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► **To cite this version:**

| Alexandre Gefen. Fictions. Chimeras: Inventory of synthetic cognition, 2022. halshs-03912753

**HAL Id: halshs-03912753**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03912753>**

Submitted on 25 Dec 2022

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## Fictions

Alexandre Gefen, « Fictions » in *Chimeras: Inventory of synthetic cognition*, Ilan Manouach et Anna Engelhardt (dir.), Onassis Foundation, 2022.

Contemporary ethical questions about “moral machines” and economic fears about the robotization of labor cannot be separated from the myths that come with them. AI is preceded by the ancient legend of the bronze giant Talos, the mechanical guardian of Crete, his prodigies are dreamt of by many medieval myths, from the automatic soldiers protecting the relics of Buddha evoked by the Indian Lokapannatti to the famous Golem, a clay figure that comes to life when a paper with the name of God is placed in his mouth. From the famous steam-powered animated bird created in the 380s BC by Archytas of Taranto, a friend of Plato’s, to the articulated lion imagined by Leonardo da Vinci, from the Chinese androids capable of singing of the Zhou dynasty to the mechanical waitress invented by the Arab engineer Al-Jazari, the tradition of automatons feeds reveries about the magical potential of anthropomorphic machines, but also nightmares about the replacement of humans by superior forms of life, offering a troubling view of the human condition as seen *from the outside*.

Few are the myths in which artificial intelligence has the kindness of the digital geisha played by Scarlett Johansson in Spike Jonze’s movie *Her*, who, realizing that his “operating system” has outgrown human intelligence, leaves her human owner to live her own life. From the *Terminator* to Ridley Scott’s very recent *Alien the covenant*, the fear of human domination by artificial intelligence, robots or cyborgs or software that has become superior and dreams of exterminating it, looms large. Theorized in 1993 by the science fiction writer Vernor Vinge, the “Singularity” is the name often given to the moment in which robots would take over humanity, leading to the end of history as an asymptote of human progress since the Cartesian project of making oneself “master and possessor of nature.” In this eschatology of the American futurologist Ray Kurzweil (who works for Google’s natural language processing program), machines would overcome human intelligence in a few decades with the risk of consuming earth’s resources for their own benefit. According to his “gray jelly” theory, the combination of AI with developments in nanotechnology and synthetic biology would allow machines to gain consciousness and lead to an “age of spiritual machines” and “singularity”. This is the time of the “Promethean shame,” a concept developed by the German philosopher Gunter Anders, which refers to man’s feeling of weakness and imperfection in the face of the perfection of the creatures created through his mastery of science.

Whether the narratives of AI are utopias or dystopias, through fiction, the political, ethical and social stakes of AI open up avenues for deep critical reflection and question the most essential philosophical categories by which we think about mankind and our place in the world. Think of Philip Dick’s famous *Blade Runner*, the magnificent series *Westworld*, which tells the story of the empowerment of androids becoming conscious and free, or *Deus ex machina*, where the main character opens his arm to verify that he is not himself a machine: at a time when deep learning and neural network algorithms are triumphant, submissive or revolted, man sees himself as a robot like any other and discovers in the machine’s gaze his disturbing banality.

The truth is that we have never been so close to artificial agents integrated into our lives. Today AI is no longer just the object of a fantasy but is gradually becoming an everyday tool

through facial recognition or personal assistants, while the first tools of predictive writing and cultural recommendation are emerging, and it is announced that a story produced by an artificial intelligence would have been a finalist for a literary prize in Japan. Moving from fantasy to computer tools, the fictional representations of AI are thus added to the fictional representations of the emerging uses of narrative AI by opening up a field of opportunity and fear for culture: on the one hand, creation by AI or assisted by AI can offer a major experimental field of interest to both conceptual writers and storytelling practitioners. On the other hand, the way in which culture is « dated » and the way in which these dates are analyzed can profoundly affect the fiction industry and its attention control, further multiplying our perplexity about the emergence of artificial narrative intelligence.