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## Who is their person? Sex robot and change



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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.<sup>1</sup> 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. Roxxy, the sex robot manufactured by TrueCompanion, is available for

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<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

### 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.<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup> 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

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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. Robotist 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. Robotists 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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).

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<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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

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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 non-human 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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