

FUTURE DYSTOPIA

1. Uwagi ogólne

Zestaw materiałów opatrzony wspólnym tytułem *Future Dystopia* jest adresowany do studentów uzupełniających studiów magisterskich studiujących kierunki humanistyczne. Przedstawione ćwiczenia mogą być wykorzystane do pracy z grupami studentów przede wszystkim filmoznawstwa (ze względu na konieczność znajomości dwóch–trzech filmów), jak również zarządzania kulturą i mediami czy filozofii (ale trzeba się upewnić, że studenci znają przynajmniej dwa z wymienionych filmów – bez *Her*).

2. Poziom zaawansowania: B2+ (z pomocą nauczyciela) oraz C1, C1+

3. Czas trwania opisanych ćwiczeń

Ćwiczenia zaprezentowane w tym artykule są przeznaczone na jedną jednostkę lekcyjną lub do dwóch zajęć po 90 minut. Czas trwania został ustalony na podstawie doświadczenia wynikającego z pracy nad poniższymi ćwiczeniami w grupach na poziomie B2+ i C1.

4. Cele dydaktyczne

W swoim założeniu artykuł ma rozwijać podstawowe umiejętności językowe, takie jak: czytanie, mówienie oraz słuchanie. Kolejnym celem jest rozwijanie krytycznego myślenia, jako że wiele z pytań ma charakter filozoficzny.

5. Uwagi i sugestie

W zbiorze przewidziane są ćwiczenia na interakcję student–nauczyciel, student–student oraz na pracę indywidualną. Ćwiczenia w zależności od poziomu grupy,

stopnia zaangażowania studentów w zajęcia i kierunku mogą być odpowiednio zmodyfikowane. Zadania tu zamieszczone możemy omawiać na zajęciach lub część przedstawionych ćwiczeń zadać jako pracę domową, jeżeli nie chcemy poświęcać zbyt dużo czasu na zajęciach. Wybór należy do nauczyciela. W zależności od tego, jaka opcja zostanie wybrana, materiału starczy na odpowiednio więcej lub mniej jednostek lekcyjnych. Materiały obejmują sceny z filmów *Ex Machina*, *Blade Runner* i *Her* (polski tytuł: *Ona*) wraz z pytaniami do dyskusji oraz recenzję filmu *Ex Machina* z ćwiczeniami na zrozumienie i leksykalno-gramatycznymi do pracy w parach i indywidualnej. Lekcję rozpoczynamy od dyskusji w grupach na temat tego, w jakim zakresie studenci korzystają z nowej technologii podobnej do tej z filmu *Her* – smartfonów i Siri (znajomość filmu w zasadzie nie jest konieczna). W części pierwszej toczy się dyskusja na temat głębokiego uzależnienia naszego życia od telefonów, a w drugiej omawiana jest pierwsza scena z filmu *Ex Machina*, która nawiązuje do wykorzystania naszych danych do celów komercyjnych, pozyskiwania informacji na nasz temat bez naszej zgody itd. Zadania od IIA do IIG to na przemian oglądanie scen i dyskusja na zadane tematy w parach lub małych (trzyosobowych) grupach. W części trzeciej studenci czytają recenzję i odpowiadają na pytania do tekstu. Można ich zachęcić do wspólnej pracy przy odpowiadaniu na nie oraz przy rozwiązywaniu zadania na słownictwo (możliwe jest pominięcie tego zadania ze studentami innych kierunków niż filmoznawstwo, ewentualnie zmodyfikowanie tekstu i wybranie innego słownictwa do tego samego tekstu).

6. Klucz

Klucz zawiera moje sugestie odpowiedzi (jako że zajęcia mają charakter dyskusji), które mogą pomóc nauczycielowi.

FUTURE DYSTOPIA

based on *Her*, *Blade Runner* and *Ex Machina*

I. Discuss the questions below:

1. Have you ever used Siri? What's your experience with it (her)? In what ways is Samantha remarkable as software and more advanced than Siri?
The video is here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1AjtIAje3o>
2. Watch a short scene from *Her* (0:00-1:13). Why do you think Theodore is more at ease with Samantha than with other people?
You can find the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7t4r2G2XCE>
3. How reliant are people on their mobile phones – what is the extent of this phenomenon and its consequences for our emotional well-being and social life in general? Could you live without your phone and the internet at this point?

II. You are going to analyse several scenes from the films *Blade Runner* and *Ex Machina*. Before you do, answer the questions below:

1. What is the future of robots and what direction might AI development take?
2. Now watch the videos and answer the questions:
 - A. The making of Ava's brain. Is there anything worrying about it?
The video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruOXWHbyfjo>
 - B. Can humans be programmed, the way computers are? Discuss, and then watch a video from *Ex Machina*. Has it convinced you?
The video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XcmG80PT83M>
 - C. The Turing test – what is it?
 - Watch Leon take the Voigt-Kampff test and try to explain his behaviour (telling the interviewer about the hotel he lives in, asking questions about the test and, in the end, killing the man – “I’ll tell you about my mother”):
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Umc9ezAyJv0>
 - Now watch Rachel and Deckard – this time Rachel takes the test.
The video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-DkoGvcEBw>
 - What's the test supposed to prove? Would you pass it?
 - Define an emotion. What makes it real?
 - Do you think machines will be capable of having simple and complex emotions?

D. Robot rights

In *Blade Runner*, four androids who have escaped from an off-world colony are being hunted by Rick Deckard. In the world of *Blade Runner*, androids are soldiers (Zhora and Roy Batty), waste disposal engineers (Leon), sex slaves (Priss), etc.; in other words, they perform duties which humans do not want to burden themselves with. The act of exterminating an android is called “retiring.” Why?

- Watch Deckard “retire” Zhora:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4lj2ISTrfnE>
- Explain the way in which she is portrayed in her death – the clothes, the snow, the music, the contrast between her and the fully clothed Blade Runner.
- Would you call Deckard a hero? Why (not)?
- Watch Kyoko and Nathan “tear up the dancefloor”.
The video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b7C69HqnV8s>
- Why does Kyoko unbutton her shirt the moment Caleb asks her a question? What does the whole scene (the unbuttoning of her shirt, the dance and her unbroken silence) tell you about her relationship with Nathan?
- If we create sentient beings, should we give them rights? What kind of rights would they be?

E. The History of Gods – how might it all end?

- Watch a short clip about the Turing test from *Ex Machina*. What is the conclusion Caleb reaches at the end of the conversation about the Turing test with Nathan?
The video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LI3Z5vIDAgE>
- With great power, the power to create AI, comes great responsibility. How do we do on that front, at least in films?
- In *Blade Runner*, Roy Batty wants more life than his pre-determined 4 years. He meets his maker to ask for it and the meeting does not go well. Why is Roy Batty disappointed?
Watch the video and discuss: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t5O-qf4NfAIk>
- In *Ex Machina*, Nathan also doesn’t do well:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LxXrecK4S3I>
- All of the makers meet their demise. Their fate is shared by Dr Frankenstein, the character of the last Gothic (and the first sci-fi) novel *Frankenstein*. Why is that?

F. Is there any social context in which humans and AI could peacefully co-exist?

- Watch Ava escape:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhcU6_wCiMo&t=178s
- Why does she act this way? After all, Caleb became infatuated with her and helped her escape.

- Read a dictionary definition of the term “Deus Ex Machina”. What is the connection between this theatrical device and the title of the film (*Ex Machina*)?

The New Latin term *deus ex machina* is a translation of a Greek phrase and means literally “a god from a machine.” “Machine,” in this case, refers to the crane that held a god over the stage in ancient Greek and Roman drama. The practice of introducing a god at the end of a play to unravel and resolve the plot dates from at least the 5th century B.C.; Euripides (circa 484-406 B.C.) was one playwright who made frequent use of the device. Since the late 1600s, “*deus ex machina*” has been applied in English to unlikely saviours and improbable events that bring order out of chaos in sudden and surprising ways.

Source: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/>

G. Supposing we survive all of the above...

- What will humans look like (height, weight, bionic elements, the brain) in 100 years’ time? Think of e.g., *Ghost in the Shell*, where Major Motoko Kusanagi IS a ghost in the shell:

In this post-cyberpunk iteration of a possible future, computer technology has advanced to the point that many members of the public possess cyber brains, the technology that allows them to interface their biological brain with various networks. The level of cyberization varies from simple minimal interfaces to the almost complete replacement of the brain with cybernetic parts, in cases of severe trauma. This can also be combined with various levels of prostheses, with a fully prosthetic body enabling a person to become a cyborg. The main character of *Ghost in the Shell*, Major Motoko Kusanagi, is such a cyborg, having had a terrible accident befall her as a child that ultimately required her to use a full-body prosthesis to house her cyber brain. This high level of cyberization, however, opens the brain up to attacks from highly skilled hackers, with the most dangerous being those who will hack a person to bend to their whims.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_in_the_Shell

- Will we still be human, if we have bionic bodies and cyber brains which could be hacked?

III. You are going to read a short review of *Ex Machina*.

1. Read the article and answer the comprehension questions:

A. What does *Ex Machina* have in common with some other films?

.....

B. What might make things tricky during the Turing test which Caleb conducts?

.....

C. What makes us fascinated by this sci-fi horror?

.....

D. What is Nathan’s house, really?

.....

E. How much action is there in the film?

.....

F. What might be the unfortunate effect of building AI endowed with sexuality?

.....

G. Who is Garland likened to and why?

.....

Ex Machina Explores the Thrill (and Horror) of Romantic Uncertainty
by David Sims, April 10, 2015

Alex Garland’s remarkable debut seeds a story about relationship anxiety within a Fincheresque artificial-intelligence **parable**.

Ex Machina is a science-fiction horror film that, like so many others, plays on fears of the future: of artificial intelligence, of the blurred line between human life and its imitations, of online **surveillance** shaping our experiences. More cleverly, it’s a plainer tale of the uneasiness regarding social interaction, and the inherent fears everyone has, no matter the era, about whether someone else really likes you, or if they’re just faking it. A tense, intelligent **chamber play** written and directed by Alex Garland, *Ex Machina* follows a programmer, Caleb (Domhnall Gleeson), who works for a Google-like company and wins a week in a wilderness compound with the company’s CEO, Nathan (Oscar Isaac). Upon his arrival, Nathan informs Caleb that he’s built an artificial intelligence named Ava, and that Caleb will help determine if she can pass for human.

Caleb is, in effect, there to give Ava a Turing test, the “imitation game” last year’s Alan Turing **biopic** titled itself after, to see whether she exhibits the kind of complex intelligence, decision-making skills, and personality no computer has yet replicated. Complicating (or helping) matters is that Ava is designed to look as comely as possible. Perhaps you’ve seen her already, since her curvy form is emblazoned all over the film’s advertising—as played by Alicia Vikander, she’s a shy, charming, mysterious creature who immediately **bewitches** Caleb.

The question that immediately surfaces in the film, however, isn’t specific to concerns about AI. Is Ava showing interest in Caleb because she’s designed to behave like a human, or is she simply trying to manipulate him into granting her freedom? And even if it’s the latter, doesn’t that kind of survival instinct make her, in a way, human? *Ex Machina* incorporates all kinds of unsettling imagery as Caleb investigates Nathan’s secluded den of techno tricks and toys, but that simple central premise is **gripping** enough: the mystery of Ava’s intentions.

If this is indeed a chamber piece, Ava’s a **femme fatale**, as beguiling and innocent as some of her best human counterparts, but with a disconcerting twist. Yes, Ava is beautiful, but she was very creepily, and obviously, designed that way by Nathan, an aggressively intelligent bro-genius with a bushy Brooklyn beard who’s

usually either pumping iron or swigging beers. His mountain retreat is a gilded cage, gorgeously designed but operated with individual keycards that keep Caleb locked out of half of the rooms.

Isaac plays Nathan with incredible physicality and brooding threat, the latest in a string of great performances that have quickly **propelled** him to coveted roles in upcoming Star Wars films. In the Coen Brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis*, he was the **titular** pathetic grouch wrestling with raw talent he couldn't mold to the world around him; in J.C. Chandor's *A Most Violent Year*, he was a coiled spring of a ruthless businessman who seemed like he might snap at any second, but who was also cursed with a sliver of morality. Nathan presents as a bit of an oaf, but there's something darker bubbling under the surface, and Isaac manages to keep that hint of horror from dominating his performance. The thrill of watching *Ex Machina*, which is relatively light on action, comes from wondering what everyone's real motivations are: Indeed, Caleb is performing a Turing test on Nathan as much as he is on Ava. Garland clearly wants us to think about the implications of a tech world run by men.

Along the way, Nathan and Caleb discuss many of the philosophical **quandaries** of "creating life" in the sense of building a human AI; for Nathan, investing his creatures with sexuality is a crucial part of making them human, but it raises the creepy specter of Real Dolls and futuristic robo-gigolos. At one point, Ava flips through a closet of naked female avatars, selecting an alluring skin to graft onto her chassis; the imagery is intentionally disturbing, but Garland clearly wants viewers to think about the implications of a tech world run by men and the moral implications of creating a distinctly female being with self-awareness. To say more would spoil, but don't expect an easy ending.

All that said, *Ex Machina* is easily one of the best films of the year so far and a remarkable directorial debut for Garland, who's made a name for himself as a novelist and screenwriter for some 15 years now. His collaborations with Danny Boyle, *28 Days Later* and *Sunshine*, were frightening sci-fi films unafraid to wrestle with deeper philosophical questions. His script for *Dredd* took a maligned comic book property and yanked it back to its nakedly **allegorical** origins as a satire of police brutality and post-industrial sprawl. But *Ex Machina* has a precise visual sheen that evokes David Fincher, and earns the sudden, quiet, powerful scares of his best work. As he looks to the future, Garland could be in no better company.

Adapted from The Atlantic: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/04/ex-machina-review/390147/>

2. In pairs, look up the vocabulary below:

parable
surveillance
chamber play
biopic
bewitch
gripping

femme fatale
propelled
titular
quandaries
specter
allegorical

KEY

I.

1. Siri is a computer program that works as an intelligent personal assistant and knowledge navigator. ... The feature uses a natural language user interface to answer questions, make recommendations, and perform actions by delegating requests to a set of Web services. The software, both in its original version and as an iOS feature, adapts to the user's individual language usage and individual searches (preferences) with continuing use, and returns results that are individualized.

Samantha is much more advanced – she is a sentient entity which (who?) can acquire knowledge within splits seconds and use it in ways unimaginable by humans.

2. People in *Her* are deep in conversation with their OSs (Operational Systems). Relationships with other humans are too challenging and difficult, so it is more and more difficult to get human touch or eye contact. Theodore is a professional letter writer – he writes on behalf of children, parents, lovers, spouses, etc., which proves how unaccustomed to communication humans have grown.
3. People rely heavily on their phones and disregard their own safety as well as keeping their sensitive data safe (e.g., no antivirus software on their mobiles). At the same time, it is harder to look another person in the eye when they're on their phone, especially if they are wearing headphones – they see nothing and hear nothing, so it is very hard to e.g., ask them a question or ask for help.

II.

1. It's hard to tell, but I think the direction in which AI development will go will be mainly towards using it for military purposes.
2.
 - A. Ava had access to facial expressions of millions of people around the world because she had accessed their mobile phones through their cameras – something that can already be done by hackers or the government.
 - B. Yes, humans can be programmed by nature (our genes) and nurture (our upbringing and experience – our peers, parents, teachers, ...)
 - C. The Turing test, developed by Alan Turing in 1950, is a test of a machine's ability to exhibit intelligent behaviour equivalent to, or indistinguishable

from, that of a human. In other words, if you cannot tell whether you're talking to a human or a machine, the machine has passed the test.

- The Voigt-Kampff test is supposed to prove whether you're human or not, but e.g., a psychopath would not pass it. Does it mean he's not human, though? What does it mean to be human in the first place, anyway? (As you can see, my suggested answer gives rise to even more questions).
- Emotion – it is extremely hard to define emotions, as they are created in the brain in response to external and internal factors and stimuli; they are influenced by e.g., hormones, etc., so it is very hard to come up with a clear and coherent definition.
- Emotions in AI – if we manage to examine the brain and discover all its potential and qualities and then replicate it, then...it might be possible.

D. Robot rights

- Killing androids is called “retiring” because nobody wants to call it what it really is – killing creatures humans created and now they're taking their lives away – androids are slaves and their lives are all they have.
- Deckard cannot be called a hero as he shoots in the back an unarmed and almost naked woman running for her life, so I wouldn't call him a hero and he doesn't seem to feel like one after “retiring” Zhora.
- In her death, Zhora, crashing through the glass, looks almost like a bloody butterfly. She falls into the artificial snow in a shopping centre. She is almost naked, projecting an image of vulnerability, in contrast to Deckard, who is fully clothed. The scene of her death is poignant and almost poetic.
- Kyoko and Nathan – Kyoko cannot speak because that's how Nathan wants it. She can hear, understand and think (in the scene she is standing in front of a painting by Jason Pollock and analysing it). She unbuttons her shirt because this is what has been expected of her, as she is Nathan's sex-bot. Nathan appears and says it's a waste of time talking to her, but they could dance – he is like a puppet master – she has to obey him, whatever he tells her to do.
- Giving rights to robots – I don't think we should create sentient beings, because I cannot imagine a scenario in which things would go well given the state of affairs in the world – we still haven't conquered famine or eradicated racism, or stopped waging wars for power and money, so creating more life would lead to its abuse (at least in my humble opinion).

E. The History of Gods – how might it all end?

- Caleb's conclusion – It's the history of gods – creating AI means that humans are godlike.
- *Blade Runner* – We do terribly as creators – we create sentient life and then we either abandon it (*Frankenstein*) or abuse it (*Blade Runner*, *Ex Machina*).

Roy Batty is disappointed because his “father” is not omnipotent and doesn’t have the answer he was hoping for. Also, he justifies the horrible things Roy has done – the android is more moral, even if he kills his maker in the end.

- In *Ex Machina* – Nathan lies and manipulates and his intention is to keep Ava locked in a glass cage as long as he pleases and then probably disable her in the same way he disabled her predecessors and Kyoko.
- All the makers die because they have failed their creation, proved themselves to be small. The question remains if there is any scenario in which beings stronger and endowed with greater brain power than humans will not turn against them.

F. Is there any social context in which humans and AI could peacefully co-exist?

- *Ex Machina* – Caleb was a means to an end – giving us such a finale, the director seems to suggest there can be no happy ending. After all, Ava is a slave and Caleb represents the oppressors.
- “Deus Ex Machina” – We will create something that is more powerful than us, hoping to harness its power and use it, and it will backfire in the most horrible way (that’s my opinion).

G. Supposing we survive all of the above...

- The definition of what it means to be human might change. What does it mean to be human anyway? All these questions...

III.

1.

- A. It is about fears connected with the future, among other things – para. 1 – “*Ex Machina* is a science-fiction horror film that, like so many others, plays on fears of the future...”
- B. The fact that Ava was designed to be beautiful – para. 2 – “Complicating (or helping) matters is that Ava is designed to look as comely as possible.”
- C. The fact that we don’t know Ava’s intentions – para. 3 – “...that simple central premise is gripping enough: the mystery of Ava’s intentions.”
- D. It is a prison – para. 4 – “His mountain retreat is a gilded cage, gorgeously designed but operated with individual keycards that keep Caleb locked out of half of the rooms.”
- E. Not that much – para. 5 – “...*Ex Machina*, which is relatively light on action, ...”
- F. It might give rise to the creation of AI sex-bots, who will be abused – para. 6 – “...it raises the creepy specter of Real Dolls and futuristic robo-gigolos. ... Garland clearly wants viewers to think about the implications of

a tech world run by men and the moral implications of creating a distinctly female being with self-awareness.”

- G. To David Fincher, because their work is similar – para. 7 – “...has a precise visual sheen that evokes David Fincher, and earns the sudden, quiet, powerful scares of his best work.”

2.

parable – a simple story used to illustrate a moral or spiritual lesson, as told by Jesus in the Gospels.

surveillance – close observation, especially of a suspected spy or criminal; observation

chamber play – a film involving a small number of characters interacting over a short period of time in a limited environment. Additional characters and environments may exist as support to the main action but would be few in number and appear only briefly.

biopic – a biographical film of the life of a famous personality or historical figure, particularly popularized by Warner Bros. in the 1930s; a sub-genre of drama and epic films.

bewitch – captivate, enchant, fascinate

gripping – fascinating, exciting

femme fatale – a woman who is very attractive in a mysterious way, usually leading men into danger or causing their destruction; a femme fatale is often featured in films which belong to the *film noir* genre.

propelled – driven, pushed forward

titular – the lead part in a movie or other production for an actor or actress, that is named after the title of the film

quandaries – a state of perplexity or uncertainty over what to do in a difficult situation, dilemma

specter (or ‘spectre’ in Br. E.) – ghost, phantom, apparition

allegorical – symbolic, figurative