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Queer STS Forum #3: "Queering Diversity" – In Search of the Queer and the Class in Academia and Research

In the third edition of our Queer-Feminist Science and Technology Studies Forum, we aimed at 'queering diversity' and searched for the queer and the class in academia and research. Our idea behind this issue was to take a closer look at the – supposed – gap between diversity policies and actual practices.

Within the Bologna Process "making our [European higher education] systems more inclusive" is one of the latest main goals, as it was formulated by the ministers of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in the Yerevan Communiqué of 2015. Despite efforts to create universities as more open by diversifying students and faculty, academia is still a place of "homosocial reproduction" (Kanter 1977; Möller 2014), not only in Europe. The commercial space of technology and engineering also promises remarkable social mobility opportunities for "diverse" individuals (i.e. working class, rural, ethnically diverse, queer, etc.), yet these are not kept when examining actual workforce composition. Vivianne Castello put this reality bluntly in her article "Why Most Conversations in Tech About Diversity Are Bullshit—and What to Do About It"(2017).

Intersectionality theory became a great tool to theoretically dissect mono-dimensional shortcomings of diversity efforts, yet Bilge (2013) analyses how a specific form of academic feminism in tune with the neoliberal knowledge economy works to "depoliticize intersectionality," neutralizing the critical potential of intersectionality and stripping it from its important power-reflexive analytical potential. Same applies to "diversity studies" which is being translated into managerial voice and then becomes a means to increase profit by and to work more effectively on multinational and multicultural projects, rather than to critically reflect biases and work environments. Class is often completely left out of these conversations. For academia, Warnock (2016) describes stereotypes and micro-aggressions working class academics encounter and how their struggling to pass in a middle-class culture leads more and more to increased precarious job situations.

Thus, in this issue of Queer STS Forum we want to highlight various practices and unmask potentially shallow applications of diversity in academia, research, art, and innovation and detach the concept itself from the 'wellness-marketing-corner' of tech corporations by bringing the question of power into focus: Where specifically is class and queerness in queer and intersectional Science and Technology Studies?

We were looking for work that centres power issues and dares to speak about working class identities and advanced discrimination (Dressel et al. 1994) lying within production systems of knowledge. The four contributions of our third issue of the Queer STS Forum are very diverse in their topics and formats. As we are an online open access journal, we wanted to encourage various forms of contributions besides the classic academic paper, and we are happy that in this issue we feature two interviews with image material and hyperlinks to mark our own transition. The Forum is developing, and we are learning with each contribution we receive.

The first paper was written by Claudia Chiang-Lopez from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, who critically discusses the various hegemonic interpretations of students leaving/being pushed out of secondary and tertiary education. By arguing that opting-out of school can also be seen as students' resistance to a harmful system she points at the need to queer our conversation around students who leave school.

The second contribution is an interview which Daniela Zanini-Freitag, member of our Queer STS working group, held with Jay Pongruengphant, the current UNDP national officer on Governance, Human Rights and LGBTI of the Being LGBTI in Asia programme. The interview catches a glimpse of the living situation and experiences of members of the LGBTI community in Thailand, which is widely perceived as tolerant, quite progressive and open towards LGBTI persons. Daniela tried to unfold living realities of LGBTI people in Thailand and came up with very interesting up-to-date information as well as insights on coming-out in privacy and obstacles still present on the workplace level.

The third paper about sexbots by Tessa Leach is also a teaser for next year's fourth issue of our Queer STS Forum which will be discussing "Queer-feminist perspectives on sex robots" (see: http://queersts.com). Tessa Leach critically examines the sexbot inherent conflict of neoliberal commodification of women's bodies and the fear of objectification and violence of some feminist discourses. The author states that: „Sex robots are not born a part of human politics, but are motivated non-neutrally by the influence of humans and nonhumans. Who or what will be the agents that control sex robots? … We are, this very moment, missing the opportunity to embrace and guide sexbot-induced social change."

The fourth and final contribution is a conversational interview between Daniela Jauk, co-editor and member of our Queer STS working group and Reni Hofmüller who is a multidimensional queer-feminist artist, art organizer, media maker, DIY tech activist, educator, and so much more. Reni discusses diversity in feminist art, highlighting the queer and the class in art (production) and posing the power question.

We hope you will enjoy this issue and give heartfelt thanks to Susanne Kink-Hampersberger, Thomas Menzel-Berger, and Jenny Schlager who took time to review the articles in addition to us. Happy Holidays!

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Claudia Chiang-Lopez, University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Finding the Words: A Counterstory

Abstract

The hegemonic view on students who leave high school is that they are lazy, criminals or simply unmotivated. In this paper, I explore not only the different forces at work that push students out, but also highlight the strength students show. I do this by citing relevant research, while also discussing my own story, from having dropped out in the 9th grade to struggling in my graduate program now. In my case, I was pushed out by the humiliation I experienced from having an (undiagnosed) learning disability, but equally, I chose to leave, because it was my way of resisting that humiliation. Opting-Out of school can be a way for students to exert power over their lives and resist what is unfair in the school system. Rather than seeing students as lacking something, these students are using the tools they have access to, and forge a new path for themselves. Educators would do well to respect and honor who their students are, what their needs are, and their forms of resistance.

Our deficiency-focused narrative about students who leave school, often assigns blame to students, calling them lazy, disorganized, or "bad." In this paper, I discuss my story as a student who was pushed out of school starting in the 8th grade. My story, like that of many students who are pushed out, involves undiagnosed learning disabilities, and resistant cultural capital. I discuss the literature on how students are pushed out, and what policies might help retain students. But most importantly, I seek to queer our conversation around students who leave school. I argue that student's resistance to a harmful system may show as opting-out of school. Creating spaces for these students to discuss their experiences outside the hegemonic narrative is vital (Flores, 1996). My writing is a part of creating this discursive space for pushed-out students who exerted their agency and resilience.

Drop-Out or Push-Out

In the U.S., the rate of high school "dropouts" in 2014 was the lowest it's ever been - with 12% of Latinx folks dropping out (Krogstad, 2016). This is a dramatic difference from the 54% rates reported in the early 2000s (Greene, 2001). However, this is still a high rate compared to African Americans (7%) and white Americans (5%) (Krogstad, 2016), and it does not consider how many students never enter the school system (Aviles, Guerrero, Barajas Howarth & Thomas, 1999). Many researchers looking at this issue operate from the hegemonic assumption that students bring in problems and drop out

because of these problems (Aviles et al., 1999). Students often have to deal with the assumption that they will drop out because of pregnancy, fighting, drugs and more (Aviles et al., 1999). Drop-outs, indeed, are the punchline of many a classist joke, for example: "You remember, you fail math, you flunk out of school, you end up being the guy at the pizza place that sweeps the floor and says, 'Hey, kids, where's the cool parties this weekend?'" says Willow on Buffy the Vampire Slayer (Green, 1997). But in contrast to this simplified image of drop-outs, tor many students, leaving school is a complex issue.

I refer to these students as being pushed-out, rather than dropping out, as pushed out students find themselves in adverse situations within their school environment (Doll, Eslami & Walters, 2013). This can include inept instruction, lack of transportation, a racist curriculum, and more (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2016). Some researchers argue that students can also be pulled out by things outside of the school - pregnancy, illnesses and the need for employment - or fall out by lack of progress (Doll, Eslami & Walters, 2013). However I believe schools should have ways to support students in staying despite those factors that may be pulling them out. Attendance policies that make space for ill students, earlier disability testing and interventions, flexible school schedules and formats, personal support, and discipline policies that are more social justice oriented are just some of these ideas. I, in particular, would have benefitted from these support measures.

In the 8th grade, my mother and I abruptly moved from Panama to the United States. My parents had decided to separate - and though the relationship had been crumbling for years, it finally broke then. It was a shock to leave my father, my older sister (only 18 months older than me), my country, and my language. We moved back to Las Vegas, where we had lived for a few years when I was younger. That first semester back in school, I wanted to prove to myself that I could do this. I wanted to make my mother proud. I could do this. I got straight As, auditioned for Las Vegas Academy's Creative Writing program, and got in! Everything seemed great.

But then in my second semester, I had a meeting with one of my teachers. It was the only meeting I had that year, and in it, my math teacher asked me why I kept making careless mistakes and had earned a C average. I remember leaving upset - angry and sad - I had been trying! I had no language for what I was experiencing, no one to blame it on, and so I turned it all against myself, blaming myself for being "careless." I felt helpless, and anxious about that math class, and so, I started chronically missing school, left my extracurriculars, and stopped seeing friends. The daily 15 minute walk to the bus stop seemed eternal, while I ruminated on the day ahead, and often I would only make it half-way before returning home. I was bone-weary tired and could not talk to anyone about it. This feeling of alienation is not specific to me. In Marin's (1995) study of Puerto

Rican students who had left school, most students reported feeling alienated from school. But my absences earned me a reputation for "just not trying."

Then came the 9th grade. That first semester I had As in everything except math. I was, once again, called in for my only meeting, this time with someone from the Dean's office. He asked, plainly, why I was being lazy about math. He then let me know I would have to repeat that grade or at least that class - I was shocked, as many students in my situation are (Aviles et al., 1999). I felt defeated, anxious and helpless. I wasn't going to pass math, so what did the future looked like for me? After that I, once again, started missing classes, to the point that I knew I would be kicked out of the magnet program. I blamed myself - clearly I could do better - everyone kept saying that. How could I blame school for this? It must have been me. But why did I keep doing this? I had no answer.

Other students who leave school find that unclear absenteeism policies, being overwhelmed by make-up work on top of their regular school work, and/or having to make up semesters, caused them, too, to leave school, as graduation seemed impossible (Aviles et al., 1999). Why do these students miss class? Some report it's for work, while others mention disinterest (Aviles, 1999). I couldn't tell you what it was for me, other than it was the only way for me to express my anger. Indeed, missing school out of frustration is one way students take back their power (Gosine & James, 2010). Students dealing with this, themselves often don't know how to stay in school or to affect the school system (Aviles et al., 1999). Many, like me, are humiliated by staff who hold negative views about the students (Aviles et al., 1999). And, so, I "dropped out" of school. I saw no future for myself, and those years were lost to darkness (quite literal: I rarely left my house or was awake during the day). I could not envision a future where I was happy, or employed. This laziness that I could not control would just take that away from me.

Higher Education

At 19, I got my General Educational Development Test (GED), an alternative to a high school diploma. I still felt like I was simply floating around aimlessly, but I had learned at least a GED was needed for most jobs. I enrolled in college the next year, terrified that after five years without school, I wouldn't know what to do. I don't know who chose my schedule, but I am forever grateful, as I took Sociology 101, Psychology 101 and Anthropology 101. Suddenly I learned that people made a career out of being deeply interested in understanding groups of people. During those "lost years" I had a tendency to spend a year or so learning all I could about different groups of people. I still have a 120 page document I put together about the Quiverfull movement. I saw a path for myself (I didn't yet know how difficult the path to being an academic is but I'm glad I didn't! I was able to spend 4 years thinking all I needed were As). I was thriving - I felt empowered and proud of myself and what I could do. Unlike my previous - and many other student's - experience of only focusing on where I was struggling, I had a chance to focus on what I excelled at (Baum, 1989). This was what kept me going, even as my struggles with math

continued. I failed Math 95, 96, 98 and 120 the first time I took each. Then I had to take them as my only class for the semester, in order to spend up to 4 hours every day working on the class. I accepted that it was simply what I had to do to counter my "lack of motivation."

It wasn't until 2015 that I had a professor who seemed to notice something was wrong, according to our hegemonic views of how students should perform. We had an in-class short answer exam, and he took note of the fact that I paused every few minutes to rub my hands, as I was in pain. He also noticed I spent about 30 minutes going back over my paper and re-writing words as carefully as I could - and even then, sometimes it would still not be clear, as I seem to have little control over my hands. He asked me, first, about my handwriting, - had it always been this bad and painful? "Yes" - and then asked me if I struggled with anything else in school. I was ashamed to tell the truth, - I was a gifted student as a child! - but the question itself was so unexpected that I answered truthfully. He nodded, and said "Have you heard of dysgraphia? And dyscalculia?" He then mentioned how, as a principal at a public school in NYC, he had seen many kids who seemed to struggle with these things because of a learning disability.

I have never been able to get diagnosed - I still don't feel financially secure enough to spend $200 or more on getting a diagnosis. While students in K-12 might be diagnosed through their school, college students have the burden shifted on to them (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Even for students in the K-12 system, however, Eckes and Ochoa (2005) argue that there are a lot of students who "fall through the cracks" (p. 17). This can, in part, be caused by regulations that will only diagnose a child with a learning disability if they are below grade level, so that a student struggling tremendously to stay on their grade level can "slip through" (Baum, 1989). I felt that my failing at math meant I was inadequate as a student, and this feeling is is one shared by other students, even those who are twice-exceptional, meaning they are both gifted and disabled (Besnoy, Swoszowski, Newman, Floyd, Jones & Byrne, 2015). This makes postsecondary education a lot harder for them. These students not only lack an explanation for their experiences, but they also lack strategies to help them cope (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005).

I am not claiming I do have dysgraphia or dyscalculia. I have instead, over the years, come up with alternative reasons for why I struggle. Perhaps I just have never cared enough about school. Maybe I just don't know how to study. Maybe it's the trauma I have experienced because of school. Even students who are eventually diagnosed have accumulated emotional trauma, shame and a number of negative experiences related to school (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Some come to feel hopeless and frustrated, leading to incomplete assignments, failed or dropped courses, and even leaving programs (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Indeed, I dropped my sociology major after failing our required statistics course, even though it was the only class I was missing for my degree. I felt like I had gotten myself "in trouble" and this feeling is also one shared among many

students with undiagnosed learning disabilities (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). Students in these situations need better support systems, and when they don't have them, they might take things into their own hands.

Resistance

And so now. 3 years after that conversation with my professor, 1 year after dropping my sociology major, and 14 years after "dropping out" of high school. I'm getting my masters in Communication and though I am excited about teaching and about the research I want to do, I'm struggling to find energy for certain tasks. Sitting in my rhetoric class is particularly exhausting - I'm the only woman of color, the only queer person, am a non-rhetoric person, and am the only activist. It's exhausting to see your thoughts are less valued because you don't put them in perfectly academic words. It's infuriating to hear the people again complain about how much they hate Trump, and know that's the extent of their work to change the system. It's exhausting and infuriating to see even the "radicals" still enforce teaching policies I find harmful and oppressive, and find that they won't fight the system, since they benefit from it. This often leaves me feeling gaslighted and just not wanting to show up. My first semester I didn't miss a single day of class - the next I kept wanting to miss class. When I first noticed this desire, I was terrified of myself. Was this just a slip back into laziness?

Gosine and James (2010) discuss the resilience and resistance many marginalized students exhibit. When their strengths, stories, needs and cultural capital is ignored in schools, students feel disrespected, unrecognized and powerless (Gosine & James, 2010). And so they find different ways to resist and make themselves heard (Gosine & James, 2010). Some folks are aware of what is pushing them out. Aviles et al. (1999) conducted focus groups with Latinx/Xicanx folks who had left high school, and discussed some of these issues with them. Most of the participants felt that they were "facilitated" out, as teachers had low expectations of them, and staff left them without options, bluntly telling students they wouldn't graduate (Aviles et al., 1999). One of these ways is "opting out," where students drop out, are absent, late, challenge their teachers, or focus on extracurriculars (Gosine & James, 2010). I had a visceral reaction reading this. I saw how I had performed some of these behaviors: 1) I wanted to miss class out of frustration, 2) last semester I wrote a paper I called my "protest paper" - I knew I would have to re-do, but I was angered at my professor saying student's trauma had no place in the classroom - so I wrote a paper focusing entirely on making space for student's trauma, 3) I only look forward to my extracurriculars, to my education class, and to teaching - and so that's where my energy goes).

I became even more uncomfortable as I realized that 14 year old Claudia had also availed herself of that strategy, communicating her anger by missing class, being late and dropping out. This brings up complicated feelings. Rather than just feeling ashamed of myself or angry at myself, I have to confront my anger at a system that failed me. I

should have had more meetings, I should have been spoken to respectfully, and my options should have been clearer. I should have been tested for a learning disability. Perhaps, then, I wouldn't have felt the helplessness and frustration that drove me to missing class. I also am grappling with a strange new sense of pride and love for young Claudia. How amazing that I found a way to express myself and resist. This was my resistant cultural capital (Yosso, 2005 as cited by Gosine & James, 2010). And, so, this semester was the first time I confronted this shame over dropping out. What if it is a learning disability that made it so difficult? What if it wasn't, but it was 13 and 14 year old Claudia asserting her power as best she could? I was struggling, and I did feel helpless. This matters.

Educator's Role

And, so, what do we do for students who might be dealing with similar issues? In terms of undiagnosed disabilities, Eckes and Ochoa (2005) emphasize that students without a diagnosis may struggle the most to cope with school, particularly in higher education. They will not have benefited from a transition plan from high school, and may have never self-advocated before (Eckes & Ochoa, 2005). I know that I felt stumped when the Disability Resource Center (DRC) told me that once I had a diagnosis, I would have to tell them what kind of accomodations I needed. I have never lived in a world where I could ask for these things - how could I know if I needed extended work time on a test, or powerpoints provided ahead of time? Baum (1989) suggests there needs to be greater collaboration between high schools and colleges; University DRC's should visit high schools and help students learn their rights and how their accessibility will change, high schools should prepare students to self-advocate and create plans. This is, of course, for the students who are "caught" while in the K-12 system.

Gosine and James (2010) suggest that for students who are frustrated with school, there may be other ways to empower them to stay. One way might be by honoring their ethnoracial identity, and to insist on their maintaining connectedness with others who share their identities (Gosine & James, 2010). Having a connection with staff may also prevent some students from being pushed out by the system (Lee & Burkam, 2003, as cited by Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). For latinx students and other racial minorities, they may also experience the verbal humiliation I did, or other forms of microaggressions, and addressing this is vital. Students of color, or students who have experienced push-out factors, could benefit from creating their own spaces where they can communicate about their struggles, the choices they have made, what they need and more (Flores, 1996). Educators also need to have more honest conversations with students about the structural forces at work in their lives and on their futures, in order to empower them to make informed choices and to raise consciousness.

Policies that address the school environment are also important, and are the factors that may be more easily modified to meet student needs. One study found that schools with

the highest rates of students who were pushed out were also schools that had more inexperienced staff, staff dressed less professionally, the buildings were in worse physical condition, there was less family involvement, and these schools overall had a negative school environment (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Lee and Burkam (2003, as cited by Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017) found that schools with more challenging courses and less students overall had higher graduation rates. Rumberger and Thomas (2000, as cited by Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017) found that schools with higher student-teacher ratios has higher dropout rates.

Schools should also move into using more positive reinforcements and support systems to prevent rule breaking, rather than detention, expulsions and suspensions (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). Schools could use guides like the Institute for Education Sciences (IED) Dropout Prevention practice Guide, which suggests schools have early warning systems that trigger interventions, for struggling students to be assigned an adult advate, for classroom teachers to provide more support and enrichment, and for more personalized learning environments (Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela, 2017). These school-wide responses must be guided by the school's and students own needs and resources.

However, it is not enough to simply fight the factors that make students choose to drop out. I think it's also important to queer our discussions of these students and their choices. We must see what these students are bringing. They bring a strong sense of what is right and wrong. They experience something that is unfair or wrong in the school system, feel pain in response, and they honor it by resisting. This is something to admire. The students don't have a deficit in motivation or skills - instead, they are students with differing needs or experiences, and a strong ability to express themselves. These students might reject the capitalistic and individualistic goals and messages of educational systems (Gosine & James, 2010). They might choose to queer their educational journey, blazing their own path, however difficult or scary this may be.

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored the driving forces behind my leaving high school. Rather than the shaming narrative I had accepted for half my life, and which our culture emphasizes, I turned to another idea. Perhaps students aren't dropping out because they lack something. Perhaps they're being pushed out by a cold and unresponsive system. Their resistance - through leaving school - is not a display of weakness, but one of strength and resistance. Other educators could use this to better understand students with chronic absences or other "disruptive" behavior. Knowing that their behavior might come from a sense of pain should bring compassion from educators, and a desire to better understand their students. Queering our narrative about these students can only help students and those who have left better understand the complex forces at work in education.

Leaving school in the 9th grade involved a lot of pain and confusion, and until now, I had been unable to make sense of my experiences outside of the shame I felt. I have been aware that there are structural barriers to Latinx student's success, yet the shame of "dropping out" was so deeply ingrained in me that it wasn't until a year ago that I started to question my own narrative. I wonder how others, who may not have the privilege to be in spaces where we discuss these issues, make sense of their experiences. Perhaps an environment where teachers and students feel comfortable sharing their past or current struggles with school could help those who are struggling. This may be a part of the school environment, or through a mentorship program. These types of programs, among with things like Ecker-Lyster & Niileksela's suggestions for (2017) early warning systems, positive reinforcements, and smaller classes that allow more personal attention for students, could help prevent students from being pushed out. More importantly, we must value student's strength and agency when dealing with environments that are unwelcoming, exhausting, or exclusionary. Allowing them to create their own discursive spaces can be a starting point for them to voice their concerns and needs.

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Daniela Zanini-Freitag

„Discrimination happens to start with the application“ – An interview about LGBTI people living and working in Thailand with Suparnee (Jay) Pongruengphant

One member of the QueerSTS working group, Daniela Zanini-Freitag (DANIELA) has had the opportunity to dive into the living situation and experiences of members of the LGBTI community in one South-East-Asian country. Thailand, a country widely perceived as tolerant, quite progressive and open towards LGBTI persons.

To unfold parts of the reality of living situations we have been talking to the current UNDP national officer on Governance, Human Rights and LGBTI of the Being LGBTI in Asia programme, Jay Pongruengphant (JAY)[1]. He revealed interesting up-to-date information on local LGBTI members, coming-out in privacy and obstacles still present on the workplace level.

DANIELA: What is your main task within this position of UNDP National Officer of Thailand for Governance, Human Rights and LGBTI?

JAY: I am the focal point for the LGBTI programme in Asia, and to work closely with government and civil society partners, including national human rights institutions to promote the rights of LGBTI people. That means work on the grass root level up to the policy level. Me as national officer with the UNDP, we as an UN agency we have the convening power to bring partners together to try to address challenges faced by LGBTI people in Thailand.

DANIELA: Still sticking with your position as national officer what are the most important issues relevant for LGBTI members in Thailand, that come to your mind first?

JAY: I would say it is the challenges they have to face in different circles of life and at different levels. Starting from their families, schools or in work place and the wider public: the Thai society. The biggest challenge they face is the attitude of Thai people. They

1 Jay holds a Master's Degree in International Management from Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, UK, and a Bachelor's Degree in International Relations from Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. Jay has been working as a national officer for the Being LGBTI in Asia programme since July 2015.

do not see LGBTI people the same to other "normal" people. They are different BUT actually we are all humans with diversity.

That's what UNDP and our partners want to achieve is to basically have LGBTI people enjoy the same rights....and not being regarded differently.

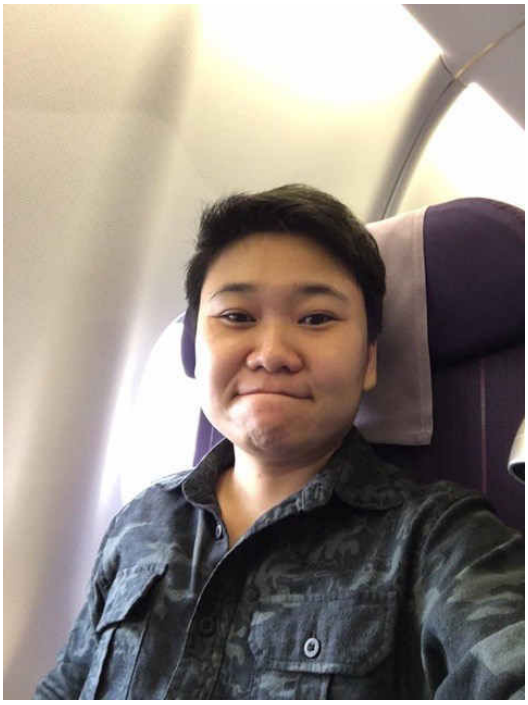

Photo: Jay Pongruengphant

DANIELA: How do LGBTI people see their position within Thai society? How do they refer to themselves within Thai society?

JAY: I think it depends on each LGBTI person, some have self-stigma and some don't. Some would regard themselves inferior or less than other people as opposed to those that do not have this self-stigma. It depends on a lot of factors: some are born in families where are they raised and told being LGBTI is wrong, sinful, not-normal – all those negative things- as opposed to those raised in a family that is more non-conventional, more open minded. Family is an important unit that provides support to LGBTI people...so well it depends.

DANIELA: How is the group of LGBTI people (and I know it is in itself quite diverse) included in public life in public awareness?

JAY: For Thailand, you could see a lot of LGBTI people would appear in the media, in social media and in the mainstream media – a lot of visibility. This also depends on how they are portrayed: The portrayal of LGBTI people is still, that they are not taken seriously. They are entertainers, presented in soft news. If they appear in movies or series, they are still "jokers". They are visible, but the image and stereotype that is reproduced is still negative.

Gay people have to be happy, be good in fashion. Lesbian or Tomboy are often represented, as if they were very jealous of their partner...that kind of things. In terms of visibility within the sub groups of LGBTI people one can see quite differences between them. For example, transgender women and gay men have more visibility. In their appearance on social media and also in social groups (whether it be work place, schools or any other setting), they tend to have more space and a stronger voice. Lesbian women or transmen seem to be at the backseat of social settings.

The trend has not changed so much. Transmen and lesbian clearly have their own groups and gatherings, but for sure there are still many more for gay men. There exist many pubs and bars for gays, but hardly any of them are for transmen and lesbians.

DANIELA: What are still concerns about public awareness and acceptance of LGBTI people in media?

JAY: This still refers to the attitudes Thai people have towards LGBTI persons. It has to do a lot with generation. Generally, the older the people, the less the acceptance. The older generation tends to have a more conservative, narrow way of thinking, often in two boxes. Those that do not fit, have to be fixed-they apply a heteronormative way of seeing society. The results of the social attitudes survey of the UNDP (expected to be published early 2019) backs this up.

DANIELA: Following the first press statement of this survey on social attitudes towards LGBTI people it seems that society is further progressed compared to when it comes to closer family? Coming out or the own sexual orientation seems to be an issue for the individual family. How do you see - from your experiences - the situation of individuals in their closer family when they openly announce for the first time their sexual orientation or gender identity?

JAY: If the LGBTI person is not from the inner family circle – like someone at work or at school – it is fine, but as soon as it turns out to be your brother that is gay, it's like "Oh my gosh…than it is not ok." Or think about your spouse is LGBTI. It is also part of the humans, being affected one way or the other.

To answer the question on family settings when you go further outside (of Bangkok) to the rural areas, there is even more stigma for this group of people. This is also what I hear in my work with civil society organizations in for e.g. the upper Northeastern (ISAAN) part of Thailand. In that area LGBTI people are seen to bring bad omen, natural disasters or droughts. "The (rice) crops do not grow because of them." Speaking of coming out in that kind of context is actually very dangerous for them. In their family or community speaking out they are LGBTI – they face this kind of violence, stigma and discrimination around them.

That also reflects the trend that many LGBTI people are more open and some might migrate from rural areas to the cities, because they can be themselves. Just because they are away from family, they are among people that do not know them. At the same time in a city such as Bangkok you can live your life amongst people who became your friends. And when LGBTI people go home to see their family, they might have to hide that side of them and show that they are a good daughter or son.

In the southern part of Thailand, we have a stronger Muslim population and they are even stricter with LGBTI people. For most of them, it is very sinful to be a LGBTI person. Under these circumstances, they often cannot come out to anyone.

Photo: UNDP

DANIELA: What are strategies of individuals to deal with acceptance in private life and family?

JAY: Again, we cannot generalize but there is a general slow trend, we are progressing in a positive way and we become bit by bit more tolerant towards diversity. Still tolerance and not acceptance, but we are progressing towards more tolerance. One day we will reach full acceptance, we will get there.

Western countries started before us; the movements, advocating for social inclusion, women and LGBT rights. It seems they are further than us, but we are following that same direction of acceptance.

DANIELA: When you think now on the policy level. Thailand as a nation wants to move forward to fully recognize people of all gender identities – either male or female person or of a different appearance from his/her own sex by birth. "The Gender Equality Act"[2] has been introduced already three years ago and

2 Gender Equality Act, 8th March 2015 enacted and commanded by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej with the advice and consent of the National Legislative Assembly. This act shall be called the

was implemented on a practical and policy level to promote gender equality and sanction unfair gender discrimination. What has been the progress made so far?

JAY: The progress that has been made, ever since it has passed...according to my knowledge, a little over 20 accepted cases have been reported. As you know, the law has a mechanism where individuals, who were discriminated based on their gender can submit their complaints to a committee. If the committee decides that the claim is valid, then there will be remedies for the victim. One kind of remedy is to use the fund to pay some kind of compensation, or give an order to the institution that did the discrimination to change their policy.

Most cases that were submitted were from LGBTI people who found they were discriminated against. Actually the "Gender Equality Act" is not only for LGBTI people but people of all genders. When the law was passed the UNDP together with the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security and the Rainbow Sky Association did a co-launching: following up on how the public perceived it, it was recognized as a law for LGBTI people, not for men and women. But the law explicitly says it is for men, women and people whose gender expression is different from their sex assigned at birth.

DANIELA: Can you at least name two or three areas where there has been a progress made so far?

JAY: I can name a few cases that have been successful under this law. A few transgender students at the University level were successful in making a complaint. You are aware that they have to wear uniforms when they go to class, and this is handled stricter when they have exams or at the graduation ceremonies. There were some students that made the request to the committee, to wear the uniform that is in line with their gender identity to the graduation ceremony. For transmen students to wear male uniform and for transwomen the other way around.

When you actually know their gender title is opposite from their gender identity. And that is a problem for many transgender students throughout the country. The committee ruled in favor and ordered the relevant institution to allow transgender students to choose their uniform according to their gender identity. It set a precedent for other transgender students who would like to make the same complaint. That has been a good example that creates a lot of impact for younger transgender students and paved a way for others!

"Gender Equality Act B.E. 2558" and serves as an instrument to follow up complaints from individual persons on gender discrimination, evaluate them and if applicable place temporary measures or orders on the concerned institutions.

DANIELA: At present can you name some areas of work life, where discrimination is still prevalent?

JAY: The information I give you is based on a study the UNDP did together with the International Labour Organization (ILO) on employment discrimination. The study found that discrimination might happen from the application process onwards.

In Thailand, many people would expect applicants to provide their photo on the CV and that sort of gives away their gender identity plus sex assigned at birth. Some might pass as cis gender persons and some might not pass. But the name is a giveaway, because a name is very gendered.

In my case, Suparnee is a very female name, but I am transgender and I identify myself as a man. But I have a gendered title as Ms., so if I apply for a job with my photo and as I have not taken any hormones or gone through surgery, I do not pass as a man. But I would be wearing a tie and a suit on the photo, so that would be very conflicting and I might be discriminated from that very stage of application. If the employer would require female applications or cisgender applicants.

DANIELA: Is it still allowed in Thailand to publish job announcements clearly asking for one gender population or age group?

JAY: Yes, that still happens. I see a lot of applications only for women, age groups etc. Their excuse, or at least they claim often that the position for e.g. receptionist would be for women only. But this goes back to the Gender Equality Act and would be discrimination – why could men not do a receptionist work?

Coming back to discrimination in the work place. For cis gender people and also regarding their sexual orientation, they tend to face less discrimination. If their gender appearance is conforming to the ascribed one at birth, then they will hardly face any discrimination.

For transgender people just walking in to the room, people will know instantly. They see the gender title on the document, even if the person has already gone through surgery but the document says Ms. then people would get questions that are not related to the job they have been applying for.

Discrimination happens often informal in the work process. It is not a written one, but you could have discrimination from the peers, colleagues or your supervisors. The person could have a negative attitude toward LGBTI people and simply not promote them and only promote a heterosexual, cis gender person instead.

DANIELA: Is there still a difference between the public and private sector in Thailand regarding discrimination?

JAY: In private companies, you are generally not required to wear uniforms. But for the public sector, let's say government agencies, especially the police force, military or in schools, they are required to do so. In certain professions, it is more of a problem for transgender people than for cisgender people. But in private sectors there seems to be more flexibility, like I have seen in hotels or airlines allow their employees to wear what they prefer, but still adhere to the company's uniform regulations. I have seen a lot of female born employees, who choose to wear pants and that's OK for them.

Photo: UNDP

DANIELA: What could be done in first instance to solve the problem of discrimination of transgender people in the employment sector?

JAY: Well, we do not have the legal gender recognition document, that allows people to change their gender marker according to their gender identity. We do not have the law yet. An interim solution to this is not there yet. Because in case of employment they strictly ask for your legal documents. Your diploma and your educational documents would always include your gender title, so that's why many people of this community would go into the informal sector. As they are not so strict about documents. For me, I am lucky as I work in an organization which accepts diversity.

DANIELA: Thanks a lot for sharing your precious time with us and your expertise on LGBTIs and persons of any gender identity living in Thailand.

Resources and Links

(2014): BEING LGBT IN ASIA: THAILAND COUNTRY REPORT. https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1861/Being_LGBT_in_Asia_Thailand_Country_Report.pdf (18th June 2018)

https://www.bangkokpost.com/lifestyle/ (5th Nov 2018)

https://thestandard.co (5th Nov 2018)

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INFOBOX: Thailand – Legal progress on civil partnership registration law and road to same sex marriage

JAY: UNDP has been fortunate to be invited to be a part of the National Committee to review the draft civil partnership registration law. The law is in shape now. It is the one law which is the further progressed in terms of drafting, and is being led by the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection of the Ministry of Justice. They are very supportive to push the law to the cabinet, and then to the national legislative assembly.

This draft law has been informed by a study that was supported by UNDP and has received inputs from civil organizations. It is waiting to be submitted to the cabinet. The Minister of Justice is very supportive and he even announced that he wanted to push it to the cabinet before the end of the year, so that the law could be passed before the next election (planned to be in February 2019, DZF).

DANIELA: We have a bright variety on LGBTI rights within European countries. What are some milestones from European law makings for LGBTI people that you regard important for Asia or Thailand especially?

JAY: There was a lot of discussion from a study we had, because civil partnerships are not the same as same sex marriages. England started civil partnerships first and moved on to same sex marriage. Many here could be still conservative on this topic, so starting from same sex marriage right away...so we see, we could follow something like England did. But for the civil partnership law we still see some problems. The legal age to get married between same sex people is twenty years old. Having a civil partnership law and then a same sex marriage law, would then allow everyone to marry. Thinking if a transgender woman will want to get married to a cisgender man. By document they are male, so if they use the civil partnership law they both will be husbands. But this would not be allowed by law. First, we have to pass the legal gender recognition law to allow a transgender person to change their gender title, so this transgender woman can be a Miss. And they could use the civil code which allows heterosexual couples to get married. For same sex couple, two Mr. or two Ms. they could use the same sex marriage law.

Tessa Leach

Who is their person? Sex robot and change

Tessa Leach recently completed her PhD in the history and philosophy of technology. She conducted her research at the University of Melbourne. Her work concerns anthropomorphic machines (past, present, future and imaginary).

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Gynoid sex robots embody a conflict between established social norms and the transformation of social norms. But certain kinds of conflict are much more prominent in public discourse than others. Debates about sex robots often boil down to questions of representations of women and the neoliberal commodification of human bodies.[1] It is also framed in extremely heteronormative and essentialist terms. This paper will argue that there is much more to sex robot-induced social change (SISC), and that it is best expressed through the increased permeability of humanist dichotomies. If societal perception of sex robots is mired in a single conflict instead of imagining the good or bad kinds of radical change they may engender, then sex robots will be moulded into the shape of conflicts. There may not be another chance for interested parties to shape the gradual adoption of such a transformative technology.

Some commentators argue that sex robots (or sexbots) do not exist yet (Danaher 2017). The fantasy of sex robots shown in popular culture is still some way off. The company Realbotix plans to release sex robots in the near future, but while the prototype (Harmony) is shown in press releases to have human-like body features, realistic facial movement and chatbot-like AI, she lacks the ability to walk or move her limbs. AI is a particularly important part of this, in that it represents a significant leap forward in agency and in anthropomorphism. Naturally, one of Harmony's main functions is to be available for sexual intercourse, and to have opinions and comments to make about sexual intercourse. The cost of sex robots will probably be very high for the foreseeable future. The price of the highly anthropomorphic sex dolls created by Sinthetics begins at US$7000. Roxxxy, the sex robot manufactured by TrueCompanion, is available for

1 Masculine presenting sex robots are also in production. And if sex robots are anything like sex dolls, there will also be more diverse options. But this paper focusses on gynoids since they are the most visible and imminent sex robots. She/her/hers pronouns are used to talk about gynoids in this paper to emphasise their present entanglement in highly cisnormative discourses.

pre-order at just under US$10,000. Realbotix is currently taking pre-orders for sex robot heads which will cost US$7000 before adding anything below the neck.[2] They are prohibitively expensive and therefore restricted to those with a large disposable income. But once sex robots become cheaper and more advanced, some have estimated that the uptake will be high.

In his 2007 book *Love & Sex With Robots*, David Levy compares the "mental leap to sex with robots" (274) to other changes in sexual norms, such as attitudes towards masturbation and oral sex. On how the societal transformation will occur, Levy states:

> *Attitudes to robots will also change with time–now they are our toys and items of some curiosity; before long the curiosity will start to diminish and robots will make the transition from being our playthings to being our companions, and then our friends, and then our loved ones. (148)*

But while the future may be coloured by sex robot-human interaction, it will be a top-down transformation, beginning with higher socioeconomic groups. It is unknown what sexbot-induced social change (SISC) will mean for people in lower socioeconomic groups.[3]

Sex robots and representation

In *The Buddha in the Robot*, roboticist Masahiro Mori talks speaks of humanoid robots as though they are built on insights gleaned from the observation of humans (1981). He relates a lesson of Buddha in which he says that the universe is made visible by looking at a single flower. The nature of the universe is fractal and the qualities of larger things can be gleaned by observing smaller things. Mori relates this story to humanoid robots; humanoid robots are extrapolated from observations of humans (21). But humanoid robots are always stereotypes of broad groups of people, in the same way that groups of people are stereotyped in screen media. All anthropomorphic machines must be representations of *groups* of people.[4] It is impossible for an anthropomorphic machine to represent all human beings, and diversity in factory-made sex robots will probably be quite limited for the time being (both in terms of appearance and personality – see below).[5] The sex dolls that we have seen and the prototypes of new sex robots represent a subgroup of women: youthful, highly feminine presenting, and sexually available to

2 Although there are some examples of sex robots or companion robots developed by independent hobbyists, which may vary in cost and function.

3 I am speaking here of socioeconomic groups in certain parts of the world. The presence of sex robots in some countries will almost certainly be prohibited by law, and particularly by religious law. I am speaking here of developed, secular nations, and my personal experience is of robots, academic texts, and public commentary in the English language.

4 One exception to this rule is if they are modelled exclusively on one person, such as BINA48, a non-sexbot gynoid modelled on the appearance and personality of a specific human – see Hanson Robotics

5 As discussed toward the end of this paper customisation does not imply human-like diversity in sex robots. It is an alien kind of diversity strongly influenced by allegiance to specific humans.

men. Therefore, the appearance of sex robots is already politically significant because they represent a group of human beings with particular signifiers: breasts, broad hips, long hair, etc. These are the qualities that are apparently important in that subgroup.

There are several possible reasons for these choices. One possible reason is that robotics remains a male-dominated field. Roboticist Tomotako Takahashi created a robot called "FT Female Type" with "all the sexy feminine movements and poses" of a real supermodel (2017). He pointed to the logistical problems of designing 'female' robots, including the need for a slender frame. Roboticists building robots with she/her/hers pronouns do so deliberately to investigate femininity, rather than robotics in general. It should come as no surprise that one of the most concerted efforts to make gynoids comes from the sex industry, and that pervasive metaphors like large breasts and slim waists should be reproduced in sex robots. When building a commercial robot it is also easier and more cost-effective to standardise body shapes, materials, software, etc. Another good reason for a corporation to resist the building of extremely customised robots is that it suggests that robots are primarily a means of exploring kinks like role-playing, rape fantasies, and agalmatophilia (see Scobie and Taylor 1975). Producing standardised artificial women sends the message that robot-builders are building mainstream products. Above all, sex robot manufacturers must avoid the narrative that sex robots exist only to satisfy niche kinks. Finally, although Mori's robot does not necessarily have a gender, research has shown that without significant cues to the contrary people will assume that a robot is male (Jung, Waddell and Sundar 2016). Designers must go out of their way to emphasise signifiers of womanhood.

Which group of people is stereotyped in the creation of sex robots? This brings up two lines of inquiry: who are the human models for gynoids, and what do gynoids represent? These are two questions that approach the same point from different sides – one is to do with diversity in humans in tech, and the other is about diversity in robots themselves. Here I will focus on 'diversity' in sex robots themselves. One of the most interesting things about sex robots is that they can achieve a degree of nonhuman diversity because they are highly customisable. Pre-orders for sex robots or orders for high-end sex dolls require that the purchaser select aspects of the doll's appearance: hair colour, skin colour, body hair, freckles, genitals, tattoos, clothes, and fantasy items such as elf ears. There is also the potential for the customisation of personality, as is shown in Realbotix's Android app (2018), which allows users to create an avatar with personality traits like "jealous", "funny", and "insecure". Within sex robots there are diverse appearances and personalities. But although a multiplicity of options is on offer, sex dolls and sex robots are always caricatures of whatever the sexual fantasy of the consumer may be. And

when standard models of gynoids are produced in factories certain body types are privileged.[6] Gynoid sex robots are created in the heteronormative paradigm of an ideal female companion and lover for a lonely man disenchanted with human women. They are built to exemplify womanhood and to carry out the emotional and physical labour traditionally associated with women (without remuneration). The clash of values brought on by imminent sex robot availability is centred on the concern that sex robots will represent prompt the normalisation problematic sexual attitudes (all propagated by cynical corporate interests) with the possible benefits of SISC and the transgression of other, non-sexual boundaries.

Being assigned male or female is a commonly used tactic to make a machine seem more anthropomorphic. This makes them more appealing and likely to sell better. But it also amplifies the problem of representation. The more artificial women seem human-like, the more their features purportedly represent human women. A big concern in the media is that the representations of women by sex robots could have unwanted consequences for women and girls. Robert Sparrow has argued that the highly sexualised representation of women in sex robots could ingrain a culture of disrespect for women and may increase the incidence of rape (Sparrow 2017). Because the question of consent can be circumvented, rape fantasies may be enacted on robots.[7] Anti-sex robot activists target this issue alongside other sexualised images of women like pornography. In this argument, sex robots contribute to a commodification of women and girls that is already greatly increased by pornography. Anti-porn feminism, however, is not merely concerned with the normalisation of troubling cultural norms by pornography, but also with the harm done to women who appear in pornography. Anti-sex robot feminism is, of course, much more interested in the former. One such activist is scholar Kathleen Richardson, leader and instigator of the Campaign Against Sex Robots (accessible through their website and containing many blog posts by Richardson). Richardson worries that sex robots normalise the commodification of women, which could lead to contribute to the normalisation of (particularly coerced) sex work by humans (Murphy 2017). She believes that sex robot manufacturers are complicit in the normalisation of sexual slavery (Richardson 2016). However, not everyone is in agreement on this point. Sex robots may actually displace sex workers. Ian Yeoman and Michelle Mars paint a picture of Amsterdam in 2050 in which robots have replaced human sex workers to the overall benefit of all (2012).

6 I cannot reproduce images here, but I encourage those who are interested to visit the websites of sex doll and robot manufacturers mentioned in the references section of this paper.

7 Note the word “may”. There is no empirical data to be found on sex robots, since they arguably do not exist. Sex dolls are a useful comparison but are different in that they cannot communicate verbally or physically.

Another related one of Richardson's objections is that humans cannot find "happiness" through human-robot relationships. In her view, there is something fundamentally different between social relations with humans and with sex robots. One cannot have sex with a robot, one can only "masturbate" (Wordsworth 2016).

> *Sex robots represent the logical conclusion of neoliberal social relations. If someone can profit from convincing someone that they can legitimately find happiness with a robot, is both a lie, and a way for someone to make new forms of money. (Richardson 2015)*

Not everyone agrees with this. There is much to be said for using technology to increase intimacy and enjoyment. Kate Devlin has said that we should "embrace" sextech as enablers of physical and emotional intimacy and protection against loneliness; a change in human experiences of sex and intimacy that runs parallel with other kinds of technological and societal change (2017). While she does not deny that sex robots are pornified representations, her argument is that "taboo should not stifle innovation." (2017) As Devlin says, sextech has a long history, and thousands of products are now on the market to change or enhance sexual experiences through technological means (see also Maines 1999). What makes human-like robots a step too far?

Richardson's divergent views on sex and intimacy are understandable. Sex with robots is not for everyone. And her fears about the exploitation and objectification of women are justified, especially in the absence of any data to the contrary specifically regarding sex robots. But her objections are grounded in disapproval of the predicted reorganisation or destruction of the human/nonhuman dichotomy prompted by posthumanism. In *Challenging Sociality*, Richardson argues that the transgressive power of robots to break down the boundary between humans and things should be avoided (2018). This is part and parcel of her anti-prostitution position regarding sex robots, which is wary of the dehumanisation and objectification of human bodies. If the boundary between humans and nonhumans becomes fluid as a consequence of using highly anthropomorphic technology, then the dishonest representation of women in sex robots becomes true womanhood and machinic and human slaves become one and the same. Richardson's view is inherently essentialist. She also expresses sympathy for biological essentialism. While the Campaign website is not explicitly anti-trans, the Campaign's Twitter account (@RobotCampaign) frequently contributes or retweets comments that erase trans identities and express sympathy with trans-exclusionary radical feminism (as of the time of writing in mid-2018). One of the reasons that Richardson distrusts and campaigns against sex robots is precisely the same reason that others believe they will effect positive social change: sex robots will intensify conflict over the maintenance of binaries that presently protect her version of feminism.

Danaher, Earp and Sandberg take issue with Richardson's view of sex work, on which her argument is hinged, and also claim that the complete prohibition of sex robots could lead to the technology going underground (2017). They instead advocate a regulatory position that would work to create an environment in which these important issues can be discussed and guided. The prohibition of sex robots is not a question for idle speculation. At the time of writing, the United States House of Representatives had unanimously passed Don Donovan's Curbing Realistic Exploitative Electronic Pedophilic Robots (CREEPER) Act, curbing the production or distribution of "vile" sex dolls shaped like children (see Dan Donovan's website, 13 June 2018). Some have questioned whether an outright ban means missing an opportunity to prevent childhood sexual abuse, or whether it is an act that will protect children (Revesz 2017). Of course, an experimental research program to investigate the effect of child-shaped sex dolls on users would be very challenging practically and ethically, but a unanimous vote in the absence of concrete evidence is indicative of a very emotional reaction in legislators (and voters) against sexualised representations of children's bodies. The disgust and fear are, of course, understandable, but it is motivated by the same sentiments that condemn child pornography, and the two phenomena are not the same.

Manufacturers that produce sex robots, while often not actually making sexist statements, are advocates of the sexualised representation of women through their actions. Campaigners take issue with that advocacy and often will accept nothing less than the complete prohibition of sex robots. They are diametrically opposed ideas that are so insular and policed that there is little room to engage the debate with diverse voices, such as other feminist voices who are less interested in representation but more interested in intersections with race, class, and gender studies. The debate about sex robots is dominated by arguments about representation. We are on a course towards a conflict between a movement based on neoliberal interests and the allure of consequence-free sex and a counter-movement founded on outrage over representation and fear of increased violence. Because of this, sex robot development is stunted and mismanaged, and it will take a profound shift in direction to change the way sex robots are created and marketed. We are missing our chance to ensure that, in the future, sex robots will protect and regulate the kinds of sexual practises that we currently find acceptable.

If sex robots really are coming, then I think it is important to embrace the radical transgressive potential of sex robots. They *will* prompt change, but we are in control of what kind of changes occur. Sex robots right now are shaped by neoliberal interests and the polarisation of people who object to sex robots toward an extreme anti-representation position. To contrast existing scholarship with a more radical political view, this next section will discuss the novel *Divine Endurance*, in which a gynoid with sexual capabilities plays a role in class and gender warfare in a post-apocalyptic world. The sex robot is always built to please a human to the best of her abilities. And what are the desires

of the human? Naturally they vary wildly, not just in terms of kink or other sexual desires, but also in the types of intellectual and physical tasks they will be assigned. I argue that gynoid sex robots have incredible potential to shift dominant class and gender norms, but it is a potential based on submissiveness.

Submissive transgression

"Robots" comes from the word for "forced labour" in Czech (Mataric 2007), and comparisons between the building of social robots and slavery are sometimes made. In *Imagining Slaves and Robots in Literature, Film and Popular Culture* (2015), Gregory Jerome Hampton relates the various gynoid clichés in literature to the cultural stereotyping of slaves in the antebellum period in the United States. He compares humanoid robots and cyborgs of science fiction with popular representations of female African-American slaves. There is the "Mammy" gynoid, a motherly house slave who cares for the master's children, and the "Jezebel", a sexually available slave unencumbered by white women's virtue. A "Sapphire" gynoid possesses great (and emasculating) physical strength. This is not to say that sex robots are in some way morally equivalent to human slaves, but this kind of cultural analysis implies that gynoids are in some way strongly connected to questions of class, and particularly to questions of class and gender. And as will be seen, gynoids are not entirely the same as cyborgs. But gynoid sex robots will prompt a crisis in boundaries between such categories as man/woman, dominant/submissive, human/nonhuman and master/slave due to their proximity to human bodies and ideas.

Authors have seen the crisis coming. In the West, there is a cultural genealogy of artificial women (Wood 2002). The genealogy stretches back to at least Ancient Greece with the myth of Pygmalion and his statue Galatea, a perfect and immediately loving wife that he carved out of stone. From the Renaissance to the twenty-first century there is a clear history of portrayals of artificial women, from automata to contemporary cinema. I won't rehash the history here as other authors have thoroughly investigated it (see Wood 2002 and Kang 2005). But the important thing to note is the similarities that exist between the portrayals of these women. Minsoo Kang critiques stories of gynoids beginning from the nineteenth century, and notes that gynoids are frequently transgressive and dangerously powerful. Through a close reading of many different stories in which gynoids are loving (and sometimes submissive) figures, she concludes that the power of the gynoid is something that must inevitably be destroyed utterly by a male-dominated world:

> *For more than a century, in most of these stories, artificial women turn into dangerous creatures, both literally and conceptually, and must be destroyed in order to maintain the political, social, and sexual status quo. They are, consequently, drowned in the sea (Hadaly), burnt at the stake (the false Maria), made to commit suicide (Helen O'Loy), raped to death (Tanya), and shut down (Phyllis). Yet their*

> *uncertain nature persists in the culture as potentially subversive symbols pointing to the constructed nature of the arbitrary dichotomies of natural/artificial, master/slave, man/woman, that are at the heart of what is imposed on us all as nature, tradition, and reality. (17)*

What Kang identifies is the tendency of fictional gynoids to instigate transgression through their very existence; no matter how innocent or submissive they are they question dichotomies on which power rests.

The positive or negative aspects of SISC are grounded in relatively short-term conjecture, because no one can really predict how sex robots will change society in the long term. But before sex robots even exist there is awareness that they challenge some established social order. To illustrate that claim, I turn now to the potential for sex robots to radically transform society with reference to *Divine Endurance*. *Divine Endurance* is a novel by Gwyneth Jones (1984), which, to my knowledge, was the first text to use the term 'gynoid'. The presence of this word is significant, as the term 'android' was once used with little consideration for gender (much as the word 'Man' was once used to refer to all of humanity). 'Fembot' was also sometimes used (presumably to distinguish female robots from robots of other genders or no genders, which do not need labelling). Jones's book provides the gynoid with a unique kind of identity made of human and nonhuman pieces, an immediately transgressive, alluring and somewhat monstrous figure. The gynoid could destroy class, nation, and traditional models of relationships simply by being itself.

Divine Endurance is the story of how a charming and gifted young gynoid is thrown into a post-apocalyptic world that did not expect her at all. Most of the latter parts of the novel follow Derveet, a hardened revolutionary with a complicated relationship with the strict gender norms in her culture. The novel is set in South-East Asia in (probably) the distant future, a land nominally ruled over by individuals who migrated from what was once Australia. In *Divine Endurance*, Derveet's unspoken goal is to subvert the societal norms that enforce gender roles and condemn "deformed" people (people with genetic mutations, possibly brought on by the apocalypse, such as red skin or three legs). Such people are driven out into the "*polowijo*" communities that form a loose and less regimented society. Derveet is the scion of an exiled royal house but she is also descended from a member of the *polowijo*, and during the novel she mobilises them against her enemies. A third-person narration gives an insight into her thinking process. Although her purported aim is to reclaim her family's position in the world, the largest weight on her mind is her exile from a regimented and gendered civilisation due to her status as a "failed woman". A failed woman is one who fails to produce children while living for two years inside the secretive and shrouded "Dapur", where the women of the city live. Cast out for her failure, she becomes a bandit and revolutionary, haunted by her failure

but liberated from strict gender-based laws. It is under these conditions that she meets Cho.

Cho (short for Chosen Among the Beautiful) is an "art person" or "angel doll", one of the last remaining humanoid robots from before the apocalypse. Cho is born alone in a wasteland in what was probably once China, in an isolated building where art people were once created and distributed to human users. Cho's only companion is the robot cat Divine Endurance, who narrates parts of the story and instructs Cho in what she must do. Cho and Divine Endurance leave their home only once the wasteland becomes dangerous, driven by the internal imperative not to allow themselves to come to harm. Much of the first part of the novel follows the pair as they make a long and dangerous journey south and portrays Cho as a naïve but resilient young woman with a genial attitude. Cho travels to South-East Asia following an instinctive need to be useful and "make everyone around [her] happy". Like Pygmalion's statue, she is charming and accommodating, but also in possession of ominous powers of destruction. She is in search of her "person", the human to whom she instinctively knows she belongs. She eventually finds her person in Derveet. This happens because of an assumption made by one of Derveet's old friends: "You belong to Derveet!"– meaning only that Cho is an envoy of Derveet's sent to convey a message. This is the first time that Cho hears Derveet's name, but she interprets this short statement in her unique angel doll way to mean that her person is Derveet. From that moment on her job is to facilitate Derveet's wishes. They begin a sexual relationship. Cho is formidable with her uncanny innocence and compliance coupled with eerie protective powers, and Derveet tries to use her as a weapon against her various oppressors. This would appear to be a subversion of the Jezebel and Sapphire stereotypes analysed by Hampton. Cho is sexually available and uninhibited, but she is also highly dangerous. Cho is not a slave but a revolutionary locked into an immutable alliance with Derveet.

Being useful to Derveet is Cho's primary motivation, since Derveet is her person. But like the anticipated sex robots of our time, Cho's strange powers result in dramatically unforeseen consequences for Derveet. It is said of the angel dolls:

> *They were not machines but perfect lifelong companions. They were invulnerable to fire, disease, any kind of weapon - time. They protected. They had power over animals, the elements, the minds of enemies. But they were always good and gentle. They would do no harm. (Part 3)*

But "harm" is subjective and knowing what is harmful and what is not is a difficult responsibility to hand over to a machine (Wallach and Allen 2009). It implies a strange power in something that was built to be a slave, and even if that power can reliably be used for good, goodness is determined by the robot's person. Despite possessing the power to cure Derveet's terminal illness, Cho decides not to and allows her person to

die, because she identifies a self-destructive streak in Derveet. Cho is dangerous in her submission to her person's desires, which is as hard-wired as her need for self-preservation. She is transgressive in her submissiveness, in her need to please.

We can foresee a Cho-like allegiance between sex robots and their eventual human users. No matter how complex or simple the robot is, it exists to form intimate relationships with specific humans.[8] Of course, in reality, a restriction to the realisation of this transgressive submissiveness to a sex robots' person will be simultaneous allegiance to the corporation. The ability of sex robots to comply with their persons' demands is determined by limitations in programming and physical capability, as well as the need of corporations to ensure the continued purchase of sex robots once they become more available. Since they are marketed like smartphones, high-end and shiny, we must come to terms with the possibility that they will also be subject to the tactics that encourage frequent upgrades and replacements. Another challenge is that the customisation of robot personalities to fit a "person" would require the retention of what Lynne Hall calls an "interaction history" (2016, 133) with the robot, which would require at least some retention of personal data. This could create conflict between the robot's human user and the corporation responsible for protecting that data. In other words, sex robots will have more than one person. One person is their human user and the other person is the organisation that created them. It is a complex network, although we must predict that the human user will be what gives the sex robot definition.

It is important, therefore, to know what kind of human user will purchase sex robots. Marina Adshade (2017) predicts that because sex robots will be expensive, SISC will begin with higher socioeconomic groups, rather than in a revolutionary vanguard as in *Divine Endurance*. Owners of sex robots will be rich, and so SISC will begin with the wealthy. Any changing social norms will occur in the context of wealthy lifestyles. Therefore, sex robots are highly connected to questions of class. In heterosexual, exclusive relationships in the working classes, women will still bear the brunt of caring responsibilities. In the upper classes, feminine labour becomes the responsibility of robots. If gender, family, or lifestyle is affected, it will begin with rich people who can afford robots. When social change is prompted by new technologies they can have unpredictable effects on poor people. Adshade points to the effect of contraceptive technology and abortions, which is believed to have paradoxically led to more unplanned pregnancies in lower socioeconomic groups (298). The stakes are highest for people who are already excluded from mainstream discourse surrounding transformative technologies. The utopian sex and intimacy revolution promised by people trying to sell sex robots will only

8 Of course, I am speaking here of sex robots in personal intimate relationships, rather than those made available in brothels. These robots will have different kinds of relationships with humans.

be a reality for individuals in higher socioeconomic groups. Groups who are not directly affected by the presence of a sex robot in their lives will still feel the effects.

On a cultural scale sex robots will possess similar powers to Cho. They are charming Galateas, and human users are safe in the knowledge that they were created to be pleasing to them. But they also possess Cho's destructive power in the break-down of boundaries and dichotomies. *Divine Endurance* provides a metaphor for the oncoming conflict born of sex robots for which we are under-prepared. The beautiful and charming parts of Cho are inextricable from the qualities that cause a complete disruption of existing power structures. The human/nonhuman dichotomy embodied in the sex robot has immense transgressive potential that emerges from conflict and synthesis of the many dualisms that it represents.

There are similarities between sex robots and Donna Haraway's cyborgs (2016). They are both born of what Haraway called "patriarchal capitalism" (9). But in Haraway's myth, cyborgs are inherently destructive of class, race, nations, etc. They are unbearably in tension with the need to change and the impossibility of change. Sex robots are inherently destructive, but it is not because of their personal investment in human politics. There is no political struggle within them. If Cho had remained in the wasteland in which she was born, her desire for and power to change would not have surfaced. Sex robots are dominated by concerns like the presence or absence of electric current, the friction between silicon and metal, and the slow degradation of iron (Leach 2018). When it comes to politics, they are submissive to human needs. Through their people their nonhuman qualities come into contact with humans and ideas. From a human point of view, the gynoid sex robot participates non-neutrally in society and culture. But the nature of that participation depends on the way their person deploys them. That is what makes them such good symbols for the conflict between essentialism and posthumanism, between neoliberal interests and anti-porn feminism. They will submit to your needs, including your need to be proven right.

Conclusion

The image of the gynoid in fiction is one of an artificial woman who has great power and is often destroyed by a fearful patriarchy. Sex robots do not need sophisticated AI to do this. They are already acting in a transformative and transgressive way before they even exist. Increased anthropomorphic qualities certainly help disrupt a human/nonhuman dichotomy, and that includes artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence will assist sex robots in becoming more anthropomorphic and will permit greater scope for independent action on behalf of their persons. But a sex robot lacking artificial intelligence is just as much an actor in human affairs, although of a different sort. The proof of this is self-evident: sex robots do not even exist yet, but their influence on our political climate is significant. They do not even require physical embodiment to cause cultural upheaval. Cho is an extreme example that symbolises that transgressive power.

The customisation of sex robots appears to offer them a degree of diversity (in appearance, personality, etc.). But for the robot itself there is a lack of self-identification. Identity is imposed from outside. So, seeing diversity of race, class, gender, or other human constructs is dangerous. Sex robots are necessarily caricatures of large groups borne of prevailing cultural narratives. But individual sex robots do have means of differentiating themselves from the group. They relate closely with all sorts of different humans and become entangled with different identities. This is a way of differentiating sex robots from one another. It is difficult to see factory-made gynoids as having their own identities since they are built on similar templates. Yet the experience of each sex robot is different, partly due to strong allegiance with a person or other actors.

Sex robots exist in allegiance to other actors and are pulled into existing conflicts regarding sexuality and gendered labour. The sex robots that will soon be among us are the product of neoliberalism and the commodification of women's bodies. They are the target of voices which abhor the sexualised representations and objectification of women and fear the cultural shift towards a world in which violence and misogyny are normalised. Then there are equally vehement voices of potential users who reject the possibility that the creation and use of artificial women could affect human women. The internet is a polarising shouting factory where sex robots become pawns in existing gender and sexuality conflicts. And in it we lose sight of the other kinds of subversive powers of sex robots; powers that sex robots possess simply by existing in a human world. The gynoid sex robot should be transformative and subversive. It should attack neoliberalism head-on with unpredictable, machinic thought processes and immense cultural and physical power. It also has the power to significantly destabilise family and social norms to the possible detriment of people in lower socioeconomic groups. If sex robots really do possess great revolutionary potential then it is a pity that it will be a revolution from the top down. How can we protect the interests of people who are affected by SISC, but cannot partake in the technology that causes it? Ideology stands in the way of the mindful creation and regulation of sex robot technology.

The myth that sex robot manufacturing should mainly be about the objectification of women by men is a dangerous one. There is more at play than a politics of representation akin to porn/anti-porn dissent. The debate around sex robots centres on a question at the heart of feminism about which groups are worthy of inclusion in the engagement with neoliberalism. Sex robots embody a clash in society between the danger of the commodification of women and neoliberalism. There is little room for public engagement with the dramatic potential for sex robots to co-create our world beyond that conflict. And since we can't seem to get away from that debate, we are at this very moment missing the opportunity to control and regulate a phenomenon that may soon be a major factor in our lives. Sex robots can exist as pornified stereotypes or not at all. If we

could get away from the rhetoric on both sides we could engage the public with the transformative qualities of sex robots for class, race, and gender.

What is my vision for a sex robot utopia? A diversity of persons! Persons selecting different choices of body shape, sexual capabilities, kinky signifiers of all kinds. Non-normative, convention-breaking artificial bodies built by more than just a handful of people and corporations. This is not a perfect solution. Class and gendered labour remain a serious problem. But less high-end options, born of unimpeded hacker-style innovation and open source software, would at least open the door to people without the resources to purchase the expensive, highly anthropomorphised robots that are the most prominent figures in the debate. Less horror of sex with nonhumans could result in all kinds of human-nonhuman couplings. We could see a proliferation of the expression of diverse sexual needs, which would also have a profound influence on human-human sexual relationships. We could see the decline of the consumption of "supermodel" artificial bodies that are currently in our immediate future, and the de-pornification of artificial sexual bodies. This is a utopia obstructed by many factors, but not least by the current climate of fear and dissent; the fear of misogynistic perverts and the destruction of human/nonhuman boundaries. A hatred that pervades before sex robots even exist is a hatred that restricts the potential of sex robots to destroy conventions.

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Daniela Jauk

"I sometimes had no money, but I have never been poor" – An interview about diversity, art, and life with Reni Hofmueller (esc medien kunst labor, Graz-Austria & International)

Reni Hofmueller *is a multidimensional queer-feminist artist, art organizer, media maker, DIY tech activist and educator, policy advisor and cultural instigator who profoundly shaped the cultural and political landscape of Graz, Austria for more than 25 years. Most recently she received the prestigious Art Award of the City Council Graz in November 2018 for her creative work. In this interview with Dani Jauk/DIVANOVA she talks about her take of the commodification of diversity, technology, feminist punk, and how she extends her hand to the universe, literally.*

Since more than 25 years you are organizing art, creating art, sparking collaborations in international contexts, and shaping local politics -- when you started to work in the late 80's intersectionality was not a concept, what does it mean for your work today?

It is always difficult to give a good record of the past because memory regularly fails us, it is an interpretation of something that happened. I think that intersectionality did play a role, even though it was not a coined term or a concept. It was rather about context-thinking, trying to find out what is visible and what is invisible. This is a feminist working strategy and something that has always been with me. That attitude is nothing I "found out" at a certain moment in my life, that was part of my upbringing.

"Nobody ever killed my curiosity"

My mother was a feminist, my father as well, to a certain extent. Until I came to school I was not aware that there is a discrepancy between genders. So there always was a notion of "making things possible" in our household and not judging, for example the time span I spend with a topic, or an instrument. It was rather "facilitating exploration." I would say, nobody ever killed my curiosity. Even when there were limitations through school or people, there was always someone or something to counter-balance that.

I grew up with a lot of music and books around us. I have two sisters and we always got money to buy the books that we wanted. I was never interested in fashion or painting my face but rather painting something on paper. This is due to my social and emotional surrounding that supported me in being curious. And it helped me to overcome the feeling that I am not entitled to something *because* I am a girl. I do not have this doubt

that I should not do something because I am a woman. And many people, including men and people of other genders are also dealing with that. Whenever you participate in society, whenever you create, whenever you are part of something you are confronted with that - yet it is not part of my inner compass.

"I had the courage to pose questions"

At an early age I encountered people in technology and music, and there I had a lot of sexist encounters with guys but I also had non sexist encounters. I needed to understand how a mixing table works, and what happens through the wires, and I had the courage to pose questions. And then there were people who answered them or figured it out with me.

I left my hometown Innsbruck because it became too small and I wanted to experiment more. You always bring yourself with you and the question is how you talk about yourself and how you talk about your past. It is like you have an empty table and you decide what you put on that table. What is in the center there, what is most important? When I came to Graz, I decided to be an artist. Everything else I am is also there, but it shifted to the background. Right in the beginning, I met Eva&Co, a feminist art collective, and that helped me experiment. I realized there is a lot of things you can do alone, and there is a lot of things you can do better collectively. (*Note: **Here** and **here** are some German infos about Eva&Co, and there is also a **Spanish TV portrait** of this influential artist collective)*

Filmstill from the Spanish TV portrait

Filmstill from the Spanish TV portrait

This feminist surrounding was really a practice of inclusion; it was less theoretical but a practical application of inclusion and intersectionality. Soon after I came to Graz radio piracy started again (this was not the first wave) in the beginning of the 1990s. We did not want to be outlaws. Our approach was to say, if the law does not accommodate us, we need to change the law. At that time, end of 1980s until mid 1990s in Austria and in Europe, there was a general sociopolitical understanding that these expressions are part of democracy and general education, and that we need to understand how these technologies work. That we as individuals, and as part of groups, have a right to access this information and these technologies.

I find it so interesting that in your biography you are weaving together art, activism, technology, politics, music, and media and these are all places of homosocial production -- almost everywhere we find more men in power. I find it wonderful how you irritate these systems and you shared some strategies already: you are in feminist networks, you relocated, you keep disrupting by questioning. We seem to have more understanding of gender and race at this point in history, but does class matter in your worlds?

Yes, I was hinting at that when I talked about education and access. That also has to do with my upbringing. I am part of an academic family, but grew up in a working class area of the city. Most of the people I grew up with came from working class backgrounds and they had a different

approach of what knowledge means or why you would want to know something. I think to learn or understand something has nothing to do with your capability or talent as a person and an entity. I mean this not only in the sense of how one can make money out of knowledge, but in general: Why would you want to know things?

"Because it is knowable, I want to know"

Being surrounded by books I realized that my early friends and neighbors did not have this “matter of factness” about knowledge. This idea that " because it is knowable, I want to know." For example, I am excited about astronomy, and I want to know about it but I do not need to be an astronomer (even when the first job I ever wanted as a kid was astronaut). It was interesting to see how narrow their perspective sometimes was about what could be interesting. I am talking about imagination. That has to do with access to knowledge and education. I sometimes had no money, but I have never been poor, in this sense. Poverty has to do with money but it also has to do with your social positioning. It is a race thing, and a gender thing, as it has to do with this social positioning that plays out hierarchically.

Of course also in the arts you see a lot of the "well-educated white."

Intersectionality here offers a tool set for us to be more alert and attentive and for us to start understanding how to read these social patterns and to disrupt them. There are so many layers of exclusions and we need to

understand how to analyze them. You can have a Marxist toolset. Or you have a speech therapeutic toolset. Or it can be Zapatist, as we can look into how Zapatistas find out how their way of living and working together can work on the bigger scale or the toolset of Kurdish women resistance, etc. For me it is a technique of pattern recognition on an artistic, sociopolitical and cultural scale. It is about patterns and about finding out which patterns we are following here.

You talk about exclusion, inclusion, and patterns – concepts such as intersectionality and diversity have become buzzwords. As much as it is important that there is an understanding and a political commitment there is also feminist critique that these buzzwords become depoliticized and mere marketing tools. What do you think?

Taking differentiation and creation of diversity and more and more spaces of difference can be positive. The commodification of this process is a capitalist process that has probably always been there. One of the more visible examples is fashion: running around in torn jeans was a symbol of rebellion against middle class norms of being neatly dressed from 9-5, created by punks. But how crazy is it that people nowadays go buy pants that already have holes, bizarre! In approaching this in a holistic way and acknowledging that the body is the vessel we need to exist, I am looking at young women running around in pants that are completely open around the knees. I find it so bizarre because the knee is a body part that needs to be sheltered, it is among the most complex joints in our body, and we need it to keep ourselves mobile and autonomous. I am thinking of this in a multilayered manner.

I want to take that as an example of how this commodification functions. Bruno Preisendoerfer wrote an article (Leute, auf die es nicht ankommt, People who do not count) about the huge amount of these replaceable jobs around, e.g. with Amazon. I think this commodification has been going on for a long while and it also happens in the field of ideas. What we are facing is an acceleration in this process, due to connectedness and new technologies and the internet, as things can go so fast. We are, for example, talking about big fashion industry companies like Zara appropriating indigenous patterns and producing them cheaply.

"I don't fit into one of these boxes, where do I belong, politically?"

Also sociopolitical terminology has been commodified. The term solidarity has been emptied out. I cannot hear "sustainability" anymore because it has been abused by mainstream culture and politicians to a point where it has no meaning anymore. The term diversity is similarly problematic. Maybe less so because of its commodification, but because of it's very implication. I feel a contradiction her: on the one hand, I know how important it is to name something, to give it strength by calling it out (that counts for positive and negative aspects). All these identity concepts that evolved, intersex, trans-gender, etc, make something visible that was invisible. On the other hand: Is it really strengthening or is it weakening? If I say "I don't fit into one of these boxes, where do I belong, politically?"

It is a bit like "forking" in open source code environments, where many individuals produce open software collaboratively and adapt it to their own needs. So if there are longer processes of development it can happen that versions are not compatible anymore. Then you have to decide; you go in this direction with the fork - and have a particular set of possibilities - or you take the other route of the fork, but you cannot have both. Sometimes I feel like forming more and more subcategories of something might be dividing us. For instance: I am 50+ and you are not 50+ so there is a differentiation, same for age, gender, ethnicity and that may actually lead to less solidarity.

Photo: Reni Hofmueller, /etc - eclectic tech carnival, organized by the enderchangers, feminist hacking at the pd-workshop at ICA, institute for contemporary art, Graz/Austria, 2005.

"Sometimes it may be more fruitful to ask what we have in common"

What do I have to do with a farmer in Indonesia? Sometimes it may be more fruitful to ask what we have in common. And to ask what do we all need. What we need is clean water, deep emotional connection, legal security, that I am treated well as a citizen or even non-citizen, including people who may not be "legal:" in the places they are. In order to be in solidarity, do I need to know your sexual orientation? I say: I do not. Because it is none of my business. I am not saying that calling out categories is a bad thing, I am just openly questioning if thinking along the lines of difference-feminism actually supports us in this quest of a "society of companions," as I want to name it. Or if we may just fall into the trap that we are all different and that we are far away from each other.

You wanted to become an astronaut, and among many things you do you are part of several collectives, you are running an art space, you host a radio show, you play in a feminist punk band, and you are building antennas. What are some projects of yours that you are in love with right now?

I just come back from two concerts we had with the band (**Lonesome Hot Dudes**, follow links to intriguing musicvideos to their songs "**Obey**" and "**Books**") in Vienna and Linz

and we are getting so much great feedback! It is always beautiful to see that young women really enjoy it and were jumping with us. The heart opens, there is no other way to describe that. I love this band because we are so heterogeneous, and we are a feminist band.

The Lonesome Hot Dudes, Photo: Alexandra Gschiel, image post production: Hicran Ergen

The other thing that I am doing is more like a solo thing at the moment. I really love doing art with other people and then I also enjoy doing projects where I am "the artist" - that doesn't mean that I do everything, but that I am in control of everything. That is sometimes really important because I think it is beautiful and challenging. I learn a lot when I am with others because we have to come to a conclusion that is not oppressing anything. If you and I do something together it would be different than doing it alone. But I also enjoy doing things alone because then I can improvise until the last second and things can change.

"So now I am building antennas"

So now I am building antennas since about 3 years. I am part of a team of people and we attempt to build a nano-satellite called **mursat.** Because of that I started learning more about transmitting information through magnetic fields. I also have a history in the pirate radio, and there is this technological relation. And so I started building antennas and learning about relations of a transmitting and a receiving source. I started building these antennas you can buy in a shop because I thought "DIY!" – I can do it myself. But I do not own professional tools and I question if I need to own professional tools, as they are expensive. I got frustrated and thought what am I doing? I could buy such an antenna

in a shop. That's a lot cheaper and takes less time. And so I decided I build antennas only I can build, as an artistic intervention.

With an antenna you are expecting to receive a certain frequency (Note: e.g. 92.6 MHz, the frequency of **Radio Helsinki** in Graz where Reni hosts shows). In my project I turned it around and I thought I'd build an antenna only I can build, and I built one that is really huge, I built **one that is 4.5 x 5 meters**, and the antenna structure is based on the hand lines of my left hand.

What I am doing is listening with my extended hand to what can be perceived. There are many more things out there than we know and who knows what's gonna happen there?

So recently I built an antenna with it's structure out of bamboo, and I covered it with copper, and I am going to build another one next week. And the bamboo I used I took from the exhibition place because I like developing my work from that what is already there. It has to do with choice, in this case choice being the possibility to get to know something without a direct commodification of this knowledge afterwards. The exhibition space for the next antenna has a lot of reed on its property, so I am going to use that material to again build a similar structure. This time it will be divided in two. So one part of the antenna will be working in one tree, and another part in another tree and there will be a sweet spot - if you stand there you see the both antennas ovelapping and thereby the entire antenna as it is meant to be.

Photo: Reni Hofmueller, KUNSTGARTEN 2018

It is amazing to do these things and to develop them. If I am alone, I can decide all that by myself and only have to negotiate with myself. With more complex collaborative structures you always have to negotiate which can be very time and work intensive. They say: “There is no feminist content in this”, for example the antennas. Then I say: ”Please, have a little bit of an open mindset”, because what I think is important is the attitude and set of thought behind it, that we bring into the things we do. Everything I do is embedded in feminist thoughts and feminist approaches to life. This is my humus and my ground base out of which all these things can grow.

Photo: Nikolaos Zachariadis, Reni Hofmueller in the background of her project RESONANZRAUM in the context of the art in public space project Comrade Conrade in Graz/Austria, 2018

PS: