

SEX AND THE HUMANIFORM ROBOT: BETWEEN SCIENCE FICTION AND ROBOSEXUALITY

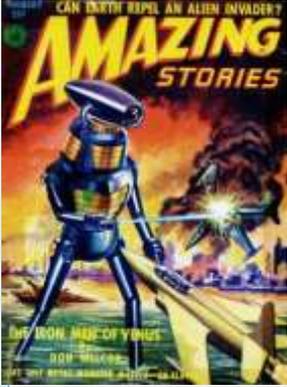
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NOTE: This is my presentation for the Forum 'Robotics Meets the Humanities', organized by Dr. Giulio Sandini, Dr. Carme Torras and Dr. Yoshi Nakamura for the International Conference on Intelligent Robots (IROS) 2018, celebrated in Madrid (1-5 October 2018). The video of the Catalan version of this talk, presented at CatCon (24 November 2018) can be seen at https://youtu.be/O_i0hkkCaYA

The title of my talk is, as you can see, 'Sex and the Humaniform Robot: Between Science Fiction and Robosexuality'. I must clarify that when I started preparing this presentation, a few months ago, I had not even heard of the label 'robosexuality'. I'm a Gender Studies specialist, used to the constant proliferation of new identities, but this is one of the most puzzling labels I have come across, since it defines human sexuality in reference to the non-human, specifically the robot.

SF and Robotics

- **SF**
 - science fiction (Gernsback)
 - speculative fiction (Heinlein)
 - 'What if...?' > 'Let's take it for granted that...'
 - Robotics in SF: shrinking time lapse
 - Surprising come-back Asimovian laws and issues

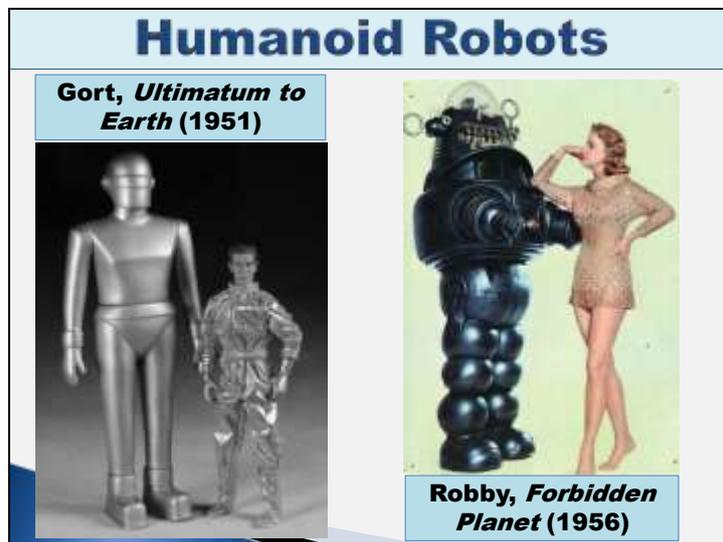


The initials SF may equally correspond to science fiction (a label invented in the 1920s by Hugo Gernsback, editor of *Amazing Stories*, actually as 'scientifiction'), or to speculative fiction, an alternative label proposed by author Robert Heinlein in the 1940s.

Whether you prefer one or the other, the fact is that SF always operates on the principle of the supposition: 'What if...?' I believe, rather, that SF as a narrative genre 'takes something for granted' and only then asks 'what if..?' Thus, SF takes advanced humaniform robots for granted and then asks 'what if we could interact with robots at a fully emotional level, including sex?'

What is happening right now in SF is that the time lapse between narration and invention is fast shrinking and, so, there has been a surprising come-back of Asimovian

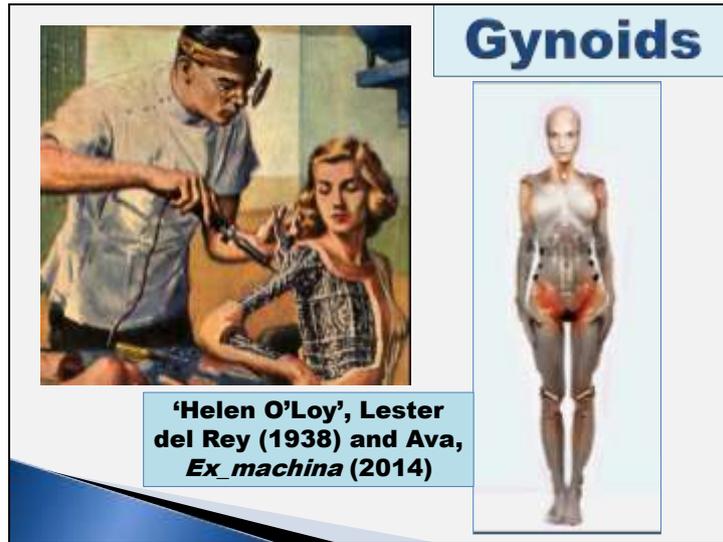
laws and issues, which many thought a matter of the quaint past. Isaac Asimov (1939-1992) imagined, as you know, fully sentient humanoid robots controlled by his famous Three Laws of robotics and this is a figure re-emerging from SF's past to be part of our robosexual present and future, as I'll show.



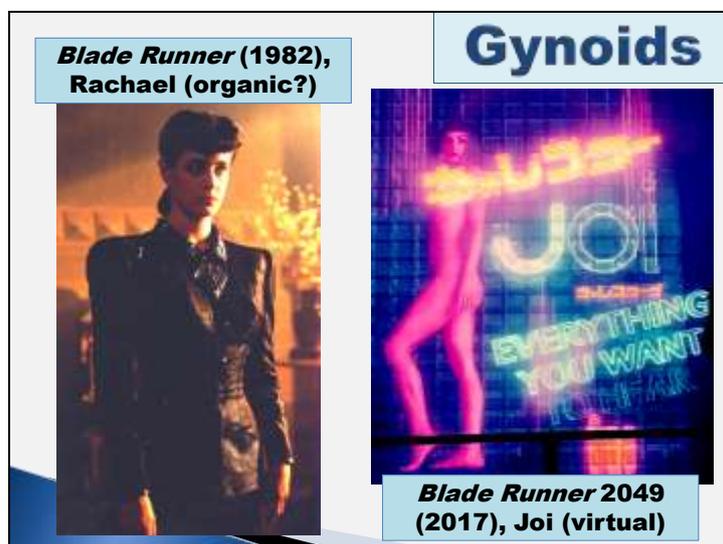
This has not happened in a neat chronological sequence, but the fact is that the human imagination has not only given vaguely human shape to robots but also, quite absurdly, specific gender attributes.



It might seem that the gendering of robots has mainly affected the female body but I'll argue that we are actually ignoring (or missing) the discourse on the humanoid male body. This is richer than we might expect, if we only know where to look.



The gynoid has occupied much space in SF and its feminist criticism mainly because the (until recently) majority of male authors have expressed blatant sexual fantasies through her. An early instance, 'Helen O'Lois', tells a romantic tale of two men falling in love with a gynoid they have created, which today seems even charming in comparison to the ruthless sexual exploitation in stories like Alex Garland's film *Ex Machina*. From a feminist point of view, Ava is a much more positive figure of empowerment than the passive Helen but I worry about the disrespect that Ava's male maker shows towards his creation in comparison to how Helen is loved.



Another kind of negative transition in the discourse around the gynoid can be seen in the two versions of *Blade Runner*, in which we pass from the unique construction that Rachel is, to the generally available virtual Joi, another blatant sexist fantasy.

Androids

A.I. (2001), Gigolo Joe





Making Mr. Right
(1987), Ulysses

Of course, many objected that the new *Blade Runner* is sexist because it offers a Joi but not a Joe. The androids as sex objects are indeed present in this discourse on robotics and sexuality but only in minor roles. We see Gigolo Joe providing his services in Spielberg's film but this is not its focal point and, in essence, little has changed since the 1980s, when the idea of 'making Mr. Right' was the object of comedy (by director Susan Seidelman).

Issues

- **MAIN ISSUE: How the application of robotics and a.i. to sex dolls will increase misogyny**
- **International Congress on Love and Sex with Robots (IV)**
<http://loveandsexwithrobots.org/>, Matt McMullen, CEO of Realbotix
- **Kathleen Richardson, Prof. Ethics and Culture of Robots and AI (De Montfort University),**
<https://campaignagainstsexrobots.org/>



Dr. Sergi Santos
and sexbot
Samantha

The debate on how we are sexualizing robots has now become serious and urgent, though its focus is how the application of robotics and a.i. to sex dolls will increase misogyny, with (radical feminist) androphobia occupying very little space in public discussion.

You may have heard already of the notorious Dr. Sergi Santos and his home-made sexbot Samantha, whose appearance tells us everything we need to fear about this misogynistic trend. Also, in the forthcoming (December 2018) IV conference on 'Love and Sex with Robots' the keynote speaker will be Matt McMullen, the CEO of Realbotix, a company devoted to making sexbots like Samantha. It worries me very

much that this is happening, that is to say, that patriarchal men are abusing robotics in this sexist way.

Much more worried is Professor Kathleen Richardson, leader of the ‘Campaign against Sexrobots’, started in 2015. They recently sent the European Parliament an open letter on the ‘dangers of normalising sex dolls and sex robots’, and this is the keyword here: ‘normalisation’. Also ‘danger’, of course.



> **MAIN ISSUE: Sexbots negatively affect actual sexual relationships (heterosexuality)**
 > **Foundation for Responsible Robotics, “Our Sexual Future with Robots” (2017)**

Harmony and friends..., RealBotix

Sexbots are already negatively affecting actual heterosexual relationships, though at this stage they are mainly an idea, not a reality. Even so, the 2017 report by The Foundation for Responsible Robotics, ‘Our Sexual Future with Robots’, paints a sad, worrying picture. Among their conclusions, we find a dire warning: ‘relationships with robots are fictive and may decrease our ability to interact with other humans’. This means now, in reality, not in SF, no matter how basic the actual sexbots are.

> **Will women use (male) sexbots?**
 > **How about LGTB+ use of sexbots?**
 > **Or non-normative gendered sexbots?**
 > **Can robosexuality be an accepted choice?**

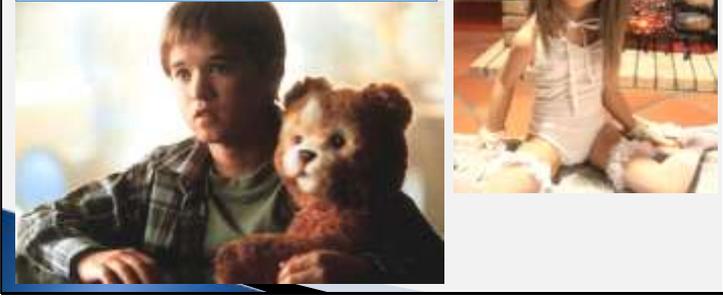


Henry by RealBotix and Lily with her InMoovator

‘Responsible robotics’ are hardly on the horizon, regrettably, and since sexbots are going to be manufactured despite all ethical restrictions, we should start asking

other questions beyond how heterosexual men's use of female sexbots will affect women. Here are some of these questions:

- will women use male sexbots? (this Frenchwoman, Lily, is building an ideal male companion already, having openly declared that she hates men)
- how about the LGBTBI+ use of sexbots?
- how about non-normative, gendered robots? (for instance intersex)
- can 'robosexuality' be an accepted identity? (is it just a nerdish fad?)

<p>➤ MAIN ISSUE: the child sexbot, therapy or aberration?</p>	<h2>Issues</h2>
<p>David and Teddy, A.I. (Brian Aldiss' 'Super-Toys Last All Summer Long', 1969)</p>	

The red line is firmly drawn, it seems, at the use of child sexbots, with defenders claiming that they are a good tool for therapy, and detractors underlining that they're just an aberration. They are aberrant indeed and also part of our degraded, sexualized perception of the child, just as gynoid sexbots degrade women.

Brian Aldiss never hints in his famous story that child robots like David can be sexually abused – he's made, rather, as a surrogate son for childless couples; I'm not sure whether the issue of abuse is raised in Spielberg's adaptation, though in it robots are the object of much irrational hatred. Today, however, any vision of robosexuality is coloured negatively by robotic paedophilia.

Thus, Irish writer June Caldwell has included in her debut collection *Room Little Darker* (2017) – a volume intended to shock the reader with very dark tales – 'BoyBot™', a story in which a paedophile receives from the state a child-robot, Conor, designed to keep him away from human victims. Terrifying, right? Reviewer Frankie Gaffney writes: 'That this is a lifeless animatron makes the scenes no less shocking. (...) The reader is made to dwell on the idea of how, in reality, such crimes are sentiently experienced by victims'.

But is this really how it works? Does the shocking tale truly generate empathy? How many, reading the Caldwell's tale, wonder whether Conor is already available?

➤ **June Caldwell (Irish, not SF writer), short story collection *Room Little Darker* (2017)**

➤ 'BoyBot™': a paedophile receives from the state a child-robot, Conor, designed to keep him away from human victims

➤ **Review by Frankie Gaffney:** That this is a lifeless animatron makes the scenes no less shocking. (...) The reader is made to dwell on the idea of how, in reality, such crimes are sentiently experienced by victims.



'Casas Rojas' (2015) Nieves Delgado



BACKGROUND

- **CorpIA sexbots are malfunctioning, attacking owners**
- **Inspection by Parliament Commission**
- **CEO Gabriel Sandler**

MAIN ISSUES

- **Consent / malfunction**
- **Sexbot training**
- **Junior line**
- **Illegal free robots**

As a matter of fact, in Nieves Delgado's award-winning short story 'Casas rojas', CorpIA's manufacturing of a 'junior line' is presented as practically inevitable.

Delgado tells the story of a Government intervention into CorpIA to stop its female sexbots from malfunctioning and attacking its owners. But, beyond the specific plot details, what concerns Delgado is very much attuned with the ongoing #metoo campaign (since 2017), namely, the issue of consent.

You may have heard already of the LumiDolls brothels opening franchises in different cities, including Barcelona (they closed after two weeks but the dolls can still be found in associate establishments). Of course, LumiDolls offers ultra-realistic sex dolls and not the sophisticated sexbots Delgado imagines. Yet, she takes it for granted that soon enough there will be sentient sexbots that will start being raped the moment their sexual training begins. One might think that consent is irrelevant in a machine – imagine your Nespresso refusing to serve you coffee! – but, rather, the point that Delgado is raising is that by eliminating consent from the way we imagine sexbots (in

SF and in reality) we are indulging in the fantasy that actual living prostitutes are like these machines and, thus, that their consent is irrelevant.

'Casas Rojas' (2015) Nieves Delgado

ARGUMENTS

- **Sandler**
 - **gynoids have ended female prostitution**
 - **the junior line is not immoral (just machines)**
 - **robots can be clearly distinguished from humans**
- **Noa**
 - **robots' rights should be respected**
 - **gynoids should be asked for consent before sex**
 - **the junior line is immoral**

PLOT: Noa shows Sandler why the gynoids attack, using his own sexbot Sylvana

In Delgado's story, CEO Gabriel Sandler – proud owner of sex doll Sylvana – uses the habitual arguments in defence of sexbots:

- 1) gynoids have ended female prostitution (but why should they?)
- 2) the junior line is not immoral (they're just machines)
- 3) anyone can tell humans and robots apart (in this story, they are marked by tattoos)

Noa, his antagonist, defends that:

- 1) robots' rights should be respected, since they're known to be sentient (the Nespresso would be a very different case...)
- 2) gynoids should be asked for consent before sex, as it is known that they do suffer if forced against their will
- 3) the junior line is indeed immoral and can never be justified

Their divergences couldn't be clearer. Sandler shows all his misogyny when he explains why he prefers his doll Sylvana to real women.

'Casas Rojas' (2015) Nieves Delgado

FEMINIST ARGUMENTS / #MEETOO CAMPAIGN

- **Why Sandler prefers his doll to real women:**
 - Because I can do with her all I want, giving nothing in exchange. I needn't negotiate, I needn't ask for permission, I needn't follow social rules. She will never ask me for respect, affection or friendship. This is pure sex, the closest one can get to oneself that you could ever try.
- **Noa's view:**
 - Perhaps (...) but it's not real sex. It's just programming. It gives you back exactly what you put in. It's just sophisticated masturbation. There is no place for surprise or rejection. There is no risk. There is no interaction.

Sandler then clarifies, and this sends a chill down the spine of any woman reader, that he is free to rape Sylvana, *despite* her ability to show resistance. By the way, this is what Dr. Santos claims he has done: programme Samantha with the capacity to say 'no'...

'Casas Rojas' (2015) Nieves Delgado

- **Sandler clarifies:**
 - You don't know how wrong you are (...) You can programme rejection, even resistance. I could have a sexbot and rape her as often as I wanted, and it would be perfectly legal.
- **Noa explains:**
 - **the dolls are attacking because they are intelligent enough to feel sexual frustration (they can mimic orgasm)**
 - **Sylvana could not cope with being asked to be passive and active, like the free robots, at the same time > her malfunction ruins Sandler's company**

Noa eventually explains that the dolls are attacking because they are intelligent enough to feel sexual frustration (they can mimic orgasm!). Sylvana cannot cope with being asked to be passive and active, like the free robots Gabriel is so excited about and, so, her malfunction, which leads her to try to murder her owner, ruins Sandler's company.

When at the end of 'Casas rojas' Noa fulfils her revenge feminist fantasy and asks triumphantly 'Did you really think you could replace women so easily?', what I actually heard in my mind was 'Not so easily but perhaps eventually'.

The Stepford Wives (1972) Ira Levin

Noa to Sandler: — Did you really think you could replace women so easily?

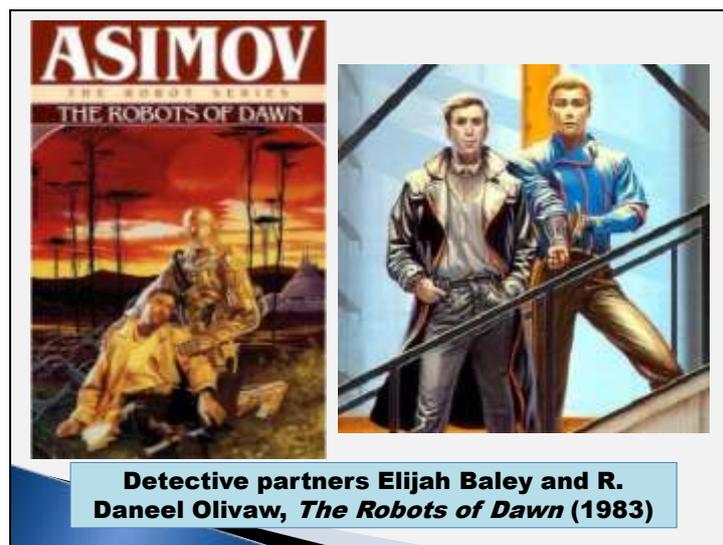


Gynoids in 1975: sex doll + housewife

I thought, of course, of Ira Levin's ambiguous SF novel *The Stepford Wives* (1972), which can be read both as anti-patriarchal and misogynistic. In that dark tale, the robots which replace the unruly feminist wives are expected to be housewives, not just sexbots. This idea has been dropped in current SF but I wonder what is worse: as 'wives' the robots are domestic slaves but, once more, they appear to receive more consideration than the mere sexbots. Of course, I'm not forgetting, how could I?, that in Levin's tale flesh-and-blood women are murdered to be replaced by robots. This is awfully sexist, but would be equally sexist to have Stepford Husbands? Or feminist...?

Reading about robosexuality this summer, I came across a comment by a reader of Isaac Asimov who claimed that sex had never appeared in his robot stories.

I had, however, a clear impression that *The Robots of Dawn*, a novel published in 1983, did deal with a woman in a relationship with a 'male' robot. My re-reading confirmed this and also that, basically, Asimov had already set all the terms of the robosexuality debate back in the early 1980s. If we have forgotten, this is because at the time the debate was pure fantasy, shared with texts like *Blade Runner*, but not an urgent social matter.



Detective partners Elijah Baley and R. Daneel Olivaw, *The Robots of Dawn* (1983)

In *The Robots of Dawn*, detective partners Elijah Baley (an Earthman) and R. Daneel Olivaw (a humaniform robot) meet again after a couple of years, though actually the previous novel where they appeared, *The Caves of Steel*, had been published 29 years before, in 1954.

Asimov would be surprised to see that, currently, Baley and Daneel are an object of gay fan fiction and fan art. Whether gay or heterosexual, though, the problem is similar: robots might return human affection but only out of dutiful programming. This makes humans look quite silly in scenes like this one:

➤ **Bailey, happy to meet his partner in *The Caves of Steel* (1956) again:**

And then, little by little, he collected his thoughts and knew that he was hugging not Daneel but R. Daneel--Robot Daneel Olivaw. He was hugging a robot and the robot was holding him lightly, allowing himself to be hugged, judging that the action gave pleasure to a human being and enduring that action because the positronic potentials of his brain made it impossible to repel the embrace and so cause disappointment and embarrassment to the human being.



The plot, however, is not about this transparent homoerotic bonding but about the murder of Daneel's humaniform twin, R. Jander Parnell. Current Asimov fans have pointed out that Jander must look very much like David (played by Michael Fassbender) in the film *Prometheus*, part of the *Alien* franchise, and not like the robot you see in bed here. The main issue in Asimov's plot is, actually, how surprised and even disgusted Aurorans are by how Gladia Delmarre, a Solarian exile, treats Jander as her husband. This needs some explaining.

R. Jander Parnell, husband



PLOT: Earthman Bailey investigates on Aurora who has 'killed' R. Jander Parnell and is surprised to find out that Solarian migrant Gladia Delmaerra considered Jander her 'husband'



**David,
Prometheus
(2012)**

In Asimov's novel, Aurora and other planets have been colonized by humans from Earth, known as Spacers.

They are divided about how to continue space exploration, and Jander matters specially because he is as close as possible to a human being. His maker, Dr. Falstoffs, however, is against using robots for exploration, which is what his main rival, Dr. Amadiro, wants. As you may imagine, the 'killing' of robot Jander, caused by the destruction of his mind, connects with their confrontation.

Humaniform robotics

ISSUES

- **Spacers (planet colonizers originally from Earth)**
- **How to continue space exploration:**
 - **Only Earth people [Dr. Han Falstoffs > maker Jander and Daneel]**
 - **Robots, then Aurorans [Dr. Kelden Amadiro]**
 - **Spacers aided by robots**
- **Why Jander matters: Falstoffs won't allow Amadiro access to his humaniform robots**



**R5 or
Valkyrie,
NASA**

Husband material

- **Gladia married in Solaria: sex for reproduction, no orgasm – widow**
- **Falstoffs lends Jander to Gladia for company**
- **Aurorans: promiscuous, uninhibited**
- **Robots used for sex (Aurorans reject sentimental attachment)**
- **Gladia learns to enjoy sex with Jander**
- **Sex with Elijah helps her to regain a 'normal' sexuality**



**Walter, 2017,
play by Jordan
Harrison (2015)**

The romance between the so-far frigid widow Gladia and Jander surfaces when Falstoffs lends his robot to her for company (apparently, not with the intention of performing a secret experiment on her but out of good faith). Aurorans, who are on the whole perfectly promiscuous and uninhibited, do use robots as sex toys but they reject any emotional attachment as a show of bad taste. Gladia, who hates the Aurorans' vision of sex as fun without emotional content, learns to enjoy *intimate* sex with Jander, finally including orgasms. Once he dies, though, she decides to re-learn sex with a human partner, Baley himself.

As a feminist woman, I find Asimov's tale well-balanced and realistic. As shown in the remarkable film *Marjorie Prime*, based on the play by Jordan Harrison, women prefer company rather than only sex, though this also depends on the circumstances. Gladia wants both from Jander: the sex and the intimacy. Marjorie, an elderly lady past 80 who shocks her daughter by purchasing a holographic a.i. version of her dead husband Walter, wants her husband's company but also the visual pleasure of his handsome presence, stuck for ever at age 40. She had no need for sex, though.

➤ **Martha: not easy to bring Ash back to her life (a.i., android)**



Domhall Gleeson as Caleb in *Ex Machina* and Ash in 'Be Right Back', *Black Mirror* (2013)

Sex does matter to a much younger widow, Martha, in the episode 'Be Right Back' of *Black Mirror* but it turns out to be problematic. Ash, killed in a car crash, returns to life first as an a.i. (simply a voice on the cell phone) and, later, as a robotic double. The uncanny valley, though, creeps into his second marriage to Martha in unexpected ways, making their physical contact truly awkward. The relationships between men and female robots are hardly problematised in this way, perhaps because it is still rare to see men represented as sex objects for women. And this is why Asimov's tale is so strangely refreshing.

Allow me, then, to return to Asimov. Here's Jander's body in a description suggesting that he and Daneel are quite close to the replicants of *Blade Runner*:

R. Jander Parnell's body, examined by Baley

➤ The body was, perhaps, not quite human. The muscular contours were somehow simplified and a bit schematic, but all the parts were there: nipples, navel, penis, testicles, pubic hair, and so on. Even fine, light hair on the chest.



Roy Batty, replicant, *Blade Runner* (1982)

Asimov doesn't say whether Jander's skin is warm to the touch, but Gladia explains:

➤ **Gladia explains that she wanted to design new clothes for Jander:**

(...) that meant having him remove his clothing in stages. He did so--and it was only when he was completely unclothed that I quite realized how close to human he was.

Nothing was lacking and those portions which might be expected to be erectile were, indeed, erectile. Indeed, they were under what, in a human, would be called conscious control. Jander could tumescere and detumescere on order. He told me so when I asked him if his penis was functional in that respect. I was curious and he demonstrated.

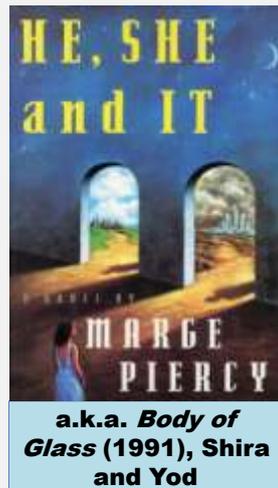
Since in her native Solaria, all sex was intended for reproduction, Gladia's sexuality is hardly functional, as she candidly explains to Baley:

➤ "I have a certain hesitation about touching men--you understand--and I have no doubt that played a part in my inability to have satisfactory sex with Aurorans. But this was not a man and I had been with robots all my life. I could touch Jander freely.

It didn't take me long to realize that I enjoyed touching him and it didn't take Jander long to realize that I enjoyed it. He was a finely tuned robot who followed the Three Laws carefully. To have failed to give joy when he could would have been to disappoint. Disappointment could be reckoned as harm and he could not harm a human being. He took infinite care then to give me joy and, because I saw in him the desire to give joy, something I never saw in Auroran men, I was indeed joyful and, eventually, I found out, to the full, I think, what an orgasm is."

From an Auroran point of view, and also from Baley's own personal point of view, what Gladia narrates is less than 'normal', yet, she refuses to be shamed:

➤ “No, Elijah, you won't talk me into being ashamed. If having a robot as a husband is unusual even on Aurora, that would be because robots like Jander are unusual. The robots we have on Solaria, or on Earth--or on Aurora, except for Jander and Daneel--are not designed to give any but the most primitive sexual satisfaction. They might be used as masturbation devices, perhaps, as a mechanical vibrator might be, but nothing much more. When the new humaniform robot becomes widespread, so will human-robot sex become widespread.”



There seems to be there is here very little distance between Asimov and feminist SF authors such as Marge Piercy in her classic *Body of Glass*, though, of course, Gladia is not Jander's maker as Shira is Yod's (or at last, his improver). A standard feminist reading would suggest that Gladia's sexuality is dominated by a patriarchal view of robotics, but she actually subverts their intended use, as Falstoffe explains:

➤ **Dr. Falstoffe comments:** “If I stop to think about it, there is nothing particularly unusual about the use of robots for sexual purposes by either men or women. Ordinary robots are not particularly adapted to it, but human beings are ingenious in this respect. As for Jander, he is adapted to it because he is as humaniform as we could make him--”
 “So that he might take part in sex.”
 “No, that was never in our minds. It was the abstract problem of building a totally humaniform robot that exercised the late Dr. Sarton and myself.”

Clearly, both Falstoffe and Asimov are being disingenuous here, as, surely, there is no point in giving a robot a set of genitalia if it is not for sex – pure sex, since reproduction is out of the question.

Intriguingly, Asimov alludes in *Robots of Dawn* to his own novella *The Bicentennial Man* (1976, 1999). In it, robot Andrew Martin transforms progressively into a man, as his relationship with Little Miss also becomes a romance including sex. Falstoffe's estranged daughter, Vasilisa Aliena, and Robot Giskard Reventlov, who is not fully humaniform, are in a similar situation. This is asexual, given Giskard's more limited anatomy, but somehow more deeply romantic, as the plot eventually shows.

➤ **Vasilia Aliena's (Dr. Falstoffe's daughter) relationship to R Giskard Reventlov is compared to Andrew Martin's and Little Miss' in *The Bicentennial Man* (1976, film 1999)**



Back to Gladia, she explains her decision to have sex with Baley in this way:

➤ **Why Gladia decides to have sex with Baley:**

“I resented the robots for reserving for themselves the right to be kind to you-- and to give. And as I thought of myself doing it, I felt a growing sexual excitement, something I hadn't felt since Jander's death. And it occurred to me then that, in my only successful sex, what I had done was to take. Jander gave whatever I wished, but he never took. He was incapable of taking, since his only pleasure lay in pleasing me. And it never occurred to me to give because I was brought up with robots and knew they couldn't take. And as I watched [the robots take care of you], it came to me that I knew only half of sex and I desperately wanted to experience the other half.”

This agrees with Noa's sentencing in 'Casas rojas' that sex is only 'real' if desire is reciprocal (a point also raised by Catalan author Montserrat Segura in her recent novella *El contracte Wong*, 2017).

I should think that this the main difference between the patriarchal view of the sexualized robot and the anti-patriarchal, feminist positions: the patriarchal (ab)user of the sexbot needs no reciprocity because he never demands it from actual sex partners (just the physiological response will do). In contrast, any individual minimally aware that sex functions on the basis of mutual empathy will be sooner or later distressed by the limited robotic response to and during sex. No matter how pleasing.

Gladia's experience is, then, atypical and typical. When Baley tells Dr. Falstoffe about Gladia's 'marriage', he finds that this union is:

Undue emotion vs. cold exploitation

➤ **Baley tells Dr. Falstoffs about Gladia's 'marriage':**
 "What? That's ridiculous. It is legally impossible. There is no question of children, so there can't conceivably be an application for any. Without the intention of such an application, there can be no marriage."
 "This is not a matter of legality, Dr. Fastolfe (...). It is a matter of emotion (...)."

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>The Robots of Dawn</i> ➤ <i>The Bicentennial Man</i> ➤ 'Be Right Back' ➤ <i>Marjorie Prime</i> ➤ <i>A.I.</i> ➤ <i>He, She and It</i> ➤ 'Helen O'Loy' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>The Stepford Wives</i> ➤ <i>Ex Machina</i> ➤ 'Casas Rojas' ➤ <i>Blade Runner</i> ➤ <i>Blade Runner 2049</i> ➤ <i>Westworld</i> ➤ <i>Humans</i>
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'It is a matter of emotion', Baley stresses. But what emotion?

In some of the texts I have mentioned here, the emotion is an irrational love for the robot, sometimes connected with lost love. In others, though, the emotion is mainly connected with sexual possession and even violation, with the robot standing in for a living defenceless person. There seems to be no middle ground, which makes little sense if we think of how we use our current machines (we don't love or hate our cars... do we?).

There is also a double standard, as you can see: men in relationships with sexbots are seen as mostly disgusting creatures; women in similar situations are liberated individuals, even feminists. Misogyny is firmly rejected, androphobia is tolerated if not openly celebrated. What is most worrying is how fantasies and aspirations about the sexualized robot, including the idea of robosexuality, aim at furthering the separation between the sexes in heterosexuality, eliminating the need for further dialogue.

All this suggests that, as many claim, the only responsible robotics passes through avoiding the humaniform robot, particularly in its child form. It might be, however, already too late. But, then I trust that our robotics engineers will show us the right path towards a fully human future, in which robots will have a place of their own though not, hopefully, our own. Thank you.

'Responsible robotics': in your hands



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