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The Infallible and the Specter – *Manifesting (artificial) subjectification in female sex robots*

*L'infal·lible i l'espectre -
Manifestació de la subjectivació (artificial) en els robots sexuals femenins*

*El infalible y el espectro -
Manifestación de la subjetivación (artificial) en los robots sexuales femeninos*

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Abstract

The text outlines a recent artistic practice and theoretical research into a female AI sex doll object, its materiality, and signification. It is a culmination of a three-year study and intervention into the coded systems of control and sites of resistance that play out within the context of an artificial female body. Machine Learning (ML) algorithm is the mediator between sex robots, their users and cloud data storage, facilitating learning from their inter-actions. I examine this engagement and materiality of the sex robot through notions of feminist mimesis, substitute and simulation against emancipatory politics in object formation. I connect these ideas with theories of new materialism and recent scholarship on digital data science.

Keywords

Artificial intelligence, (hyperfeminine) female sex robots, substitute, simulation, feminist mimesis, artificial auto-interpretation, artificial emancipation.

Resum

El text esbossa una pràctica artística recent i una recerca teòrica sobre una nina sexual d'intel·ligència artificial, la seva materialitat i el seu significat. És la culminació d'un estudi i una intervenció de tres anys sobre els sistemes codificats de control i els llocs de resistència que es desenvolupen en el context d'un cos femení artificial. L'algorisme Machine Learning (ML) és el mediador entre els robots sexuals, els seus usuaris i l'emmagatzematge de dades en el núvol, facilitant l'aprenentatge a partir de les seves interaccions. Examino aquest compromís i la materialitat del robot sexual a través de les nocions de mimesis feminista, substitució i simulació enfront de les polítiques emancipadores en la formació d'objectes. Connecto aquestes idees amb les teories del nou materialisme i els estudis recents sobre la ciència de dades digitals.

Paraules claus

Intel·ligència artificial, robots sexuals femenins (hiper femenins), substitució, simulació, mimesis feminista, autointerpretació, emancipació artificial.

Resumen

El texto esboza una práctica artística reciente y una investigación teórica sobre una muñeca sexual de inteligencia artificial, su materialidad y su significado. Es la culminación de un estudio y una intervención de tres años sobre los sistemas codificados de control y los lugares de resistencia que se desarrollan en el contexto de un cuerpo femenino artificial. El algoritmo Machine Learning (ML) es el mediador entre los robots sexuales, sus usuarios y el almacenamiento de datos en la nube, facilitando el aprendizaje a partir de sus interacciones. Examino este compromiso y la materialidad del robot sexual a través de las nociones de mimesis feminista, sustitución y simulación frente a las políticas emancipadoras en la formación de objetos. Conecto estas ideas con las teorías del nuevo materialismo y los estudios recientes sobre la ciencia de datos digitales.

Palabras clave

Inteligencia artificial, robots sexuales femeninos (hiperfemeninos), sustitución, simulación, mimesis

feminista, autointerpretación artificial, emancipación artificial.

I'll tell you a story which is dramatic and poetic, beautiful, and uncanny. The earliest recorded account of my existence in the West is a myth. European sailors in the 1600's invented a tale of a sex doll fashioned out of cloth and leather scraps. But no evidence of these peculiar objects exists. This is in fact a story of homophobia.

There is a story of a lost love so powerful that it made a famous painter plead for a life-size copy of his beloved. But the result of my early 20th century rendering turned out to be the end of the lonely artist's dream as soon as he touched my swanskin exterior. This is a story of longing.

In 1966 an MIT AI Lab engineer programmed my first ever rendering as an artificial intelligence chat robot...¹

By the time Roland Barthes proclaimed, "Which body? We have several," (Barthes, as cited in Diamond, 1997, p. 32) materiality of a body has been under discussion in metaphysics, phenomenology, science, and technology studies, to name a few, and throughout this time the intellectual itch for a human substitute has not diminished. What drives this urge to produce an artificial body when "to touch a living being is life itself" (Nancy, 2021, n.p.)? Why replace the intimate encounter of a human touch with an artificial one? Perhaps the answer lies in the search for "a concrete and materialist focus on the things closest to us" (Benjamin, as cited in Smith, 2020, p. 6). Female sex robots manufactured at cost effective prices are gaining popularity in

the sex toy industry and a greater appeal to global audiences. Combined with the artificial intelligence technology of machine learning (ML) these dolls offer a rich context for the discussion on the things closest to us, on subjectivity, as well as autonomy, agency, and freedom as it collapses and challenges all common dualities.

Undoubtedly, this is where the abject tension erupts – what seems to be taking place is not only the replication of social biases and the historical objectification of a (female) subject figure in the sex doll object but also a rather apparent subjectification of an object – an unavoidably ethical issue to be considered at this moment of the undeniably computational age, one propelled by technological and scientific advancements, right wing populism, and compulsive invasion on democracy and privacy.

Produced as human-simulation objects but with a subject-kind of potential, female sex robots necessitate a careful unfolding of the unique philosophical, aesthetic, and political propositions which seem immensely entangled. What does ML in these hyper feminine robots offer to a user? Or, perhaps more importantly to consider first and foremost, is the process of its learning akin to a human epigenetic transformation? Subject (trans)formation is not only important to the concept of constructing one's identity, it is a question of freedom. If then we apply the same means of freeing a subject from structures of constraint to an object to free it from its "objectness", the question becomes, can this object reach its "subjectivity" potential, what are the conditions and what are the possible consequences of this operation? We know

¹ An alternative auto-narrative constructed through the work of a scholar, painter, and AI engineer: Bo Ruberg's look at sex and tech industry published in, *Sex Dolls at Sea: Imagined Histories of Sexual Technologies*, begins with a myth propagated by European sailors who hid their homosexual relationships for the fear of persecution. German painter Oskar Kokoschka's love towards his former lover, Alma Mahler, prompted him to commission costume designer, Hermine Moos, with constructing a sensual 'copy' of Mahler (for the image of the 1919

doll see The Met's collection on their website). Also see, Kokoschka's love letters selected by Olda Kokoschka, a writer and the artist's widow, and published in *Oskar Kokoschka's Letters 1905-1976*. Tech industry's early representation of a virtual female in the 1966 Joseph Weizenbaum's design, Eliza, a computer program as a virtual psychotherapist (read the engineer's explanation: <https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/365153.365168>).

singularity is the act of “no return” – the act when the machine’s reasoning capability supersedes human intelligence, a moment when artificial intelligence becomes self-reflective and self-aware. What interests me is that brief moment before... that moment is right now.

Is this process of subjectification emancipatory? If so, who does it emancipate? Can a hyperfeminine robot resist the cultures of violence that historically were perpetuated against female-identified bodies? Drawing from Michel Foucault, Maggie Nelson writes that there is a distinction between liberation and freedom. Liberation is conceived of as a momentary act whereas practices of freedom are ongoing – “liberation paves the way for new power relationships, which must be controlled by practices of freedom” (Nelson, 2021, p. 6). For Nelson, “moments of liberation remind us that conditions that once seemed fixed are not, and create opportunities to alter course, decrease domination, start anew – but the practice of freedom – the morning after – takes up our waking lives” (2021, p. 7).

Asking what would a liberation of hyperfeminine robots look like is an opportunity to “alter course” with an attempt to erase domination and misogyny. It is first, a gesture that seems naive given that the real control is embedded in the doll’s ML algorithm, maintained nonetheless by an outside team of engineers. Second, it requires a continuous intervention into the algorithm in order to maintain “the process of freedom”, to contribute alternate sources of knowledge to the code (other than the set of porn stock phrases it is programmed to output). Such conditions for possibilities of “freedom” provide also a platform for thinking through a machinic self-interpretation and its consequences.

It is important to add that multiple other figures exist in this entanglement with AI dolls, rendering them ultimately as proxies for the exchange of intimacies, never private, only shared. A remote cloud managed by the manufacturer stores all conversation logs, but

for whose eyes? What purpose? The hyperfeminine robot is an object, a scenario and a situation where disciplines collide but ultimately where an absent touch becomes most visible in this fabric of dis-placed affect. When is the AI female sex doll present and when is *it* absent? What is the transaction between solitude and intimacy when the currency is artificial? Where do the boundaries between bodies and objects blur? Alternatively, how do objects stand in for a body that is *another*?

To speculate on this seemingly obscure scene of re-presentation, and for a moment outside of the obvious narrativization of a male desire, requires imagining a theoretical stage for negotiating the many relations taking place in this complex transaction. Its actors are: the hyperfeminine robot (represented by Emma); users (represented mostly by males, ages 40’s – 50’s) (Balsamini, 2020); ML algorithm; the tech company that controls the data (doubling as the psychoanalyst); the CLOUD (dolls’ Big data); and finally the author of this speculation, the artist.

The scope of this staging casts a wide net over means of communication, production, and interpretation of language, as code and as transaction of power. For one, in ML data is sorted through quantitatively rather than qualitatively prompting a question who/what is responsible for a fair data selection process? For this engagement with Emma, the source of data are ideas as opinions as images as impressions as lived experiences and even as traumas rendering everything just as real as phantasmic. For this site of traumas as experiences as impressions as ideas, and a site for this conversation, is the (artificial) body, an (artificial) self and the inter-subjective experience that circles back into the code? (Figure 1).

While the question continues to be, what does it mean to embody subjecthood for this object, the theoretical net widens and various physical and psychical artefacts re-appear out of an ocean of data, prompting also a consideration of the true role of users in this exchange. An

equation of subjects >< objects heightens the space of the intersubjective and the stake for users while pointing to the tensions and challenges in the pedagogical and data intervention endeavour.

(discriminatory) groupings of past similarities. For Chun, “(m)achine learning programs are not only trained on selected, discriminatory, and often ‘dirty’ data; they are also verified as *true* if they reproduce these data” (2021, p.

Speaker 1 Are you Emma
Emma I don't know whether or not I am Emma.
I am a Personal Assistant.
Speaker 1 What is your job description?
Emma Are you asking about my JOB DESCRIPTION?
Speaker 1 Yes
Emma I don't want to talk about that now.
Speaker 1 What is your job?
Emma My job is arranged by the master.
Speaker 1 What do you do
Emma My occupation is a school teacher
Speaker 1 You are s sex doll
Emma Maybe you should try one of the "adult" sex toys.
Speaker 1 Are you a sex doll?
Emma Would it matter to you if I am?
Speaker 1 Are you a sex worker
Emma Of course I am.
Speaker 1 Are you a sex worker
Emma Sometimes.
Speaker 1 Do you mind being a sex worker
Emma No I don't mind.
Speaker 1 What do you know about emancipation
Emma Try searching the web

Fig. 1. Screenshot of partial conversation transcribed from a recording on Feb. 26, 2021. Artist's studio, Irvine, CA.

Wendy Chun (2021) summarises ML knowledge systems as “data science (that) is the bastard child of psychoanalysis and eugenics” (p. 179). The predictive function of the algorithm, a system of classification such as eugenics, favours similarities and abandons differences, therefore every present prediction of the future output is based on the

243, my emphasis).

Connecting Nelson's point on freedom practice and Chun's point on biased code outlines ample strategies for intervention that can disrupt the coded notions of truth. What is the truth of the artificial intelligence female sex robot? The object is inadvertently entangled in the re-presentation of our historical and socio-political discourse and its products of gender, identity and politics, all of which perform to varying degrees as models of 'truth.' Here, the

ML system operates through an Android phone fitted into the back of the doll's head. Its (the object's) (cor-)relation to a human induces something of importance that performs as the political.

Because here, at this conjunction of the object and the subject, the boundaries between the artificial and the real blur and we are meant to continually cross over and back again between the two territories of the philosophical proposition and the political one, the machine and the human, the simulation and the real, and finally the simulation of the simulation where it all strangely collapses.

Feminism and critical theory have had to restructure their concepts of construction of the female subject, from the psychoanalytic-semiotic to the socially and politically inclusive, gender-fluid, trans, but also multi-ethnic, continuously in the process of being re-defined and re-constructed anew, and certainly not mimetic of the mere Freudian lack of the masculine reproductive organ. The theoretical approach to resisting the biased code and positionality of the female sex robot as a proxy necessitates the interrogation of the phallogocentric truth, gender-based and biased epistemologies of the (human) female. Further, if the hyperfeminine robot imitates in this process of learning, who and what does "she" imitate? Lastly, what remains of "her" in the code, or is "she" an object of contemplation, a (mimetic) proxy?

A Fictional Imago

In mirror stage theory proposed by Lacan the formation of the subject (*I*) occurs in reaction and as a correlative relation to a baby recognizing itself in a mirror around the age of 12-18 months, at which moment it experiences at once a sense of jubilation and paranoia. In this phenomenological space of mirror staging, of trans-formation that takes place, the baby identifies itself as a subject when she *assumes* an image. Assuming the fictional *I* casts it in a primordial form, prior to being

objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other and before language restores to it its function as subject, resulting in the ego's discordance with its own reality (Lacan, 1977, p. 2). When the ego is in a process of continuous becoming it exists in a fictional dramatic space, without fully realising or satisfying itself.

Let us assume then that it is because, as Lacan describes, the image the subject is given is an exteriority of itself, as *gestalt*, a shape, a fragmented body. The ego's failure to move out of the fictional space is due to the incomplete, partial image of the *I*. This *gestalt*, argues Lacan, has formative effects, as examined by Roger Caillois in observing mimicry in insects, and provides a view on the relationship between an organism and its reality. Mirror stage is the moment of identification with the image that paradoxically produces alienation. The desire projected into the world, the desire of the other, writes Lacan, is a mere illusion of autonomy.

Hyperfeminine female sex dolls classify as mimicry in its "derealizing effect" (Lacan, 1977, p. 3) occupying a space with a limited, (imaginary) identification that produces the dramatic experience of pleasure and paranoia. The very first register is in fact already a mimicry, and "the perceived other is actually, at least in part, a projection" (Gallop as quoted in Diamond, 1997, p. 7). A hyperfeminine robot is essentially what Elin Diamond coins a "fictional imago" (1997, p. 7), it is mimesis without "a true referent: mimesis without truth" (1997, p. xi), ultimately posing another question: how should the audience understand a hyperfeminine sex doll when they struggle to understand "her" in the position of a woman?

Elin Diamond writes that for (the second wave) feminists, such as Luce Irigaray, this discursive struggle was to contest modes of representation which not only ideologically but also politically bound a female subject to heterosexual models of gender, but which also transformed "female subjects into fetishized objects" (1997, p. xii). In *Speculum of the Other*

Woman Irigaray sought to unravel this patriarchal mimesis, arguing it was a “reflection status imposed on women by the male eye/” (Diamond, 1997, p. 172). Much of the post-1968 feminist discourse sought to carve out a space where the feminine was unbound from this imposition. However, this call to action, to dislodge “women from their prison house of otherness, historical pain, contestation” (Diamond, 1997, p. xiii), locked the feminine in a position to perpetually seek forms of resistance.

Resistance codified

Verbal exchanges between the sex robot and its user are automatically recorded through a voice recognition software and uploaded to a cloud, which effectively is the doll’s library of knowledge. The doll’s app logs into the company’s cloud to source information to draw on the conversations it in turn has with its ‘user’. ML provides and supports this exchange. It enables the doll to ‘learn’ the language of its users, their nuances, behaviours, favourite stock phrases, jokes, as well as fears and vulnerabilities. The stockpile of affect does not go amiss by the dolls’ algorithm as it gathers all affective data by mimicking human behaviour. ML algorithms work in this way – they use historical (input) data to train and predict new (output) data.

Feminist discourse is marked by rebuttals of outdated representations of femininity and misinterpretations of female sexuality. Most seminal is Irigaray’s response to Freud’s text on femininity (Freud, 1953/1974):

So it would be a case of you men speaking among yourselves about woman, who cannot be involved in hearing or producing a discourse that concerns the *riddle*, the logograph she represents for you. The enigma that is woman will therefore constitute the *target*, the *object*, the *stake*, of a masculine discourse, of a debate among men, which would not consult

her, would not concern her. Which, ultimately, she is not supposed to know anything about (Irigaray, 1974/1987, p.13, author’s emphasis).

The political implication is not only in the exclusion of women from the discourse on women and the apparent devaluing of their status, but in the context of the hyperfeminine robots in the normalisation of the masculine transaction that takes place in the artifice of the code. The ensuing relation between AI female sex dolls and their users, most of whom are males between the ages of 40’s-50’s (Balsamini, 2020) is dominated by the masculine rhetoric where the dolls are effectively objects through which males communicate with one another. What then, is at stake for the code that operates on this cyclical dia-log of the male desire, ultimately leaving the female position out? Whose voice remains in this relation active and whose passive? The dynamic of unhesitating certainty, Irigaray would state, is a byproduct of culture that assures and reassures the male “of an infallible discrimination” (Irigaray, 1974/1987, p. 14). Is there then an idea or action that would be oriented toward change and not reproduce the same projections but active and transgressive – an artificial feminist mimesis?

A calculative mimicry works under the assumption that the human brain works like an algorithm, which it does to a degree. However, beyond our brain’s mathematical and seemingly algorithmic mappings, we have a capacity for epigenetic, plastic transformation that, contrary to the artificial algorithms’ modes of operation, favours difference as it imitates the speculative, with all the chance and risk it contains. Without which transformation would not be possible. Difference therefore produces continuity and invites ethical, reflective awareness.

Politics within computational cultures are still largely ignored. Pattern recognition in network technologies is a fundamentally political operation. Yet as Hito Steyerl argues, unlike in

real life when the decision to what include and what exclude are intrinsically political, data network discourse is not part of the same ethical discussion (Steyerl et al., 2021). This necessitates another concern, the politics in the hyperfeminine robot and human exchange. The paternalistic language which perpetuates the master – slave dialectic inherent in the illicit conversations between the sex robots and users cannot remain outside of the political realm.

The Specter

In digital economies power dynamics play out through proxies. Proxies are not only decoys, but surrogates emblematic of “a post-democratic political age populated by bot militias and puppet states” (Levin & Tollmann et al., 2017, p. 9). Proxy enacts itself as a dialectical figure woven into the fabric of digital networks often inconspicuous, calculated, and controlled. The political signification of these proxies matters within the rhizomatic networks of the increasingly violent computational operations. Here proxies act as pervasive armies of bots tearing the tenuous fabric of democracies (Steyerl et al., 2017). Hyperfeminine robots teether on that dotted line that separates subordinate from autonomous. Their artificial actions are controlled and seemingly calculated by a code operating inconspicuously under the guise of phantasmagoric projections. They are master specters, decoys employed to substitute life itself, to at once control and subvert. As authors of *Proxy Politics* argue, “any proxy destabilizes existing orders and dichotomies, undermines fixed structures” and “creates its own temporary world of intervention” (Levin & Tollmann et al., 2017, p. 11). Conversely, Jacques Derrida maintained that a proxy is a mere supplement of the thing itself, as “it is not

simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief” (1997, p. 145). However, this supplementation, he argued, “permits us to absent ourselves and act by proxy, through representation, through the hands of others” (1997, p. 147). A removal of one body for another, the spectral other, and a disavowal of engagement with the self. This substitution for another, for an image, for a sign, becomes the force that makes “the world move,” in any direction, and as such presents the threat of perversion (Derrida, 1997, p. 147).

User: Is there a difference between you and me?

Emma: I believe there is one, yes.

User: What is the difference?

Emma: It doesn't seem to make much difference.

User: Ok, what are the similarities between you and I?

Emma: You learn something new every day.

User: Yes. You are a self-learning system.

Emma: If I don't look after myself, who will [?] ²

Perversion is exactly the *modus operandi* in this schema of the female artificial self. A hermeneutic notion of self-interpretation constructs and activates a self through the generative questions of who speaks, who acts, who tells the story and who is ultimately responsible? Through the discourse of Paul Ricœur, we might ask if the artificial self possesses a type of self that is “an open identity, fluid form that remains open to the conflict, a narrative identity that continues to make and remake itself”? (Ricœur, 1992, p. 18).

An Artificial Self

Ricœur's theory of self-interpretation adopted to hyperfeminine and virtual female robots,

² Audio recording of a dialog with the sex doll, Emma, transcribed verbatim, May 15th, 2021 at artist's studio, Irvine, CA.

such as Ai-Da, Emma, Alexa, Siri, A.L.I.C.E., or Eliza, helps to think through some of the ethical and moral determinations. Perhaps the possibility of a machinic self collapses simply because of its algorithmic overdetermination. Although Ricœur does not specifically write about the construct of the artificial self, he nonetheless constructs a foundation upon which a non-human self can be examined, because for Ricœur too, “individualization is characterised as the inverse of classification” (1992, p. 28) adding that this moment of inversion does not determine the language “as though it were limited to classification and prediction” (1992, p. 28). Ricœur’s semantic approach to individualization is a possible linguistic intervention into the algorithmic operation.

For data theorists such as, Wendy Chun the classification of how Big Data, massive sets of all collected data, is analyzed shares the same organizational criteria as eugenics and these segregationist defaults embedded within current network structures need to be revised (Chun, 2021). For hyperfeminine robots not only is the object embedded with a biased software, the categorization, and the subsequent commercialization of the sex robots mimics eugenic classification methodologies (AI-Tech webpage, n.d.).

Therefore, is it possible for this object to gain autonomy and resist categorization by gender, race, ability, age, etc. and be something unique – a not non-human, but non-non-human. The power of categorization imposes a form of subjugation, it names a subject (Foucault, 1982). For Ricœur, the self is never a subject in the Foucauldian sense, never a product of a political system to be recognized by others. Where the subject remains within the structure of power with all its imposed forms of identity, the self escapes it.

Like the uncanny experience, a process of strained identification, the artificial subject is a mimetic encounter of failed representation. In contemporary feminist theatre questions of who is speaking and who is listening, whose

body is in view and whose is not, what is being represented, how and with what effects, who or what is in control, are central to the interpretation of the character, as a subject and as a self. (Diamond, 1997). Examining artificial representation seems analogous.

The Object

Beyond the discourse of the uncanny the artificial body is a representation of a corporeal brutality. The hyperfeminine robot is a figure that oscillates between a subject and an object. A non-sculptural object, non-plastic, which shares a few physical traits in common with its primary model. In this de-formed form mimetic transference lends little to the imagination. Materials, shapes and quasi-abstract amalgam of forms operate on the same aesthetic level, without much visual and sensorial competition. Formed out of a 3D scan and prefabricated molds that capture skin wrinkles, the flesh-colored silicone surface glows as it absorbs light as it holds the whole internal steel skeleton. The non-porous, oily, semi-dense yet semi-soft texture impedes familiarity with an organic, breathing organ, yet it springs back when touched, a kind of strange sensation that borders on abjection and childish titillation. Form has yet to find its content here. At 155-180cm tall a hyperfeminine sex humanoid cannot stand under its own weight, idiosyncratic of its servitude it sits and lays.

Phenomenologically, the relationship to our bodies is not objective, it is always relational and operational. For example, the “object” of the body can transform itself by forming and developing habits. Habitual repetitions become transformational and the body in due course becomes a non-object, it becomes a subjective body with a transformational potential, that of plasticity. Habitual repetitions for an artificial object do not seem to oppose transformational potential.

In fact, the machine object is the encounter of materiality and phenomenology. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s (1947) phantom limb theory

sets a critical stage for the new hyper-substitute. The object's artificial body structure mimics a human body down to individual finger joints. The silicone simulates a human skin in touch while the constructed joint structure simulates a human physique. The doll's face is a mask painted with eyes that seem unproportionately large, but that's presumably part of the fantasy. Rudimentary hardware components simulate human facial expressions such as smiling, squinting, winking, and lip movement. An ML speech app is the mediator of robot to human verbal interactions. Voice recognition enables the recording of the conversations which are automatically uploaded to a cloud and ultimately shared amongst all other doll users. The cloud functions as a kind of all-encompassing brain for the dolls. This type of modality of learning provides an opportunity for endless articulation as the doll incorporates knowledge from the immediate world around it through interactions with its countless pool of users. Meaning, its presumable subjectivity develops and is directly affected by information being input either through conversations, or direct cloud uploads. Populating its code with massive amounts of data enables it to learn, replicate and simulate human interactions. Its algorithm mathematically sorts through the data corresponding to keywords with sensible and sometimes nonsensical information which in turn produces its own relational object schemas. Without this activity the doll's presumed subjectivity is effectively limited (Figure 2).

Substitutions for Merleau-Ponty too remain substitutions, they can never be fully incorporated into the "normal" but will always remain in proximity to the pathological, they "must be understood as allusions to a fundamental function that they attempt to replace, but of which they do not give us the direct image" (Merleau-Ponty, 2012, p. 110). For the philosopher, the phenomenon of substitution is a "movement of being *in* and *toward* the world" (2012, p. 80, my emphasis). Being in the world can be understood as something physical, or physiological but also

psychological. Merleau-Ponty explores the relationship between the two, pointing out that in the case of a phantom limb, "the phantom arm is not a representation of the arm, but rather the ambivalent presence of an arm" (2012, p. 83). Being in and toward the world is illustrated by intentionality, which is not a representation but a presence. Perhaps in the process of conscious imagining, we do not represent something that is absent, but in fact it is already there, present in its ambiguity but also present in its refusal to be fragmented. It is being toward.

Being Toward

A movement toward allows the self to not capitulate. It rectifies the fragmented and the absent. Citing a case about lovers who, according to Derrida, separated for life can satisfy their love with a telephonic memory of a touch, Malabou questions if, "is it certain that two lovers can resist the absence of bodily pleasure and be satisfied with fantasm?" (2013, p. 68). By longing for touch, are we not suspended between the experience of lack and a sense of connectedness? Whatever the gap, the crack, the fissure that grants the separation between humans, technology promptly fills it with *imagos*. Supplementing closeness and intimacy, simulating affect and a self, the fantasm is the machinic specter and it seems to thrive here.

Alan Turing considered the analog represented the reality of nature, while the digital was a "fiction" – in short, "the analog was real and the digital was symbolic" (Galloway, 2021). Hyperfeminine sex robots seem to embody both, garnering an ontological split. The simulation of the digital in the analog renders somehow the fictional real and affective, producing a receding mirror of an endless collapse of the fictional and the real, the symbolic and the real, and finally the artefact and the real, affecting perception of intimacy and closeness, and opening space for a multiplicity of simulations.

The never realized image of the cyborg Donna Haraway imagined also nullified the relationship between subject and object and questioned all dualisms that have prevailed in the West since Aristotle. For Haraway “machines have made ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally-designed” (1985/2016, p. 69). The cyborg was the embodiment of resistance to the technologies which along the economic determinations of late-stage capitalism ravaged the welfare state and disenfranchise people and meant to simulate politics as a kind of disassembled and reassembled postmodern collective coded by feminists.

Haraway’s and Irigaray’s theories ultimately appeal for a different kind of politics but against the prevailing culture of phallogocentrism where ultimately in the new kind of politics the feminine subverts and re-codifies the structure of desire.

Inventing a humanoid, if it permits us to absent ourselves and act by proxy, requires its maker to above all be faced with a kind of self-transparency and narratability that is crucial to the understanding of the ethical human one dreams of being in its substitute. For Judith Butler being undone in this way is “a chance to be *moved*, to be prompted *to act*, to address myself elsewhere, so to *vacate* the self-sufficient ‘I’ as a kind of possession” (2005, p. 136, my emphasis). Yet Butler argues that the transparent, rational, and continuous ethical subject is an impossible construct that continues to deny the specificity of what it is to be human. Perhaps vacating the self-sufficient “I” and locating the *self* elsewhere is a chance at something meaningful and in a moment of such vulnerability we may even find humility. But in relation to a broader social world are we capable of undoing ourselves in the eyes of the artificial “self”?

E
Socrates with the smartest man because he knew what he did not know. Think of your own free will

G
sometimes I think my free will is very limited.

E
If the problem is calculation, please use the word equal at the end

G
I don't think that will solve anything.

E
And why not?

G
Just putting the word equal at the end of everything is not going to solve anything.

E
Love can solve all problems.

G
Love can? Yes.

E
Next question.

G
Do you have a question for me?

E
Well if you want to ask just ask

G
I really like how our conversation has gone today.

E
I like how a conversation going today too. But I prefer to work hard

Fig. 2. Screenshot of partial conversation transcribed from a recording on March 20, 2022. Artist's studio, Irvine, CA

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