The Transcendent Humanity of the Post-human: The Narrative “Patterns” and the Value System of *Westworld*

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Abstract
The film and the American drama versions of *Westworld* share some narrative programs, which could be called narrative “patterns”. They secure the continuity between the original and the adapted versions, and as a form of intertextuality, they stress the elements in programmatic references. In science-fiction texts, “patterns” are present in the value system as well as narrative programs, following a possible set routine. The posthuman shown in science-fiction texts does not refer to the future reality, but just demonstrates the reading interests in the current era based on a concern for the future. Therefore, the so-called posthuman is the synthesis of factual expectations of future, narrative patterns, and reading expectancy, and it expresses a transcendent humanity that is beyond the limits of ordinary humanity.

Keywords
posthuman, narrative, transcendent humanity, *Westworld*, science fiction

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1. An explication of “pattern”

The term “pattern (套路)” , meaning a narrative program, is employed in this article to emphasize the influence

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of narrative methods on the value system embodied in the text and the technical elements of the narrative on the whole work. Narratological studies extract a variety of elements from novels or folktales, and the combination of these different elements constitutes a concrete structure. It is, as it were, the practical application of various narrative elements that forms diverse works of literature. The analysis of the narrative structures of folktales by Vladimir Propp reveals the continuity of themes and even the set routine of plots. The same structures may have been adopted to different stories, and “the names of the characters change (as well as their belongings), but not their actions or functions.”¹ In a specific narrative work, once a certain element changes, novelty will arise. We never expect an alteration in all the narrative elements, for only in completely innovative works do multiple elements experience change at one time. Generally speaking, the change of a single element can lead to an alteration in the narrative system and then produce a new work, which is an important source of narrative charm.

The term “pattern” is used to replace “narrative program” for the emphasis of some elements that are irrelevant to the value system embodied in the narrative. Undoubtedly all “patterns” are more than they seem to be. Authors always choose “patterns” from the development of narrative content and narrative effects, suggesting that they have in some ways adopted holistic selection and judgment. Thus, the “pattern” is stressed with the intention to highlight the fictitious representation of science fictions for there is a general cognition—a spectacle of science fiction stories and also of contemporary cultural concepts—that science fictions are peculiarly related to prophecy or preparatory facts. The term “pattern” is used here in two senses: one is the narrative fragments in a work, and the other is the value system produced from the narrative work. The latter is generally believed to be equivalent to the metaphysical thinking of the whole work, but it is regarded as a big “pattern” in this article with its narrative elements underlined. In other words, the value system is an element that must be considered in a narrative work in that it determines the overall orientation of the work. Not only can the plot elements be a pattern for the narrative, but the value system can also be so, as particularly evidenced in science fictions. By and large, it is appropriate to highlight the “patterns” of science fictions in narrative programs; however, it may be an exaggeration to consider the value system as a “pattern”. This reinforcement, nevertheless, is of special significance for the broader theme like post-human humanity.
2. Two “patterns:” narrative program and value system

Despite the intense copyright awareness nowadays, after reviewing works in the history of literature, we can find that the narrative programs have been stuck in the groove. This common phenomenon, of course, is not plagiarism in the modern sense. Although there is some reproduction or imitation in terms of structure (or other elements), no accusation of plagiarism will be made as long as there is no obvious similarities in names, scenes, descriptions, and the like.\(^2\) In effect, the recurrence of narrative elements is rather a manifestation of genre characteristics.\(^1\)

In a comparison between the 1973 film and the 2016 drama versions of *Westworld*, we can find the same “patterns” and some changes in their details. In terms of the overall structure, the drama may inherit some “patterns” like the holistic framework from the film. The film features three “worlds”: the Roman World (the ancient Roman city of Pompeii), the Western World (the American Old West), and the Medieval World (medieval Europe), among which the most important part lies in the Western World and the other two are foils without many scenes. This “pattern” is completely inherited by the drama, which preserves almost all the humanistic designs and the basic “patterns” of the film. For example, in the film two tourists—an experienced visitor and a novice—go on a trip to the Western World together, and they have a kind of guiding and following relationship. This mode of functional structure is retained in the drama, but it serves different purposes. Do not forget that the film was released in 1973, at a time when the robot amusement park was an extremely fresh and shocking “pattern” for audience, who, like the novice, needed a reassuringly experienced tourist due to their lack of preparation for the coming situation. However, the “pattern” experiences an alteration in the drama. The main value element has been transformed from hunting to the conflict between two human natures: killing and love, which

\(^1\) This is intertextuality as proposed by the French theorist Julia Kristeva, which refers to an infinite interconnection between texts and between texts and society as well as history. As regards narrative programs, authors use citations, collages, parodies and other techniques to absorb and adapt other texts, thus a new one coming into being. Readers likewise refer to the reading programs they have developed for various intertextual interpretations of the text. In this sense, the text embraces rich and complex meanings. See Wang Jin’s *Intertextuality* (Guangxi: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2005).
allows the full length of the drama. Therefore, the plots of the drama are much more complex, and so do the protagonists. In the movie, one of the two protagonists indulging in the adventures is killed by a robot, while the other kills the robot and flees the Western World. In spite of the horrific ending, the design of the plot is quite cheesy: the robot’s killing can heighten the tension in the audience and thus create expectations for the potential energy of the Western World’s collapse. But if this expectation is fully realized, the film would be a tragedy, which does not meet the genre of a future exploration film: there should be a possible escape from the horrific future because an ending without exemption will only cause fear and boredom in the audience and turn the movie into a scary film. In other words, arrangements must be made for a young person to escape the park, and this is a fast-food ending determined by the genre of a science fiction that has the nature of future exploration. The difference of the drama *Westworld* lies in its sufficient plots for the elaboration of the whole story. The two young visitors are shifted from protagonists to plot-drivers, with the real protagonists being two androids named Dolores Abernathy and Maeve Millay. The two visitors own competitive concepts about Dolores’s fate: one regards androids as dolls, and the other falls in love with Dolores, hoping to help her get a new life. In the end, they become enemies and one of them kills the other owning to their different values.

Surely enough, the most similar “pattern” is the theme of bionic rebellion. In the movie, the robots eventually malfunction and kill almost all the visitors, leaving only the hero to escape. This “pattern” is thoroughly played out in the drama. Of course, in terms of primary interest, the essential tendency of the film is to shock the audience by this event, with which the faint fear is inexorably revealed from the development of plots. This effect would gradually dissipate after the audience walked out of the theater because in 1973 everything seemed so distant. The audience found no differences between people around them and themselves, and technology had not yet brought the possibility of androids; hence,
the dangers remained hypothetical. Furthermore, even if the Western World, an enclosed location, shifted from Utopia to Dystopia, it would be restricted in an area without affecting ordinary daily life, so the audience would feel safe. Fredric Jameson refers to this type of closed utopia as an isolated island utopia, a classical form of utopia, whose enclosed spatial form corresponds to classical political and military form.\footnote{Viewed in this light, the aesthetics of shock contains both shock and resistance to shock, which may come from daily life or the programs of imagination and narrative that have been elutriated by the aesthetic program. Only the combination of these two elements can create a sense of shocked satisfaction. However, in the drama the western paradise is certain to be open in that both Dolores and Maeve break through the boundary to the outside world and pick up the gun to kill any blocker. Dolores even kills Robert Ford, the creator of the park, which inevitably leads the audience from the fictional text to real life in an emotional sense. With the effect continuously fermenting, we may have wisps of unease in addition to shock: perhaps it would be our future. Thus, many narrative “patterns” employ the combination of contemporary technological development and cultural imagination to achieve a certain value determination with textual programs, pointing to a holistic system: a big “pattern” concerning value.}

The “pattern” system is undoubtedly discussed from the perspective of narrative programs. In other words, the various components making up the film and the drama feature some elements that share the same structures and usages, but the specific plots are different. Such “pattern” is somewhat similar to intertextuality.

The same “pattern” may engender different connotations or directions in different plots. Taking the two young visitors as an example again, they are friends in the film and have the same enemies, i.e. robots, which represents the confrontation between humanity and bestiality. This difference is derived from the whole story as well as the “pattern” The plot system, also named the value system, is often deemed a practical value. It can be seen in many text analyses that the value system of fictional texts and that of real life can clarify each other but sometimes the two are confused. Therefore, we should treat the value system as a new or potential operating system to reveal the focus of the issue. The superposition of the “patterns” of both narrative and the value system will produce different dramatic texts. Why the film and the drama turn out to be different in protagonists’ fates, ways of dying and their relationships? This is because that different value sys-
tems which play a fundamental role in adjusting plots have been included in the two texts. For example, the film with the element of hunting focuses on the confrontation between man and machines. In 1973, robots were so novel that humans didn’t take them as objects with potential humanity. The horror of robots’ killing permeate the whole film, alerting the audience that robots would bring terrible resistance as well as benefits. The benefits include allowing us to give free rein to our sexual and killing desires, which would be a joy for the human system just as it was exciting for some scientists to kill animals in public in the 17th century. Then, the systems of “patterns” and values were actually related to the whole value system of the people at that time when they did not have the concept of “robotic nature”. By contrast, some changes have taken place in the drama, among which the most significant lies in that after decades of development the androids have shown the dawn of humanity, though seemed far away. After all, how could we treat a “machine” —that has no distinction from ordinary people in both appearance and emotion—as merely a prop for performance without humanity rather than as a “person”? The drama Westworld has, in fact, a new value system: exploring. If the androids created by us feature humanity, then, is their justice in their rebellion? Is it inhuman for man to play them and treat them as tools for their own lust? The continuous and complicated plots present a new value system gradually, indicating the emerging of robotic humanity.

There are complex connections between the “pattern” of the narrative structure and that of value orientation. The apparent distinction between the two “patterns” could generate infinite texts. The “pattern” of the narrative program mainly consist of skills, while the value system is often subject to many conditions that depend on the cultural and political ideas of the time and the distinctions between people’s consciousness. In the movie, for instance, people at that time had no awareness of robotic humanity, so the machine has absolutely nothing to do with humanity but is an existence of program operations without blood, warmth, and so-called free will or self-consciousness. Though similar to, or even the same with, the appearance of human beings, the robots merely have a flimsy veneer with only circuit inside. But in the drama, their surface is no longer flimsy “skin” but rather contains muscles and even nerves, just some pseudo dynamos or battery in their brains or hearts. A new question, then, arises. Those humans in the movie are so indifferent to robots that they never presuppose the problem of their humanity; however, we may feel amazed or deem the plots inhuman if
the androids are presented with no humanity in the drama. How does this change happen? The time interval between the film and the drama could answer this question. Over the five decades, artificial intelligence has become an increasing role in everyday life. If we call the vassal machines that serve humans “machines”, then the possibility that they have their own judgments or even wishes will be ignored. Especially in the past two decades, the “pattern” that androids have a sense of rebellion has become commonplace in science fictions, which was not included in the film of 1973. To reflect on this point is to recall that the value system is produced from the combination of multiple narrative “patterns” through continuous changes, derivations, communications and transformations. When is the system seems complex enough, a new value system emerges. The new one seems to derive from life, but it actually also come from the integrated construction of narrative history. It can be seen that the distinction between the micro narrative “pattern” and the macro one is the difference between the individual work and the overall narrative history.

3. The overflowing “pattern”: immortality and rebirth

Either in the movie or in the drama, the androids have a common characteristic that is closely related to their nature, namely the reproducibility of machines. This nature seems unremarkable and mundane, but if we rethink it at the level of human life, we immediately see a significant transition: compared with human bodies, machines are infinitely repairable. We can even deem them immortal if a certain consciousness can be transferred between different machine mediators. The robots in the movie are simply regarded as machines, so their immortality is not noted. Though similar to humans in appearance, they do not have all the human reactions. They are completely programmed and controlled by computers and various parameters. In other words, their actions are predetermined rather than spontaneous. When the robots get out of control, their machine nature is revealed more clearly in both appearances and actions. Similarly, androids in the drama—especially in the beginning—are also programmed to follow prescribed plots without awareness. Admittedly, nearly all machines might malfunction; thus, there are scenes of repairing them in both the film and the drama. On one hand, fault repair in the movie is just a simple and recurrent process. The robots
are as callous as steel. On the other hand, fault repair in the drama, with more connotations, can be divided into two types: physical repair and mental repair. Like that in the movie, the physical repair happens to those androids who are slaughtered but not destroyed, as in the typical case of the awakening prostitute —Maeve, who is constantly sent back to repair because she has not been dead and can be reused after adequate repair. By contrast, the android Dolores receives mental repair since she has some strange thoughts but without physical damage. The designers perform a so-called backstage repair that is done by dialogues dependent on the androids’ self-inspection system, which is similar to the safety mode of the computers. Those androids who are completely exposed to the designers can only tell the truth due to their inability to conceal their thoughts, and the source codes of the program are displayed unreservedly. Through the mental repair we can find that though androids in the drama still act according to prescribed plots, they have certain self-awareness, with which they could recognize themselves and think of themselves as unified selves. The debris and fragments of memories—or the distractive moments—produced from many scenes, which constitute special moments in their “life”, leave them a doubt about their identities and roles. This self-consciousness gradually infiltrates into their security model and eventually forms a special sense of mission: to explore the meanings of existence and the entire Westworld. Nonetheless, to discover their true identities is devastating for them, and it seems inevitable for them to find the self-identification and resist human tyranny. When the “singularity” 3 comes, they constantly repair themselves and use their death in the plots to gain the space to control the whole process of life; therefore, death for them is a farce in that they are immortal at whatever level, and the awareness of this will bring them an immense change as regards their survival. Then, how to deal with their immortality when faced with human biology? If the androids secure their own source codes, they can live forever. Isn’t that what we humans dream of? From such plots or narrative “patterns” we can find that any narrative “pattern” might result in some

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3 Singularity used to be a concept in astrophysics, but now it is a futurological concept, referring to events that may occur in the future. Once these events take place, such as artificial intelligence taking control of humans and aliens occupying the Earth, the status quo of human society will be reversed. These imaginary events shape contemporary cultural psychology in a way that leans toward fear. Here Singularity is used for androids, meaning the truth of the world that was once concealed from them.
overflowing or unexpected consequences, which may not be fully demonstrated in the “pattern” system but will overflow wonderful narrative effects if compared with other systems. In this sense, it is possible to imply the posthuman existence: the possibility of a new narrative “pattern”, namely the combination of machines and humans. This might be the reborn posthuman that are beckoned in various texts, corresponding to the ethical status of posthuman human-machine integration.

No matter from which perspective, the human-machine hybrid will be a basic link of the post-human, which we cannot discuss without various kinds of invasive replacement of bodies by machines. So what is the post-human? Since ancient times, each of the body technologies has become a leading link for the post-human, such as crutches, glasses, hearing aids, telegraphs, telephones, televisions and radios. It is the network that results in dramatic changes in contemporary life. The network unfolds the post-human and becomes its precursor. It brings us to the extension of body senses that are replaced by online forms to create new feelings, including social contacts, remote listening, Internet sex, and the like. We are also going to witness the birth of a new network platform: virtual reality, in which the true post-human will see a new way of existence and make new ethics accordingly. Though the new ethics may be far from the presuppositions in the Westworld, there exists the continuity or similarity in nature. From virtual reality to bionic sex, we can imagine that they will replace each other constantly, but then how will people in the future live with the emergence of bionic sex? This is related to another value system, but if the new system is too tightly integrated with our actions, it will be concrete life rather than a “pattern” for those of us who act within it. When put into the screen or into the plot, it is bound to be a system of narrative or value. Their complex connections with life will be a huge problem for us.

4. Transcendent humanity of the posthuman

If we see in Westworld a special humanity, then we know that its focus is not on humans but on androids. Once the bionic man gains autonomy, the nature of the machine will change entirely and become an organic part of humanity. Then, what kind of humanity is this? We may be able to grasp it with the concept of
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posthuman. Overarchingly, the post-human may represent a new dimension, that is, the invasion or integration of machines into human bodies. The existence of these machines was originally not regarded as with humanity; however, when we look back at history, the emergence of any new machine, in particular the modern network and virtual reality, may transform human’s psychological conditions and the way we perceive the time and space around us, and even create a new human existence that are compatible with new machines. These facts suggest that machines are inherently related to humanity. A closer look at the make-up of human nature reveals that technology has been treated as part of human beings, but any kind of ethics may imply a premise that the technological condition to which it is adapted is stable and subject to few changes. We have acknowledged that these technological conditions constitute the fundamental platform for human actions; therefore, once changes take place in this platform, our humanity and basic ethics are bound to alter as well. Since modern times, technology has witnessed a rapid development, and so has our humanity. Especially in contemporary times, we could even see that multiple human natures are kept together to form a conflicting but harmonious state of humanity, where post-human and human conditions are mixed. Surely, here the human condition is actually a representation of modern ethics, whereas the post-human is directly bound up with the postmodern—an unsteady stability or a balance of conflicts, which, as merely described as a whole, may be technical, political or ethical. Of course we know that the posthuman has not yet fully developed. Some of the faintest hints of the post-human condition may be invisible in real life, but fortunately there is a method to bring them to light: the science fiction narrative. Fredric Jameson found the nature of “thought experiments” in science fiction texts: “one of the most significant potentialities of science fiction as a form is precisely its ability to provide experimental variants for our own empirical universe.” 5 This thought experiment can magnify a “seedling”—the situation after mankind that is only possible in the future—to such an extreme that we can treat the posthuman as reality, which offers us the opportunity to carry out an excavation in a sense of future archaeology. In this way, we can see how surprisingly rapid post-human development can be, though it is not reflected in today’s reality. But by making regular speculations along the present rate of development, we could infer that the future of science fiction embraces a great possibility, which is a special type in the human environment.

Let us return to the narrative. We have discussed narrative “patterns” and
value systems in previous sections. When we move towards a dimension of humanity, we need to jump out of narrative “patterns” and value systems and move to a predicted holistic condition, which is in effect posthuman humanity. We have to say that this posthuman humanity is inseparable from the narrative of science fiction as well as the value system it sets, which, integrated with the narrative “pattern”, inevitably adds new elements to current ethical dimension and value systems. This humanity undoubtedly contains a possible value of the future. It is not an observation of a real situation but a text-based speculation, or even an informed adaptation of the human ethical system. Corresponding to the present ethical system, it produces some interesting responses or even some peculiar fusion, which is actually integrated with the technological advances that science has brought us. This value system shall be combined with the content of the narrative; for example, the peculiar combination of the content about androids and the narrative system that is derived from their integration and breakthrough indicates a form of post-human humanity, which does not exist in reality but meaningfully becomes a contrast to our human nature. It has been an appendage of humanity until now, but, based on evidence, we can safely infer that it will become a substitute for humanity at some point in the future. Taking sex for example, when homosexuality replaces heterosexuality as a primary type of love, it becomes no longer an accessory form of sexuality but a universal one. More radically, when Queer Theory becomes a universal theory of sexuality, it will claim that all human sexuality shall be queer, that heterosexuality is actually a particular form of sexuality without universal power though chosen by the vast majority of people, and that only a pluralistic theory of sexuality like Queer has the capacity for generalization.

In discourse analysis of all science fictions there is a danger that is bred in the text, that is, the temporal isomorphism between the future in the text and the future in real life makes them confusing. Science fictions depict future time and future society, and we always take this possible future as a possible fact in real life. In other words, although the future has not yet come, the future in a narrative text is essentially identical with the future in real life. On one hand, we tend to speculate on the future on the basis of the past and the present, and whether by imagination, expectation, or projection from the present trends, the future seems to be an ever-adjusting and constantly coordinating existence which is not yet but will come eventually. On the other hand, the future in the narrative text is dif-
different, as it bears the dual function of speculation and hope, forming a complex objectivity that never promises fulfillment. This is the opposite of the future in social practice on the grounds that realization is the only criterion to judge whether the future in social practice is reasonable or not. Yet narrative texts only need to ensure that the idea about future is presented in the textual narrative.

Another essential difference will completely lead to a deep gap between the future in the narrative text and that in real life, and that is the narrative itself. Not interested in how the future is realized, the narrative is aimed at attracting viewers’ interest, which is the more fundamental purpose. Seeming to focus on the future, the narrative is actually designed for contemporaneous interests, of which the “future”, or a complicated entanglement in the narrative, is just one of the components. The narrative prefers to adjust itself to contemporaneous interests, rather than to make a “realistic” speculation about the future. Taking the drama *Westworld* as an example, in order to remain attractive, the second season should not completely follow the thread of rebellion that is presented in the first season, otherwise it will be less appealing to the audience who would always love the new but loathe the old “pattern”. This reminds us of Neo’s story in *The Matrix*. Neo awakens in the first episode to the fact that the so-called reality is false, and then his rebellion becomes the main thread of the narrative. In the third episode, however, the Creator tells him that all programs are flawed and are going to collapse if developed freely and that mere suppression serves no use but to make a faster collapse. He is told that a good solution is to design a program, called Neo, that can collect all the rebels together and would be an incarnation of justice in their eyes, but in fact it would clarify all hidden problems so that the Creator could eliminate and improve them at one stroke. When Neo, at the end of his quest, finds himself nothing more than a stepping stone and the biggest traitor of his cause, he realizes that there is no point in doing anything. This is the fate of Neo. When we return to the *Westworld*, we can imagine that over the second and the third seasons more drama will be included, which is also the effect the show pursues. So, the “future” may not be a real future, but it is presented only in the narrative as if it were real. Here the future is an exploration and more a cheesy “pattern” loaded with value systems and real considerations about the future, but, we must remember, it is designed to entertain the audience. The entertainment is the backbone for all narrative "patterns", and in such "patterns" usually comes a unbearably cheesy ending. In any case, the audience will adapt to and like the
ending, regarding it as a natural consequence, and thus forget that it is just a narrative technique. After all, any value system, even including some mystical imagination, is nothing but a sophisticated exquisite trigger for viewing pleasure.

Then, the problem is that we often confuse the future in the text with the future in reality and forget that interest itself determines at least half elements. Thereby, interest and narrative “patterns” become more closely linked. What we see in the narrative text is, in effect, various narrative “patterns” catering to the current interests, and these “patterns” seem to guide us to the future but is actually leading us to complete contemporaneous interests. Accordingly, narrative “patterns”, especially those in novels about the future, do not bear the function of helping us face the future. Although they carry some senses of excavation, we do not forget that we have another task, i.e. to criticize current interests, which is our real direction.

Notes