Why Does Film and Television Sci-Fi Tend To Portray Machines As Being human?

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The way we communicate about machines informs how we interact with them. The mind-machine metaphor predominates in screen fiction, in part, because it is compatible with audience identification. However, stories using technological protagonists and antagonists displace other visions of AI. For example, the mundane but immediate dilemmas that AI presents, like surveillance and unemployment, are overlooked. Effective public discussion and debate require a greater diversity of ways of representing and imagining AI in popular culture. The affordances of film and television also encourage a type of species solipsism. Even if machines could become conscious, why should we assume that they would, essentially, be human.

Why is TARS Different?

If TARS were a person it would be a slave. It exists to work. TARS is not seen to be ‘a person’. Its personality is a user-configured simulation.

Most importantly, there is no pressure of identification on TARS as a central character. Thus there is more scope in the representation of technology.