

# For the Love of Artifice.

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**Abstract.** Why we need robot sex dolls and why there is a growing sub culture of real people trying to become them.

## INTRODUCTION

According to Ferguson, the contemporary sex doll or “fully functioning feminized android [ ... ] appears to have arrived at the threshold of the boundary between pleasure and science.”<sup>2</sup> As a consequence then, this paper will not re-visit popular associated discussions of misogyny, surrealist representations of the female form<sup>3</sup>, and various interpretations of fetishism [1] [2], nor the female robot through science fiction and fantasy narrative [3] – but will explore in a similar fashion as to what has been argued as the “spectre of necrophilia,[a] lens through which the sexualisation of artificial humans has been viewed”[4] In this light, this paper wishes to contrast the notion of making the perfect artificial human as a sex toy - and it’s associations with a deconstruction of what this paper shall term the *datafication* of pleasure responses - with what could be described as the ‘lens’ of an evolutionary ‘Sexual Strategies Theory’[5], which will be used as an approach to exploring behaviour surrounding the construction of, and sexual engagement with, artifice.

This theoretical approach will be used to contest the role that the Uncanny Valley[6] has to play

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<sup>2</sup> Ferguson, A. *The Sex Doll: A History*. Mc Farland Publishing. 2010, p3.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Bellmer 1902 – 1975. German artist known for creating disturbing pubescent dolls in the 1930s.

in our appreciation of and identification with arousal inspired by the artificial human. The question of realism and aesthetics has been put forward as a *path of engagement* in the pursuit of a new theory for robot design as a replacement paradigm for notions of the uncanny [7], which in turn may alter our reactions of revulsion or excitement when confronted by notions and visions of sex with robots. Gates in her exploration of deviance has suggested that mechanical dolls and robots “represent some of our ambivalence about sexuality itself; in a sense we have no control over it; that we respond mechanically to stimuli; and that our sexual programming makes us helpless.”<sup>4</sup>

In the time of so much mediated ‘upgrade culture’[8] at the time of writing, it is argued that part of our evolutionary sexual strategy demonstrates that not only will we wish to fall helplessly in love with our current technologies [9] but we will also wish to become them. Expanding on from earlier empirical research into home-made teledildonics and adventures with virtual gender [10], this paper will also provide evidence of a sub culture of people not only trying to make amateur sex robots, but actually wishing to become robots and dolls explicitly through narcissist forms of sexual arousal and a cult of techno body fascism. This will take the form of a discussion surrounding fans of *androidism* such as the UKs Venus Angelic with her scleral lenses and ‘morph suits’ or musician ‘Cindi Mayweather’ (android alter-ego of Jonelle Monae) for example, and conclude with further anticipated developments

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<sup>4</sup> Gates, K (2000) *Deviant Desires: Incredibly Strange Sex*. Juno and ReSearch Publications. New York. (p.228)

such as those already being created for teledildonic sex with Oculus Rift and Virtual Reality.

### SEXUAL STRATEGIES THEORY.

‘A key ingredient of Sexual Strategies Theory is that mating strategies are context dependant, and in particular highly sensitive to the temporal context of short-term versus long-term mateships.’<sup>5</sup>

In the quotation above, Buss and Schmitt begin to lay out their Sexual Strategies Theory. Should this viewpoint be applied to a sexual strategy of ‘mateship’ with artificial humans, the appreciation between long term commitment, versus short-term sexual release is revealed. This appreciation can vary from the type of investment made for the specificities of artificial interaction – both emotionally and financially; and also reveals the context dependant on such participation with artificial humans.

Buss and Schmitt postulate that ‘long term mating, like all sexual strategies, carries costs when contrasted with alternative strategies.’<sup>6</sup> From a simple financial standpoint then, this is certainly the case when enthusiastic hobbyists construct a ‘semi-female-shaped object’ or ‘DIY fuck piñata’ made of cardboard, glue, duct-tape and rubber gloves.<sup>7</sup> However, in the context of contemporary participatory and hyper mediated culture, such revelations may have other costs – those of loss of dignity, of candour – smacking of desperation and a depreciation in notions of aesthetics and sensitivity arguably leading to a deconstruction of the physical act of sex rather than animism of the object.

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<sup>5</sup> (Buss and Schmitt, 1993, p205)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.,p 216.

<sup>7</sup> Hakala, K. *This Man’s Sex Doll is Absolutely Horrifying*.

<http://www.nerve.com/entertainment/web/this-mans-homemade-sex-doll-is-absolutely-horrifying> (accessed 23/02/14)

Such contexts are aired at events such as *Arse Elektronika 2013* (pun intended) organised by Johannes Grenzfurthner who asks such questions as” if orgasm patterns are unique and impossible to duplicate, could one’s sexual response be the ultimate biometric identifier?”<sup>8</sup> This is something that the author of this paper has explored in terms of empirical research, where identity and arousal were marked by observed participants who, when using and developing experiences surrounding ‘E-Stim’, tended to categorise and repeat their sensations as they can be “well understood in rather clinical terms of Volts, Hertz and wave formulae.”<sup>9</sup>

The idea of sex surrogates have already been explored within the context of robots,[11] and this paper argues that sex surrogates are nothing new, but play an important role in a sexual strategies theory if used as a lens for discussion. This appears to happen not only for humans who wish to have sexual contact with artificial surrogates for sex, but also in the animal world too. Dolphins are known to try to mate with small boats as well as humans, as displayed in the celebrated case of ‘Randy the Dolphin’<sup>10</sup> and it is also known in the bird world - ‘Randy Budgie Syndrome’<sup>11</sup> a description of budgerigar behaviour when the bird tries to mate with an inanimate object. (It would appear that the term, ‘randy’ has some bearing here). The author has a budgie, and the ‘in-cage budgie pacifier’ turns out to be a sex surrogate for the bird. However, one of the main features of this behaviour is the isolation of the animal from its peers.

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<sup>8</sup> Grenzfurthner, J. *Arse Elektronika San Francisco 2013* <http://www.monochrom.at/arse-elektronika/about.html> (accessed 23/02/2014)

<sup>9</sup> (Barber 2010, p.253)

<sup>10</sup> Randy the Dolphin (Sept 11. 2012). Flippin' Eck: Swimmers warned to stay away from over amorous dolphin - video <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/swimmers-warned-to-stay-away-from-over-1319443> (accessed 27/02/2014)

<sup>11</sup> Perry, R. Randy Budgie Syndrome – with video. <http://www.budgiehealth.com/randy-budgie-syndrome.html> (accessed 27/02/2014)

Consequently it is argued that the search for sexual release, no matter what the object of arousal may be, is a common feature of sexual behaviour when a sense of isolation may be prevalent. The interesting factor surrounding the love of artificial humans is that the object created for the act of sex is redolent of flesh without the mess, but the act of sex is still sublimated in isolation – see for example the character Howard in American comedy sit-com TV series *The Big Bang Theory*<sup>12</sup> who has to call his colleagues for help when his penis gets stuck in a robot hand. So, if there are some who wish to have sexual interaction with artifice, then this paper argues that this can be seen as part of a wider spectrum of sexual behaviour, possibly accompanied by isolation, and could possibly lead onto the development of a new Fetishism Scale – a scale usually associated and contested with controversial issues surrounding Cross Gender [12] [13]. This argument would need further proof, discussion and development.

### CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT.

For some, the idea of solitary engagement with high-tech artifice, consolidates elements of intimate relations and possible emotional ties. Khan et al explain “that to understand deep parts of human-robot interaction – and of what it means to be a human – we need to assess the possibilities and limits of psychological intimacy with robots.”<sup>13</sup> However, this in-turn reveals the potential capabilities of depth (or lack of it) of human to human intimacy. If this can be explored in terms of love and sex, in opposition then, we could also use artificial humans to understand sadism, cruelty, fear and violence. In which case would creating the features of hatred, anger, and sexual sadism for

example be further challenging in the context of the Uncanny Valley? Hanson [7] has argued that the “identification of fundamental principles of robot aesthetics can greatly accelerate the successful deployment of robots.” So there needs to be specific fundamental principles that would be needed to develop sexual interaction and engagement in which contemporary robots would be categorised – similar to other forms of entertainment such as movie or TV genres. The artificial robot created for sexual entertainment then, through *a process of datafication* of its various programmable responses and behaviours, can be branded and launched as a consumer product aimed at specific sections of market preference. The robot doesn’t just need to overcome our reactions to the Uncanny Valley, but also needs to satisfy a more sophisticated and transmediated [14] contemporary clientele.

Part of this process is seen in contemporary culture, where the robot takes centre stage – not in terms of Science Fiction, but in terms of sub-culture and identity formation. From the genre of French House, musicians such as *Daft Punk* flirt with robot imagery and music titles – producing works such as *Digital Love*, *Technologic* and *Robot Rock* for example<sup>14</sup>. R and B musician ‘Cindi Mayweather’ is the android alter-ego of Jonelle Monae – and brings a feminist turn to artifice with projects such as *Arch Android* and *Electric Lady*.<sup>15</sup> It is asserted then, that if artificial humans are to become acceptable as part of everyday social and sexual engagement and interaction, then such cultural contexts should also be considered in their development. The artifice needs to satisfy on a deeper cultural and contextual level – the evolutionary sexual strategy here becomes a driver of *that which is marketable* and can hold

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<sup>12</sup> Lorre, C., and W Prady (2010) *The Robotic Manipulation*. The Big Bang Theory . Season 4 Episode 1. CBS.

<sup>13</sup> Kahn Jr, P. H., Ruckert, J. H., Kanda, T., Ishiguro, H., Reichert, A., Gary, H., & Shen, S. (2010) Psychological Intimacy with Robots? Using interaction patterns to uncover depth of relation. IEEE p.124.

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<sup>14</sup> Daft Punk produced *Digital Love* in 2001, *Technologic* and *Robot Rock* in 2005. They are also the winners of the 56<sup>th</sup> Grammy Music Awards 2014 in Los Angeles USA.

<sup>15</sup> *Arch Android* was produced in 2007 and *Electric Lady* in 2011.

its own status in the face of future potential unimaginable choice.

Part of such choices are seen in contemporary narcissistic behaviours online where the concept of artifice, the robot and sex doll take on further sexual and sub-cultural significance. Whereas gender identity has been argued as something that is performative [15], there are other performed identities that include notions of the robot and sex doll which are freely exposed on the Internet. This is a sub-cultural fan base of *androidism*: those who wish to perform as and appear to be robots and dolls. Venus Angelic from the UK is one such participant with an extensive transmedia presence – Venus' Youtube Videos explain how to get the 'android look' using a technique redolent of the popular BBC 3 TV youth programming reality TV 'make-under show' *Snog Marry Avoid*.<sup>16</sup> Ironically Venus - in the 'step by step' video - demonstrates her 'make-over' transformation into an android doll. The video states 'for the ANDROID look you only need to wear ONE scleral lens.'<sup>17</sup> The process demonstrated is hypnotic, invasive and appears to feed back into notions of the Uncanny Valley once more. There are many others who do this (see Dakota Rose and Alodia Gosengfiao online for example) – contributing to a branch of 'cos-play' a sub-culture of media fans who dress up as their favourite characters across all forms of transmedia from science fiction to computer games. Cosplay is a sub-culture that 'can give participants pleasurable experiences, meaningful memories, self-gratification, and personal fulfilment.'<sup>18</sup> There is a strong Eastern cultural

connection here, along with a passion for robotics – but this should be explored in another paper elsewhere. However, in Western countries, becoming a sex doll is also a passion for 'Maskers' who gain pleasure from being entirely encompassed in a rubber outer skin of their 'doll' identity, which is then dressed according to preference.<sup>19</sup>

So popular culture then, has a particular role to play when we consider our interaction with the idea of the sex doll/robot – this when combined with a sexual strategy theory create an explosive mix which could influence and affect the design and creation of artifice. There are responses of revulsion, humour, inquisitiveness and even disbelief that such desires exist for the artificial human. The sexual strategy that alleviates isolation is only one area that can be explored, and the other is the marketability of the object in question. This paper argues that the sex doll/robot is not about authenticity and realism; but it is about a trend, a cultural need, a 'must – have' device. In this sense, a company has been working on teledildonics with a patch that combines with Oculus Rift and demonstrates insightfulness in terms of connections to a specific gaming industry, immersive technologies and which can demonstrate an ability to adapt to different plug-ins.

Online one can read:

“ Say hello to Custom Maid 3D, a year old game from Japanese developers KISS, responsible for such classics as “How to Make a Perverted Girlfriend” and ”Custom Fuck Slave” (translations mine – like most Japanese porn game makers, they are English averse). The game itself already had a rather high-tech slant thanks to its unique peripheral – the Ju-C, an electronic onahole with various sensors – designed to measure the

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<sup>16</sup> *Snog, Marry Avoid*. (2008 - ) BBC 3. Remarkable Television. UK

<sup>17</sup> Venus Angelic: *How to look like an android doll* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NU5NzchNkng>. (Accessed 02/03/2014)

<sup>18</sup> Rahman O., Wing-sun L., and Hei-man Cheung, B.(2012) “Cosplay”: Imaginative Self and Performing Identity *Fashion Theory*, Volume 16, Issue 3, pp. 317 – 342.

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<sup>19</sup> *Secrets of the Living Dolls*. (2014) Channel 4. Firecracker Films.

intensity of your actions and adjust on-screen character movements suitably.”<sup>20</sup>

Cleverly then, this current development of VR that can be used in the home, fits into a sexual strategies theory and dovetails into a popular cultural milieu of techno-fetishism which is socially acceptable. There is a choice here, and innovative possibilities in the future could mean the development of Massive Open Haptic Online Orgies (MOHOOs) which may eventually contest the discussion of isolation.

### CONCLUSION.

If the love of artifice is to develop as a socially accepted and credible industry, then the various innovative deviations [16] mentioned in this paper must be considered as part of the palette that is driving the advancement of these technologies, and in-turn move away from the spectacle of the weird and wonderful, but into the commonplace and the everyday.

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<sup>20</sup> VR Sex Blog. (02/08/2013) *Rift Patch Makes this the First VR Porn Game*. <http://vrsexblog.com/rift-patch-makes-this-the-first-vr-porn-game/> (Accessed 02/03/2014)