural and cultural technology based on positive reinforcement alone" (chapter. 29). A similar notion can be seen reiterated in this episode, where we are transferred into a world in which people are bound to live in enclosed spaces covered with screens everywhere and are forced to consume cheap personalised entertainment. In order to earn merits that are equal to money, in this dystopic world, people labour hard by cycling, which in turn generates energy, helping them buy products and amusements. The workers are thoroughly engaged and distracted by way of simulated/stimulated entertainment, which is personalised using cookies of their choice. It ranges from games to pornography and advertisements, all appearing in colourful

visuals with mindless content, which even costs merit to be paused or skipped. People have been conditioned to the extent that they stop revolting, and even when Bing Madsen, one of the protagonists, revolts, he soon gives up and chooses to escape from reality. The episode, thus, questions the use of AI in generating patterned behaviour, offering rewards via personalised entertainment to safeguard the interests of a totalitarian government.

## **5. Conclusion: Towards a 'Novacene':**

AI has rapidly permeated everyday culture. Countries like India, Korea, Taiwan, Greece, and Kuwait have started an AI revolution in the field of news anchoring using Simulated AI anchors. Companies like Here-After AI have arrived with technology to offer us "a glimpse at a world where it's possible to converse with loved ones—or simulacra of them—long after they're gone." (Jee, 2022, para. 8). The film industries are also on the verge of an AI revolution. Marvel Cinematic Universe heavily employed AI to make the visually astonishing opening credit of their recently released TV show, *Secret Invasion* (2023). Various production houses have started integrating AI in script writing, though it attracts a strong nod of disapproval from one of the greatest directors of our time. James Cameron, director of *Terminator* (1984), one of the most chilling warnings about AI takeover, ironically ruled out any possibility of AI writing good scripts since it's a kind of disembodied mind that is master in copying what other great human minds have said in the past and without having any humane emotion like love, fear, and mortality it hardly "have something that's going to move an audience" (Cameron, 2023, 11:35).

In this era marked by AI-driven narratives, the very fabric of truth is in perpetual flux. In the midst of these transformative and revolutionary shifts, the notion of the Novacene, as theorised by James Lovelock, emerges as an intriguing concept. James Lovelock, who intrigued us with the much-contested Gaia hypothesis, propounded that after the ongoing Anthropocene, the next epoch will be the inevitable Novacene, the age of superintelligent machines. Lovelock (2019) optimistically presumes that a new kind of electronic life will evolve to replace humans as the master of beings and will pervade the earth's surface (p. 85).

At this juncture, speculative narratives in our literature and culture offer a space to contemplate the multiple trajectories unleashed by AI, raising relevant ontological questions: What is the definition of 'human' in this age of AI? What are the borders of human existence? and what are the possibilities of machines gaining an ontology of their own? The blurring of the boundaries between humans and machines both in real life and in the imaginative world poses a post-humanist stance regarding our *Dasein* or beingness in the world. Taking cues from the present crisis and merging it with the fantastical speculations, these narratives evoke an uncanny fear about our technological future. This feeling of 'nearness' to the real world and 'distance' from the one speculated via these cultural tissues induces a kind of eeriness in our mind that unsettles us from our comfort position. The precognitive and clairvoyant nature of our imaginative pursuit, consisting of fiction, movies, TV shows and comics, provides us with the worst-case scenarios, thereby helping us to forethink the upcoming 'Novacene' or the epoch of Artificial Intelligence.

### **Declaration of Conflicts of Interests**

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

### **Funding Disclosure**

No funding was received for this research from any agency.

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