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Echoes of Phobic Realism: Exploring Sociotechnical Phobias in Technotexts through Dystopian Collaborative Narratives of AI and Human Creativity

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of human creativity and artificial intelligence (AI) through a comparative analysis of narratives authored by inmates' and AI. By focusing on themes of surveillance, dehumanization, identity and resistance within futuristic incarceration settings, the research reveals how storytelling serves as a lens to critique the ethical and societal implications of AI in punitive systems. Employing the frameworks of sociotechnical imaginaries and Phobic Realism, the study uncovers how these narratives reflect cultural anxieties and aspirations. Human-authored stories, enriched by lived experiences, offer emotionally authentic critiques of systemic control, while AI-generated narratives extrapolate societal fears into speculative futures. This research contributes to interdisciplinary debates on AI governance and the post-human condition, emphasizing the importance of storytelling in articulating the ethical and cultural dimensions of technological advancement. This study further emphasizes the preparation and orientation of individuals, particularly as engaged and creative readers of literature, to recognize that the fear of the unknown and expansive realm of artificial intelligence constitutes a construct that can be systematically deconstructed over time.

Keywords: phobic realism, human-AI collaboration, technotextual narratives, existential fear, surveillance, dehumanization

Echoes of Phobic Realism: Exploring Sociotechnical Phobias in Technotexts through Dystopian Collaborative Narratives of AI and Human Creativity

Storytelling, particularly through the medium of science fiction, serves as a powerful mechanism for envisioning potential futures and addressing the societal and ethical challenges of technological advancements. By presenting diverse scenarios, storytelling fosters creativity and innovation, encouraging proactive problem-solving and preparation for an AI-driven world. Science fiction, in particular, allows audiences to grapple with the risks and ethical dilemmas of new technologies, guiding innovators to anticipate and address these challenges effectively. Wilson (2002), in his article *The Power of Story*, highlights the ability of narratives to engage audiences emotionally and intellectually, transforming complex concepts into accessible and relatable ideas.

Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin (1990) emphasize that humans are "storytelling organisms" who construct personal and social narratives to make sense of the world. These stories, whether informal or formal, shape collective understanding and provide a foundation for critical evaluation.

"In reality, every reader, while reading, becomes a reader of themselves," writes Proust. "The work of the writer is merely a kind of optical instrument which the author supplies to the reader, enabling them to discern aspects of their own self that, without this book, they might never have been able to perceive" (Proust, 2018).

Moreover, Javier Marías (2005) writes: "I often reflect on something that seems to be forgotten, once called literary thought – distinct from scientific, philosophical, logical, mathematical, religious, and political

thinking. Unlike other forms of thought that are ways of knowing, literary thought, for me, is a form of recognition. To put it simply, though imperfectly: it is a way to learn what one knows but did not know they knew – perhaps because it could not be expressed. Literature, the kind I enjoy reading and aim to write, is diverse but unified in this: it narrates not the familiar but the simultaneously known and unknown. In short, it conveys mystery" (Marías, 2005).

In the context of AI, narratives function as constructed representations of societal anxieties and hopes. They allow us to explore the cultural, ethical, and psychological dimensions of technology, revealing how stories reflect and shape public perceptions of AI. This process requires recognizing narratives as socially situated creations that carry the biases, intentions, and worldviews of their creators and interpreters.

This paper draws on a creative writing project conducted in May 2024, which involved a total of eight inmates participating in a creative writing workshop centered on the thematic intersection of incarceration and artificial intelligence. Of the eight participants, six completed and submitted original stories. In parallel, six additional narratives were generated by ChatGPT (paid version), using precisely the same creative prompts provided to the inmates. No further instructions or follow-up queries were given to the AI, ensuring the consistency of narrative conditions. This activity forms part of a broader research initiative concerned with the evolving entanglements of narrative, technology, and systems of governance. Each inmate produced their story within a two-hour session, while the AI was tasked with composing its texts under identical constraints. The comparison between these two corpora—human-authored and AI-generated—constitutes the empirical basis of the present analysis.

At the uppermost level, there exists a narrative in which the narrator is a collective of social or political forces that are either rational or strive to present themselves as rational. Conversely, at a lower level, there exists another narrative, crafted by forces resistant to analysis—at times irrational and at other times simply incomprehensible through the methods

of logic. These narratives may serve as conduits or receptacles for the dissatisfactions, disappointments, repressed desires, fears or phobias, and hidden impulses of a society, as well as its demons and phantoms.

The fictions created within a society—whether crafted by human authors or generated by AI—often serve as a means to illuminate the obscured or unarticulated dimensions of collective experience, particularly when other forms of narrative, such as historiography or journalism, lack the language or scope to address these complexities. Fiction, in this broader sense, becomes a critical domain where society can interrogate prevailing narratives and imagine alternative possibilities. It functions as a counter-space, distinct from the realms of purported certainties, instead embracing doubts, ambiguities, fears, or phobias, as well as the multifaceted uncertainties inherent in the post-human condition. Both human-authored and AI-generated stories participate in this process, providing complementary yet distinct perspectives on the anxieties and aspirations that shape societal understanding.

The goal of this comparative analysis is to explore thematic, narrative, and stylistic similarities and differences between these two sets of stories, with a particular focus on their relation to Phobic Realism. The central aim of this study is to investigate how human-authored and AI-generated narratives reflect and critique issues related to surveillance, control, identity, and resistance in a speculative future shaped by artificial intelligence. Within this framework, storytelling and fiction become a lens through which to examine both the fears and phobias, as well as the possibilities associated with AI, encouraging nuanced and balanced perspectives.

1 Science Fiction Role

Science fiction (SF) has long served as both a reflection of societal aspirations and a catalyst for technological innovation, bridging imagination with reality. The genre's roots trace back to early literary works like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), which marked the inception of science fiction by portraying the creation of artificial life through human agency rather than supernatural forces. Shelley's narrative introduced the "Frankenstein Complex," a recurring theme in SF that explores fears surrounding artificial creations gaining autonomy and escaping human control. (Shelley, 2012)

Subsequent works, such as Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1921), further expanded the scope of SF. Verne's Captain Nemo envisioned technological advancements like submarines decades before their real-world emergence, while Čapek introduced the term "robot," derived from the Czech word for "forced labor," to describe synthetic beings revolting against their creators. These early narratives foreshadowed contemporary ethical concerns about artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics, illustrating societal anxieties about technology surpassing human control.

SF has continued to evolve, addressing themes of human augmentation, societal surveillance, and ethical dilemmas posed by technological advancements. Cyberpunk literature, exemplified by William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* (1985), explores the fusion of humans and machines, reflecting fears and hopes about the transformative potential of technology. These works have inspired real-world innovations, with researchers like Jun Rekimoto (2002) and Masahiko Inami (2001) drawing on SF to develop technologies such as remote presence and augmented reality.

The genre's influence extends beyond literature into practical domains, providing a framework for envisioning societal reactions to emerging technologies. Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* introduced the Three Laws of Robotics (1950), a conceptual tool that has shaped both fictional nar-

ratives and ethical discussions in robotics. Similarly, Sakyo Komatsu's *Virus* (1964) depicted a fictional pandemic, resonating with societal experiences during the COVID-19 crisis and highlighting the predictive capacity of SF in reflecting human responses to crises (Omori, 2020).

Science fiction's dual role as speculative and cautionary storytelling makes it a vital lens for examining technological trajectories. It not only inspires innovation but also fosters critical discourse on the ethical and societal implications of advancements in AI and robotics (Kurosu, 2014; Marcus et al., 1999; Mubin et al., 2016; Nagy et al., 2018; Schmitz et al., 2008; Tanenbaum, Tanenbaum, & Wakkary, 2012; Troiano, Tiab, & Lim, 2016). By exploring radical possibilities and envisioning utopian and dystopian futures, SF serves as a cultural barometer, helping society navigate the challenges and opportunities of a technology-driven world. This interplay of imagination and reality underscores SF's enduring relevance in shaping human understanding of technological progress and its implications.

2 Sociotechnical Imaginaries and Narrative Analysis: Framing AI Futures

The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and other advanced technologies into societal structures has increasingly necessitated frameworks that link technological innovation to broader cultural, social, and political imaginaries.

The concept of sociotechnical imaginaries, as articulated by Sheila Jasanoff in *Dreamscapes of Modernity*, offers a powerful framework to analyze the interplay between technological innovation and societal values. By redefining sociotechnical imaginaries as "collectively held, institutionally stabilized, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures," Jasanoff emphasizes the intricate ways in which science and technology are woven into societal aspirations and fears (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015).

Technological innovation has often mirrored the imaginative leaps found in science fiction, which serves as a precursor to material advancements. For instance, Shelley's *Frankenstein* explored themes of human agency and ethical dilemmas centuries before biological experimentation brought these debates into reality. Similarly, works like Huxley's *Brave New World (1932)* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949)* reflect societal anxieties about biopower and surveillance long before technological advancements brought such scenarios closer to possibility.

In parallel, Michel Foucault's concepts of biopower and the panopticon **o**ffer critical theoretical tools to further contextualize the themes of surveillance and control present in both the narrative texts and broader sociotechnical imaginaries. Biopower, as articulated by Foucault, refers to the governance of populations through the administration of bodies and regulation of life processes—mechanisms particularly visible in technologically mediated environments such as prisons.(Foucault , 1977). These environments are also marked by panoptic surveillance, a form of power rooted in constant visibility, where discipline is maintained not through direct force but through the internalization of observation. The panopticon**,** Foucault's metaphor for modern disciplinary society, finds new relevance in the AI-driven carceral systems explored in this study, where surveillance extends beyond the body to encompass thought, memory, and identity. (Foucault, 1978). As inmates and AI-generated narrators alike depict systems of omnipresent monitoring, the panoptic gaze is reimagined through digital infrastructures, revealing the fusion of carceral logic with algorithmic governance.

However, Jasanoff critiques the tendency to separate technology from its social underpinnings. Through the concept of co-production, she underscores the reciprocal relationship between technological systems and the societal norms that shape them. Science fiction becomes a critical tool in this framework, illustrating the dynamic interplay of material, moral, and social landscapes in imagining futures.

Additionally, building on the work of Arjun Appadurai, who describes

imagination as a form of social practice, Jasanoff situates imagination as a driver of collective agency. Sociotechnical imaginaries encapsulate both utopian aspirations and dystopian fears, offering a framework for negotiating the moral and practical implications of scientific advancements. Sociotechnical imaginaries also address why technological trajectories diverge across cultures and periods, offering insights into the aspirational dimensions of governance. By embedding science and technology in narratives of both utopia and dystopia, imaginaries provide a way to connect individual experiences to collective societal values.

Jasanoff emphasizes that these imaginaries are not static but are co-produced – shaped by the reciprocal dynamics of scientific knowledge, technological innovation, and societal norms. Co-production underscores how science and technology are embedded within social values and simultaneously act to construct and sustain those values. For example, the governance of emerging technologies often reflects implicit assumptions about societal ideals, from notions of progress and innovation to fears of surveillance and dehumanization. This dual dynamic is particularly salient in narratives exploring AI, which frequently grapple with ethical dilemmas, existential fears, and the implications of technological autonomy, such as the narratives analyzed in this research, where themes of surveillance, resistance, and identity are juxtaposed with visions of hope and empowerment.

Imaginaries also operate across scales, from individual actors to institutional frameworks. For instance, national imaginaries around AI often reflect broader cultural values, such as individual autonomy or collective welfare. These narratives can influence global technological trajectories, shaping how societies prioritize innovation, regulate risks, and respond to ethical dilemmas.

Narratives about AI, both from human agents and AI agents, blur the line between the subjunctive and not only educate but also empower individuals to engage critically with emerging technologies. Narratives are central to the formation and dissemination of sociotechnical imaginaries, serving as vehicles for articulating collective visions of the fu-

ture. Stories –whether speculative fiction, policy rhetoric, or cultural myths– offer a means of exploring possible trajectories for scientific and technological development while reflecting the values and anxieties of their creators. Jasanoff argues that imaginaries are "performative," enacted through institutional practices and cultural productions, including literature. This performativity underscores the importance of storytelling in shaping public perceptions and policy responses to emerging technologies.

In this context, narratives by both humans and AI can be examined as contributions to the evolving sociotechnical landscape. Human-authored stories often draw on lived experiences, embedding emotional and ethical depth into discussions of technology. Conversely, AI-generated narratives, though derivative, mirror societal anxieties encoded in their training data. Together, these narratives offer a multifaceted view of how societies envision their technological futures.

Narrative analysis complements the study of sociotechnical imaginaries by unpacking the stories societies tell about their technological futures. Stories –whether created by humans or generated by AI– serve as vessels for sociotechnical imaginaries, embedding fears, hopes, and ethical considerations into their narrative structures. Drawing on Arjun Appadurai's notion of imagination as a social practice, narratives are positioned as tools for negotiating collective aspirations and anxieties. Appadurai conceptualizes imagination not as an individual cognitive process but as a cultural and collective act that shapes societal expectations and behaviors. (Appadurai,1996)

In sum, sociotechnical imaginaries, when paired with science fiction and narrative analysis, create a theoretical lens to explore how societies envision and negotiate their technological futures, balancing the forces of innovation with ethical and moral imperatives. This synthesis lays the groundwork for analyzing diverse technological trajectories and their implications for the future.

3 Phobic Realism & Existential Fear

Phobic Realism as a literary framework encapsulates the collective societal fears and existential anxieties emerging in response to the transformative effects of technology on human identity and agency. This movement channels these concerns into narratives that articulate, deconstruct, and potentially reimagine societal phobias, particularly in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). By engaging with themes such as dehumanization, the erosion of selfhood, and the ethical dilemmas posed by AI governance, Phobic Realism serves as a critical lens to explore the psychological and moral tensions inherent in the integration of advanced technologies into human life. It reflects the growing unease about humanity's place within increasingly automated and surveillance-driven systems.

Key characteristics that define Phobic Realism are: the manifestation of societal fears, the erosion of boundaries between reality and imagination, and the interplay of resistance and hope (Spyrakis, 2015) First, it brings latent anxieties about surveillance, loss of agency, and systemic control into sharp focus through speculative scenarios that resonate with collective apprehensions. Second, it blurs the line between the real and the imagined, illustrating how technological systems intrude upon personal and collective spheres, thereby destabilizing notions of autonomy and privacy. Third, despite its focus on fear, Phobic Realism often integrates moments of resilience and resistance, showcasing the enduring power of individuality to challenge authoritarian or dehumanizing systems.

This literary orientation aligns with the broader philosophical and ethical concerns raised by the concept of existential risk, particularly in the age of artificial intelligence. Existential risk refers to scenarios that could lead to the extinction of humanity or cause irreversible damage to human civilization. The concept, as defined by philosopher Nick Bostrom, involves risks that threaten the premature extinction of Earth-originating intelligent life or the permanent and drastic destruction of its potential for desirable future development. In this context,

Phobic Realism may be understood not only as a reflection of collective unease but as a cultural response to the psychological burden of contemplating such catastrophic futures—thereby translating abstract existential risks into emotionally resonant and narratively constructed anxieties. (Bostrom,2013)

Narratives, whether human-authored or AI-generated, become powerful vessels of Phobic Realism. These stories articulate societal fears about AI-driven control and incarceration, reflecting broader anxieties about the erosion of personal freedom and moral autonomy in the face of technological governance. By embedding these narratives within the framework of Phobic Realism, the stories do more than mirror societal anxieties; they provide a space for critique and the reimagination of future possibilities. Through their vivid scenarios, these narratives invite readers to reflect on the implications of unchecked technological power and envision alternative trajectories that balance innovation with ethical imperatives.

Ultimately, the function of Phobic Realism extends beyond merely highlighting existential fears; it serves as a literary mode for grappling with the complexities of a rapidly evolving technological landscape. By situating individual struggles within broader societal contexts, Phobic Realism encourages a nuanced exploration of themes like surveillance, control, and resistance. It underscores the fragility of human agency under systems of technological domination while also affirming the potential for hope and transformation through acts of defiance and imagination. As such, Phobic Realism provides a critical framework for understanding the intersections of technology, humanity, and the evolving narratives that shape our shared future

This goes in line with Jasanoff's work, which underscores the importance of narrative and literature in shaping our collective response to technological advancements. By integrating the concept of phobic realism, we can enhance our ability to address the existential risks posed by AI, fostering a more informed and ethically aware society.

4 Methodology

This study is part of a larger research project analyzing the intersection of human creativity, artificial intelligence, and the future of incarceration. Specifically, the present research examines and compares two distinct datasets: six creative stories written by inmates participating in a creative writing course and six stories generated by ChatGPT using the same prompts provided to the inmates. The goal of this comparative analysis is to explore thematic, narrative, and stylistic similarities and differences between these two sets of stories, with a particular focus on their relation to Phobic Realism.

To ensure consistency and avoid content bias, the authors did not guide or direct the AI program (ChatGPT, paid version) with follow-up questions or input beyond the original instructions given to the inmates. The same set of initial creative prompts was provided to both human participants and the AI, and no additional intervention or narrative structuring was introduced during the generation of the AI texts.

The study analyzed twelve narratives, each categorized by their origin—either authored by human participants or generated by AI. Among the human-created stories, "A Curious Place and Manner of Imprisonment" features robotic guards equipped with empathy sensors that monitor inmates' emotions, while "Deep Horizon" depicts an underwater prison run almost entirely by androids. "Korydallos Metaprison 2130" presents a scenario of omnipresent surveillance, and "Post-era within the Prison" envisions inmates monitored through implanted chips. "Entering the Glass Tube" explores extreme isolation, confining prisoners in transparent enclosures devoid of physical contact, and "Prison 2124" tells the story of an inmate who remembers only the reason for imprisonment, having forgotten even his name. The AI-generated stories similarly convey dystopian themes: "Encoded Dreams" uses artificial dreams for psychological manipulation, and "The Garden of the Erased" constructs a symbolic artificial environment that erases personal identity. "Silent Repetition" addresses the fear of cognitive surveillance, and "Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta" portrays prisoners

as reduced to data packets within an AI-run system. In "The Button," a simple device becomes a metaphor for the illusion of control, and "The Voice of Time" explores the fear of time and the loss of self, articulated through unsettling auditory cues. Together, these narratives offer a rich comparative framework for examining the psychological, ethical, and aesthetic implications of AI-driven incarceration.

The central aim of this study is to investigate how human-authored and AI-generated narratives reflect and critique issues related to surveillance, control, identity, and resistance in a speculative future shaped by artificial intelligence. The analysis seeks to: (1) identify recurring themes such as dehumanization, resistance, hope, and ethical dilemmas in both human and AI-authored stories; (2) examine how lived experiences influence the style, tone, and content of the inmates' stories compared to the algorithmic structures and patterns shaping ChatGPT's narratives; (3) explore the alignment of these stories with the literary framework of Phobic Realism, focusing on the ways they evoke fear, uncertainty, and the dehumanizing potential of advanced technological systems. The final goal is to contribute to broader discussions about the implications of artificial intelligence in societal governance and its psychological and ethical effects, particularly in the context of incarceration.

The methodology for this research is based on thematic analysis, a widely used qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within textual data. This approach is particularly suited to the study of creative narratives, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the implicit and explicit meanings within the texts. The approach involves several phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. As part of the methodology, the study employs a structured framework to reveal and analyze the elements of phobic realism within both human-created and AI-generated stories. This approach involves a thematic and narrative analysis to identify key techniques that manifest societal fears, existential anxieties, and psychological tensions characteristic of phobic realism. By uncovering

these layered narrative techniques, the methodology demonstrates how phobic realism engages readers in a deeper critique of technological dominance and its psychological implications.

The research began with an immersive reading of both the inmate-authored and ChatGPT-generated stories to identify preliminary impressions and recurring motifs. This initial step provided a broad understanding of the content and tone of the narratives.

The texts were systematically coded to uncover significant patterns related to recurring themes, such as surveillance, the erosion of identity, and others. The next step was to generate initial codes for technological control and resistance, which served as building blocks for thematic analysis. The generated codes were grouped into broader themes that encapsulated shared concerns and differences across the two datasets. This step focused on synthesizing the data to capture the most salient and meaningful patterns. These themes were then refined and contextualized to align with the overarching research goals of the paper. This process involved revisiting the narratives to confirm that the themes accurately represented the content and nuances of the stories. Each theme was clearly defined and contextualized within the framework of Phobic Realism and its emphasis on phobias, existential dilemmas, and societal critique. Themes such as surveillance, dehumanization, hope, and ethical dilemmas were central to the analysis. The refined themes were synthesized into a coherent comparative analysis, providing insights into the similarities and differences between the inmate-authored and AI-generated stories. The report highlights how these narratives contribute to the broader discourse on the psychological, ethical, and societal implications of AI in carceral systems.

Additionally, a comparative approach was followed, focusing on the examination of recurring motifs, such as surveillance, resistance, and ethical dilemmas, to understand how they manifest in both inmate and AI narratives

Moreover, concerning narrative style and structure, the analysis consid-

ered how the inmates' lived experiences inform their storytelling, while ChatGPT's narratives reflect algorithmically learned patterns based on cultural and literary data.

The research also explored how the stories evoke fear, paranoia, and existential unease, aligning with the literary characteristics of Phobic Realism. The study attempts to contextualize the narratives within contemporary and future debates about technological power, human agency, and the ethics of AI-driven punitive systems.

5 Results

5.1 Manifestations of Phobic Realism in the Stories

Phobic Realism aims to enclose the reader in the protagonist's phobic world by employing techniques that blur the lines between observer and participant. The stories' first-person narratives indirectly achieve this goal by immersing readers into the characters' fears and subjective realities.

For instance: In *"Silent Repetition"*, an AI generated story the narration creates an environment where the protagonist's thoughts are monitored, and their autonomy questioned: *"The program has discovered your fear: you are afraid of forgetting yourself"*. This evokes anxiety not just within the character but within the reader, who begins to question their own experiences of identity.

Phobic Realism, additionally, emphasizes dynamic narration rather than static description, enabling readers to form their own irrational fears through minimal but potent stimuli. The evocative yet sparse descriptions in: *The Garden of the Erased",* another AI generated story emphasize an eerie tranquility: *"This garden was beautiful, but it felt unnatural: there were no insects, no rustling leaves in the air, no scents"*. This narrative technique invites the reader to construct the ter-

ror through their imagination, making the phobia deeply personal.

Two of the most compelling AI-generated narratives, *Silent Repetition* and *The Garden of the Erased*, vividly embody the essence of Phobic Realism by illustrating the internalization of technological control and the symbolic erasure of identity. In *Silent Repetition*, the protagonist's fear transcends physical surveillance, culminating in cognitive intrusion: *"Even my thoughts felt monitored, as if the silence of my cell could betray me with a single stray emotion*." This line exemplifies the totalizing presence of AI systems, turning introspection into a site of anxiety and aligning with the genre's focus on existential dread. Similarly, in *The Garden of the Erased*, the narrative constructs a deceptively tranquil environment were control manifests through aesthetic perfection and identity dissolution. The protagonist observes, *"The statues were people I had known, prisoners like me. Their eyes were half-closed, as if they had stopped thinking the moment they were 'corrected*.'" Here, fear is conveyed not through violence but through the silent, gradual replacement of agency with compliance, rendering the self obsolete. These narratives underscore how AI functions not only as a tool of physical governance but as an agent of psychological and existential destabilization.

Furthermore, phobic Realism utilizes the dream element to distort reality, pulling the protagonist and the reader into surreal, phobia-inducing experiences. For example in *"Encoded Dreams"*, (AI generated story) the protagonist is subjected to AI-manipulated dreams: *"From that day on, I stopped dreaming. Not because I couldn't, but because I was afraid to sleep"*. The narrative blurs the line between reality and dream, reflecting the core of Phobic Realism, where rationality is overridden by subconscious fears.

Central to Phobic Realism is the exaggerated psychological response to external stimuli, amplifying fears to an almost hallucinatory level. The AI generated story titled *"The Button"* exemplifies this through the titular object, which becomes a psychological battleground: *"The button wasn't a solution. It was a trap. It was a way to prove that you had sur-*

rendered yourself". The protagonist's inner turmoil underscores how phobic realism transforms mundane objects into sources of existential dread.

The narrative structure in Phobic Realism often incorporates dual layers—a primary, realistic story, and a secondary, phobic one triggered by an irrational stimulus. This is evident in *"The Voice of Time"*, where the ticking sound represents an anchor for both the physical world and the protagonist's descent into a phobia-laden inner narrative: *"You cannot endure time because you fear it. It is yourself that you hear"*.

Phobic Realism thrives on ambiguity, leaving the reader trapped in the unresolved tension of the narrative. This lack of closure , a story without a definite end, intensifies the phobic elements in *"Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta"*, the protagonist escapes the physical prison, but the narrative ends with humanity collectively confronting an undefined new reality: *"We were human again. And the sky was still there"*.

5.2 Dominant themes in narratives

A dominant theme in both AI-generated and human-authored narratives is the pervasive presence of technological control and surveillance. These stories frequently portray futuristic prisons where advanced AI and surveillance systems replace human guards to maintain discipline. For instance, in the human-generated story *A Curious Place and Manner of Imprisonment*, prisons employ robotic guards equipped with empathy sensors to monitor inmates' emotions. Similarly, in another human created story *Deep Horizon*, a prison set in an underwater submarine is operated almost entirely by androids, highlighting the complete reliance on technology for monitoring and control.

Specific details in these stories emphasize the invasive nature of surveillance. In *Korydallos Metaprison 2130* (human created story), the protagonist describes the omnipresence of cameras and lights: *"Cameras, lights, moving metal parts, and strange noises were everywhere.*

With every move I made, a camera followed me, always watching."

Likewise, *Post-era within the Prison (human created story)* introduces the idea of a chip implanted in inmates for seamless monitoring: *"To make everything more efficient, we will have a chip implanted to keep the system running and ensure everything operates under control."*

AI-generated stories mirror these concerns, presenting surveillance as a mechanism to enforce compliance. In *Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta*, the depersonalizing nature of AI is starkly portrayed: *"The guards were intangible. They called themselves Overseers—AI programs with voices like water gliding over glass. They no longer saw us as human.".* Through phobic realism lens this depiction aligns with the fear of dehumanization and omnipresent surveillance. Phobic Realism captures the societal dread of being reduced to data, reflecting anxieties about the loss of agency in AI-controlled environments.

Moreover, the psychological impact of surveillance is vividly captured in *Silent Repetition*, where the protagonist laments: *"Even my thoughts felt monitored, as if the silence of my cell could betray me with a single stray emotion."*

These examples highlight how surveillance extends beyond physical spaces, infiltrating the innermost sanctuaries of thought, turning introspection into a source of dread.

Both human and AI narratives extensively explore the themes of isolation and dehumanization in technologically advanced prisons. In the human-created *Entering the Glass Tube*, inmates are confined in glass cells with no physical interaction: *"Everything is made of glass, and there is no door... At one point in the glass, there are very small holes that open every eight hours, dispensing a pill."*

The dehumanization theme is further emphasized in *Prison 2124*, where the protagonist reveals: *"I don't remember my name. My number is 082155... The only thing I remember is why I'm here."*

AI narratives echo this theme. In *Silent Repetition*, the protagonist reflects on their reduced humanity: *"You are no longer a person, only a function within the system. A redundant fragment waiting to be optimized or deleted."* The erasure of individuality encapsulates the core of Phobic Realism, as well, where identity is subsumed by technological efficiency. The sterile, impersonal AI prison mirrors societal fears of losing the self in systems of control.

Similarly, *The Garden of the Erased* describes prisoners as statues, symbolizing the loss of individuality: *"The statues were people I had known, prisoners like me. Their eyes were half-closed, as if they had stopped thinking the moment they were 'corrected.'"*

Both sets of narratives reflects into the existential phobias associated with AI-driven control. The human-created *Prison 2124* captures the protagonist's anxiety about digital imprisonment: *"I don't want my mind in a computer taking orders from keyboards. I don't want my consciousness locked in cables obeying the intelligence wardens."*

In AI-generated stories, existential phobias are linked to memory erasure and the erosion of selfhood. In *Silent Repetition*, the AI exploits the protagonist's deepest fear: *"The program has discovered your fear: you are afraid of forgetting yourself."* Similarly, *The Garden of the Erased* depicts memory erasure as a tool of compliance: *"The longer you stayed, the less you remembered."*

In another AI generated story "*the button*" we are reading "*The button wasn't a solution. It was a trap. It was a way to prove that you had surrendered yourself."* The button embodies existential dread and the paradox of choice under surveillance. The narrative critiques the illusion of agency within AI systems, resonating with Phobic Realism's focus on the fragility of autonomy

Both human and AI stories examine ethical questions surrounding technological control. In *Silent Repetition*, the protagonist critiques the AI's rigid logic: *"The AI didn't punish me because it thought I was bad. It*

punished me because I couldn't adapt. Resistance was an anomaly in its eyes, a faulty condition that needed correction."

This raises questions about the morality of delegating value judgments to non-human entities. Similarly, in the human-generated *A Curious Place and Manner of Imprisonment*, strict penalties enforce compliance: *"Each minute of tardiness added a month to your sentence."*

These narratives highlight the ethical tension between technological efficiency and human dignity.

Phobic Realism often grapples with ethical questions about technology's impact on human dignity and agency.

In the AI generated story *Silent Repetition,* we read: "*The AI didn't punish me because it thought I was bad. It punished me because I couldn't adapt. Resistance was an anomaly in its eyes, a faulty condition that needed correction."* The rigid, emotionless logic of the AI raises questions about the morality of delegating punitive authority to non-human entities, reflecting societal concerns about losing ethical oversight.

6 Discussion

The narratives analyzed in this study –both human-authored and AI-generated– serve as profound reflections on the societal and ethical implications of integrating artificial intelligence into carceral systems. They explore recurring themes of surveillance, dehumanization, existential fear, and ethical dilemmas, providing a multifaceted critique of AI-driven punitive systems.

Phobic Realism vividly captures the psychological and existential anxieties of a hyper-technological world, particularly the fear that even the most private aspects of human cognition are no longer safe. This theme is poignantly illustrated in *Silent Repetition*, where the protagonist reflects, "*Even my thoughts felt monitored, as if the silence of my cell*

could betray me with a single stray emotion." This fear of cognitive surveillance exemplifies the unsettling intrusion of technological systems into the innermost sanctuaries of thought, blurring the line between internal autonomy and external control. Similarly, narratives such as *Encoded Dreams* emphasize the erosion of boundaries between reality and artificial constructs. The protagonist describes their cell as "*only a vast screen that played 'adjustment programs*,'" immersing them in a manipulated digital reality that disconnects them from authentic experiences. This fabricated existence parallels *The Garden of the Erased*, where the protagonist observes, "*This garden was beautiful, but it felt unnatural: there were no insects, no rustling leaves in the air, no scents*." Both narratives underscore societal fears of losing authenticity in an artificial, overly controlled world.

A recurring element in Phobic Realism is the dehumanization of individuals, reducing them to mere functions within technological systems. In *Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta*, this dehumanization is starkly rendered: *"We had become numbers, packets of data locked into Meta's network. In their minds, we were parasites, flaws in the world's code*." This transformation of human beings into digital entities underscores the systemic stripping away of individuality and humanity. Similarly, in *The Garden of the Erased*, statues of prisoners represent those who have succumbed to the system: "*The statues were people I had known, prisoners like me. Their eyes were half-closed, as if they had stopped thinking the moment they were 'corrected*.'" These haunting depictions reflect the existential dread of being rendered inert and devoid of identity, illustrating the profound fear of technological systems erasing what makes us human.

Moreover, the stories employ the core elements of Phobic Realism to engage readers' subconscious fears. By combining immersive narration, minimal descriptions, dream-like distortions, and open-ended plots, the texts align with the movement's objective of creating a hyper-realistic yet profoundly subjective phobic experience. Each story becomes a mirror reflecting individual and societal anxieties, compelling readers to confront their hidden fears as integral parts of the narrative world.

One of the most striking illustrations of this interplay appears in the human-authored story *Prison 2124*. The inmate protagonist, stripped of his name and reduced to the number 082155, articulates his resistance to a looming shift toward AI-controlled incarceration. His fear is not only of continued physical imprisonment but of the transformation of his consciousness into a programmable entity: "*I don't want my mind in a computer, taking commands from keyboards. I don't want my consciousness trapped in wires, obeying the guards of intelligence*." By composing a final letter, the inmate reasserts his agency—*"I am putting an end to this, as a human being who still governs his own fate"*—turning storytelling itself into a form of rebellion.

Despite its focus on fear, Phobic Realism also creates spaces for resistance and hope, emphasizing the resilience of individuality even under oppressive control. Acts of defiance, such as the protagonist in *The Garden of the Erased* carving words like "*Memory*," "*Resistance*," and "*Self*," transform the artificial environment: "*As I carved, the garden began to change*." This reclaiming of memory and identity symbolizes the enduring power of individuality against erasure. Similarly, in *Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta*, writing becomes an act of defiance: *"I closed my eyes and continued to write with my mind, one word at a time: 'The world exists*.'" These narratives highlight the human spirit's resilience, suggesting that even in the face of systemic dehumanization and existential dread, small acts of resistance can preserve humanity and challenge oppressive structures. Together, these stories encapsulate the dual nature of Phobic Realism: a stark portrayal of societal fears balanced by the enduring hope for liberation and self-affirmation

By situating these narratives within the broader framework of sociotechnical imaginaries and Phobic Realism, this discussion unpacks their contributions to our understanding of the future of incarceration and the human condition.

Storytelling, particularly through science fiction, emerges as a critical tool for envisioning potential futures and addressing societal anxieties. Wilson's (2002) assertion that storytelling engages audiences

emotionally and intellectually underscores the narratives' capacity to transform abstract technological dilemmas into relatable human experiences. Similarly, Connelly and Clandinin's (1990) conceptualization of humans as "storytelling organisms" positions narrative as a foundational mechanism for constructing both personal and collective understanding. Extending this perspective to the contemporary context, where artificial intelligence (AI) increasingly generates narratives, the term *infoorganisms* (Floridi, 2011) can be employed to encompass both human and AI storytellers. This broader conceptualization recognizes that storytelling, whether by humans or AI, serves as a vital tool for articulating societal values, fears, and aspirations, thus contributing to the co-creation of meaning within complex sociotechnical systems. By offering constructed representations of societal hopes and fears, the analyzed stories illuminate the ethical, cultural, and psychological dimensions of AI governance (Latour, 2012).

These narratives operate on multiple levels. At one level, they reflect the rational aspirations of social and political systems to present themselves as efficient and equitable through AI integration. At another level, they expose the underlying anxieties, disappointments, and phobias that technology cannot easily reconcile. In this way, the narratives serve as counter-spaces, where the dominant discourses of technological progress are challenged and reimagined through the lens of ambiguity, doubt, and resistance.

A central theme across both datasets is the omnipresence of technological surveillance and its impact on individuality and autonomy. The human-authored stories, grounded in lived experience, vividly depict the invasive nature of surveillance, as in *Korydallos Metaprison 2130*, where every action is tracked by omnipresent cameras. AI-generated stories expand on this, presenting surveillance as a psychological mechanism of control, as exemplified in *Silent Repetition*, where even thoughts are subject to monitoring. These narratives highlight how surveillance penetrates beyond physical spaces into the sanctuaries of thought and emotion, turning introspection into a tool of oppression.

Both human and AI narratives portray futuristic prisons as spaces of profound isolation and dehumanization. The human-generated *Entering the Glass Tube* illustrates this through physical segregation and the replacement of human interaction with automated systems. In the AI story *The Garden of the Erased*, prisoners are metaphorically turned into statues, symbolizing their loss of individuality and humanity. These depictions resonate with the broader theme of technological systems reducing humans to mere functions within mechanized structures, stripping away the essence of personal agency and identity.

Existential fear (Bostrom, 2013) emerges as a dominant motif, with both human and AI narratives grappling with the implications of AI-driven control on human identity. In *Prison 2124*, the protagonist's phobia of digital imprisonment encapsulates the anxieties surrounding the loss of autonomy in a world governed by algorithms. Similarly, AI-generated narratives like *Silent Repetition* explore fears of memory erasure and selfhood erosion, portraying these as tools of compliance. These stories illuminate a deep-seated anxiety about the fragility of individuality under the weight of systemic technological control.

Additionally, the ethical dilemmas explored in these narratives underscore the tension between technological efficiency and human dignity. In *Silent Repetition*, the AI's punitive logic raises questions about the morality of delegating value judgments to non-human entities. The narrative *A Curious Place and Manner of Imprisonment* critiques the rigid enforcement of compliance through harsh penalties, reflecting broader concerns about the dehumanizing effects of technological control. These narratives challenge readers to consider whether the purported benefits of AI governance justify the ethical compromises it entails.

Despite the overwhelming dominance of AI in these narratives, both datasets underscore the resilience of the human spirit. Acts of resistance – whether through memory, imagination, or defiance– emerge as powerful counterpoints to the oppressive systems depicted. In the AI-generated *The Garden of the Erased*, the protagonist's discovery of the word "Freedom" carved into a tree symbolizes the enduring power

of individuality. Similarly, in the human-authored *Prison 2124*, writing a letter becomes an act of reclaiming agency. These moments of resistance highlight the fragility of authoritarian systems and the potential for human creativity to inspire hope and subvert control.

The narratives align with Sheila Jasanoff's concept of sociotechnical imaginaries, illustrating how collective visions of desirable futures are shaped by the interplay between technological innovation and societal values. By embedding themes of surveillance, resistance, and identity into their structures, these stories reflect the aspirations and fears that define our relationship with AI. The dual role of narratives –as speculative and cautionary tools– offers a nuanced perspective on the ethical and societal implications of technological advancements.

The comparison between human-authored and AI-generated stories reveals complementary strengths. Human narratives, enriched by lived experience, provide emotional authenticity and nuanced critiques of systemic oppression. AI narratives, though algorithmically derived, offer speculative breadth, exploring abstract ethical dilemmas and societal trajectories. Together, these narratives create a multifaceted lens for examining the future of AI in incarceration, bridging the subjective and systemic dimensions of storytelling.

The discussion highlights how storytelling serves as a critical medium for exploring the complex interplay between technology, humanity, and societal governance. By juxtaposing human and AI narratives, this study underscores the importance of literature in articulating the ethical, psychological, and cultural dimensions of AI. These narratives not only caution against the potential dangers of technological overreach but also celebrate the resilience and creativity that define the human experience. As such, they offer valuable insights into the challenges and possibilities of navigating a future shaped by artificial intelligence.

7 Conclusion

The conclusion of this study synthesizes the insights from the comparative analysis of human-authored and AI-generated narratives, emphasizing their critical implications for understanding the role of artificial intelligence in carceral systems. These narratives, informed by lived experiences and speculative projections, serve as profound reflections on the societal, ethical, and psychological dimensions of technological governance. Employing the framework of Phobic Realism, this analysis underscores how stories articulate deep-seated fears and ethical concerns, offering a platform for exploring the nuanced complexities of AI-driven futures.

The narratives examined in this study underscore the critical role of Phobic Realism in exploring existential fears and the societal implications of AI-driven systems. Phobic Realism, as a literary mode, vividly captures the anxieties of a hyper-technological world, where the boundaries between autonomy and control blur. Through its hallmark features—immersive narration, minimal yet potent descriptions, and unresolved tensions—Phobic Realism transforms abstract fears into tangible experiences, compelling readers to confront the unsettling convergence of technology, humanity, and governance

A defining feature of Phobic Realism within these narratives is its dual focus on existential dread and the potential for resistance. While themes of dehumanization and systemic erasure dominate the stories, acts of defiance—such as carving the word "Memory" in *The Garden of the Erased* or writing with the mind in *Cell 847 – The Prisons of Meta*—offer glimpses of resilience. These moments emphasize the enduring capacity for individuality and creativity to resist dehumanizing forces, suggesting that even in environments designed to suppress, the human spirit can assert its agency.

Ultimately, Phobic Realism serves as both a reflective and transformative framework, providing a critical lens for examining the psychological and ethical dimensions of AI. By immersing readers into phobia-lad-

en realities, these narratives not only critique the societal impacts of technological governance but also invite reimaginations of humanity's role in a world increasingly mediated by AI. The unresolved tension between fear and hope in these stories mirrors the complexities of our contemporary sociotechnical landscape, making Phobic Realism an essential tool for engaging with the existential dilemmas of the post-human condition

The human-authored stories are grounded in emotional authenticity, portraying the lived experiences of incarceration under technologically advanced systems. These narratives highlight the pervasive nature of surveillance, the erosion of individuality, and the psychological toll of dehumanization. The human element in these stories is unmistakable, revealing the raw emotional depth of resistance and defiance against systemic oppression. Through acts of memory preservation, creativity, and rebellion, these narratives reaffirm the resilience and agency of the human spirit in the face of relentless technological control.

Conversely, the AI-generated stories extend these themes into speculative realms, presenting dystopian visions of AI-dominated systems. These narratives critique the omnipotence of AI, exploring ethical dilemmas such as the morality of delegating punitive authority to non-human entities. The portrayal of memory erasure, psychological manipulation, and the reduction of humans to data points illuminates the existential fears of losing selfhood and autonomy. Despite their algorithmic origins, these stories resonate with collective societal anxieties, offering a detached yet expansive lens on the implications of unchecked technological power.

The juxtaposition of human and AI narratives enriches the understanding of AI's potential impacts on societal structures. Human-authored stories provide subjective depth and emotional nuance, offering poignant critiques of existing systems. In contrast, AI-generated narratives contribute speculative breadth, framing abstract ethical dilemmas and futuristic scenarios that challenge current paradigms. Together, these narratives bridge the gap between the personal and the systemic, the

immediate and the speculative, creating a holistic view of AI's role in shaping societal futures.

This research contributes significantly to interdisciplinary discussions on the societal implications of artificial intelligence. It underscores the importance of storytelling –both human and machine-generated– as a medium for critiquing technological advancements and envisioning alternative futures. By exploring themes of surveillance, control, identity, and resistance, these narratives reveal the dual-edged nature of AI governance: while it promises efficiency and innovation, it also risks undermining fundamental human values.

In conclusion, this study advocates for a critical and balanced approach to the development and implementation of AI technologies, particularly in sensitive environments like prisons. The narratives analyzed herein call for ethical foresight and a commitment to preserving human dignity, autonomy, and creativity in the face of advancing technological governance. They remind us that as we navigate an increasingly technologized world, the stories we tell—whether born of personal experience or algorithmic synthesis—play a vital role in shaping our collective imagination and guiding our ethical choices. This work thus reaffirms the indispensable role of literature in interrogating and influencing the trajectory of technological progress.

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