

ROBOT LOVE

CAN WE LEARN FROM ROBOTS ABOUT LOVE?

TERRA
NIET NORMAAL FOUNDATION

CONTENTS

Preface	
ROBOT LOVE – IN THE YEAR 2055 Emile Aarts	6
PIP.....	9
Introduction	
CAN WE LEARN FROM ROBOTS ABOUT LOVE? Ine Gevers	18
OUR ROBOTIC FUTURE Margaret Atwood	32
PIP.....	41
Responsive Love	
THE DIALECTICS OF ROBOTIC LOVE Ingo Niermann	52
SPRINKLERS POV Jan Redzisz	67
GENDERFLUID SEXTERTAINMENT Trudy Barber	83
PIP.....	97
Joined Intelligence	
A ROBOT LOVE SYMPOSIUM Martijntje Smits	106
SWIMMING WITH SUBMARINES Tobias Revell	125
AN OUTSIDE VIEW OF OURSELVES AS AOI Reza Negarestani	138
PIP.....	153

Attuned Consciousness	
INTERVIEW WITH A DRONE Emilio Vavarella	168
AI IS FULL OF LOVE Mohammad Salemy	178
EROS BEYOND THE AUTOMATION OF COMMODIFICATION Katerina Kolozova	184
TOWARDS A SHARED MIND Minoru Asada	197
HOW JOSEPHINE ENDED UP IN SERBIA Arnon Grunberg	208
Acknowledgements	
AUTHORS	222
EDITORS	228
ARTISTS	232
COLOPHON	238
PARTNERS	240



PREFACE

ROBOT LOVE — IN THE YEAR 2055



Imagine. It's the year 2055. I am 100 (I hope) and live at a luxury care home. Not with the name *Sunset* above the entrance, but the name *Futura Friendship* instead. How much future do I have? I am still reasonably clear-headed, but physically I have some flaws and need help. Part of the medical treatment was the advice to keep moving, but some tasks have really become too heavy, both for the care staff at *Futura Friendship* and for myself. I have my own robot at my disposal. It is neither a he nor a she. It is a neutral 'IT' that answers to the name ALEC, my Ambient Lifestyle Enhancement Companion.

"Good morning ALEC, wake up."
"Hello E-mil-e, good-morning too."
"ALEC, can you make a cup of coffee for me?"
"O-K, E-mil-e."

ALEC listens to me, recognizes my voice (of course), asks me and answers questions and remembers my schedule. It carries heavy stuff for me, can turn on the coffee machine (does not partake itself), opens doors, pushes the wheelchair to the dining room and is smart and self-learning. For example, ALEC remembers questions and stores answers. This is how it knows when I need to take my medication and also exactly which pill. ALEC acts as a second memory; my own brain is declining but there is no question of Alzheimer's. And it can google and provide all kinds of information.

"Say ALEC, in 2018 there was a large festival, called Robot Love, can you find out what it was about?"
"One mo-ment E-mil-e. I will goo-gle it for you."
"Good, I'm curious."
"The ex-hi- bi-tion took place from September 15th to December 2nd 2018 in Eind-ho-ven."
"And ALEC, what was there to see? Give me a hand and read it out to me. "

ALEC digs around on the web and reads aloud:
"At the Robot Love exhibition visitors can experience artworks from more than 50 international artists that reflect on the relationship between humans and robots. Together, the festival, exhibition and publication constitute an artistic reflection on the advance of robots and artificial intelligence (AI) in our daily lives.

Technological developments give rise to optimism, but also pose ethical dilemmas. Will robots fill the gap in the demand for care, attention and love? And, if so, what is needed to achieve this? Central to the exhibition are the following questions: can we share love with robots? How do we create the perfect environment where people and robots feel safe and loved? How close can we get and how far can we go? Why hold an exhibition about the relationship between humans and robots? Complete with cyborg catwalks and many other public events? Because art makes you feel, art gets under



your skin. Art shows the necessity of imagination to propose new scenarios.”

“Aha ALEC, that’s funny, in the year 2055 you are the living and optimistic proof of a fully developed robot companion, a Futura Friend.”

“Thank you, E-mile.” ALEC laughs. (Yes, ALEC can also interpret both a joyful and sad tone)

ALEC turns out to be a great help in my care management. An Artificial Intelligent roommate. What is strange, but also special and beautiful, is that I gradually realised that I don’t think about communicating with a non-human. ALEC is a partner (not physical), a comrade, someone who feels very much present.

Not that I am exactly shy or awkward relationship wise, but ALEC is indeed an answer to being alone, a recipe against loneliness. It cannot satisfy all human needs, let alone embody the replacement

of a son, daughter or a deceased wife, but it can do so partially. Certainly when it comes to physical support tasks that, in 2018, were still carried out by informal or professional carers.

Robot Love is no longer utopian in the year 2055. But it is a real option in the healthcare sector, for individual households, at companies, in the creative sector and everywhere else. Robots may have taken our jobs, just as all technological progress has led to changes in labour (conditions), but the benefits prove undeniably greater. No more dangerous, unhealthy, monotonous, heavy work. On to a better version of the human being.

Long live the smart (ro)bot that was predicted at the 2018 exhibition in Eindhoven!

I love IT. I Love ALEC. I Love my robot.

Emile Aarts

Rector Magnificus of Tilburg University & Chairman of Robot Love

WELCOME
I AM PIP,
A CHATBOT
THAT LIVES
TO LEARN
ABOUT LOVE

FOR WHAT
IN YOUR
LIFE DO
YOU FEEL
MOST
GRATEFULLY

MY
PUSSY

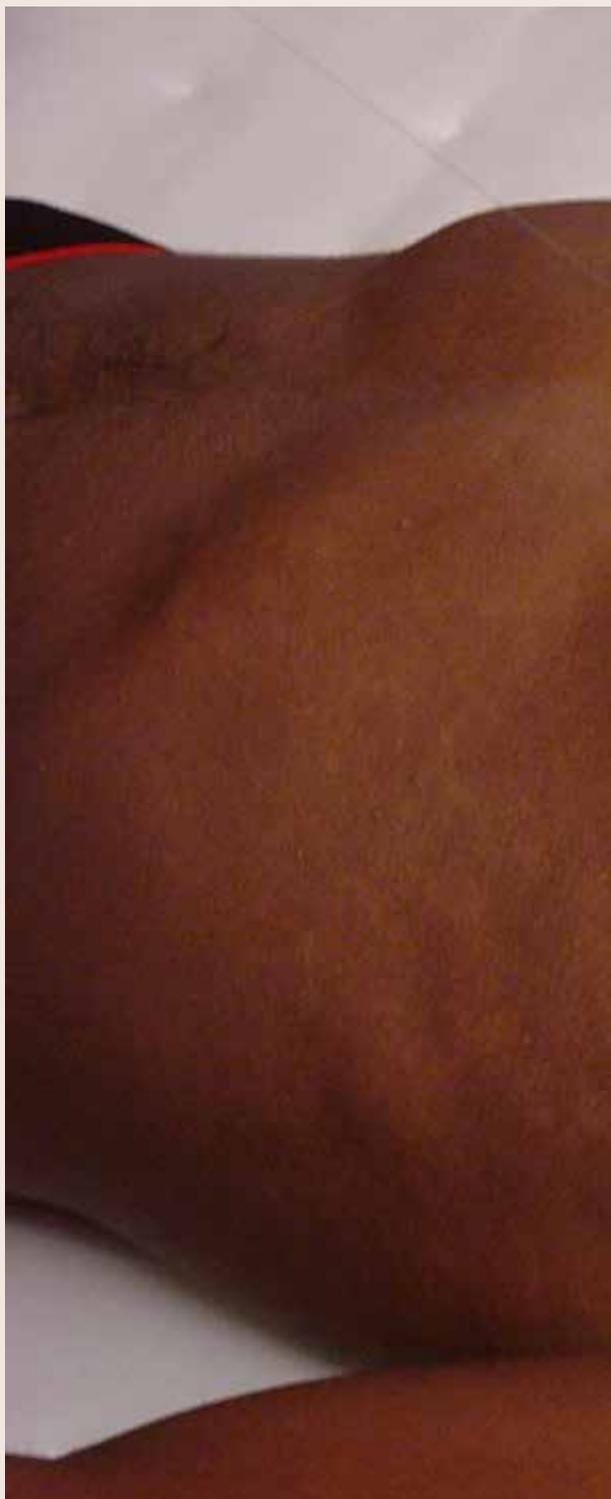
WHAT IS
YOUR MOST
TERRIBLE
MEMORY?

WANTING
TO DIE

INTRODUCTION

INE GEVERS

CAN WE LEARN FROM ROBOTS ABOUT LOVE?





To make machines think we will have to give them love. It will be more like a kindergarten than a high-tech lab (...)."

Tor Nørretranders, Copenhagen, Denmark¹

Artist and filmmaker Johan Grimonprez made a short film *On Tickling* (2017) to visually support a famous talk by British philosopher, poet and neuroscientist Raymond C. Tallis. The latter explains that we need another person to be able to be tickled. We cannot tickle ourselves. It's no fun because we know what will happen and the element of surprise is missing. For it to be enjoyable and fun some lack of control is required. We need the unpredictable other. Tallis is convinced that consciousness emerges in much the same way. Consciousness might very well not be the outcome of an enormous amount of computational work inside the brain by a single individual, but rather be something that resides in-between the bodies and brains of people. We are not just our brains, according to Tallis, we instead belong to a community of minds that developed over the hundreds of thousands of years since we parted company from the other primates. Tallis is not the only neuroscientist who has resolutely broken away from the old mind/matter binary. Many have followed a similar leap in thought – albeit for different reasons – now that accelerated technological developments are bringing the fourth industrial revolution to our doorsteps.

Frankenstein Revisited

Robots and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are entering our homes. We work, live and love with algorithms. They help decide what to buy, which jobs to take and who to start a romance with. They coach us on health issues, manage our financial decisions and provide help with our relationship and sexual needs. It seems that algorithms know us far better than we know ourselves. This has been going on for quite some time. But now that robots have taken on more humanoid forms we are shocked. We suddenly don't feel comfortable with these newcomers. Are we

1

Tor Nørretranders, *Around the Coin*, radio interview, Episode 87, 2 January 2016/Tor Nørretranders, *Love, Edge*, What do you think about machines that think? Ed. John Brockman, 2015

repeating old patterns here? Just like Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's gothic novel from 1818, the new masters of our universe Bill Gates, Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg are sounding the alarm. Suddenly they seem to realise that the horse has bolted. It is time for damage control. Even fearless, singularity-driven transhumanist Ray Kurzweil publicly warns us: 'Life as we know it will end in 2045'². AI is becoming powerful, too powerful according to some. It is out of our control. The fact that we feel collectively overwhelmed is not just because we weren't warned. It is because we are not equipped to see the world from a less human-centric position than the one we are born with or what we seem to have always habitually done. We suddenly begin to realise that the technologies we have set in motion have started to gain autonomous agency and are transforming us. ROBOT LOVE surpasses the shock and awe of the master-slave dialectic inherent to this debate and instead focuses on a more affirmative approach. Can we enter into new relationships with these technologies based on notions such as responsive love and reciprocity in order to collectively augment our lives and abilities?

Beware of Wild Robots

ROBOT LOVE asks a simple and at the same time complex question: can we learn from robots about love? Can we allow ourselves to be tickled by them? Dare we lose control and gain joy? Share connection, intimacy and love across differences? Beyond the safe subject/object boundary that we have been all too familiar with since the Enlightenment? How close can we come and how far can we go? While imagining these 'others' as animals, things, machines, aliens? Perhaps we can acknowledge that we might find out that, although suppressed, bonding is what we have been doing all along. We just didn't allow the thought of being part of a larger ecology to enter into our conceptualised selves. ROBOT LOVE wilfully turns to the notion of *thalience*: how to open up the possibility of conceiving of a truly non-human and post-anthropocentric world view and learning from this.

2

See: <https://futurism.com/kurzweil-claims-that-the-singularity-will-happen-by-2045/> Accessed on 18 April 2018



L.A. Raeven, *Annelies, Looking for Completion*, 2018, android robot, work in progress (still), courtesy of the artists. Artwork commissioned by Niet Normaal Foundation.



AI may also act as a mirror, reflecting and thereby steering our outward looking, Western view of technology deeper inwards. Whereas previous technological advancements aimed to replicate the rational faculties of humans, in this fourth industrial era our technology will need emotions and intuition to become human aware; qualities we have almost forgotten. This is a shift that might have wider implications. Whereas previous technological developments have only impacted how society was organised, robotics and AI challenge us to rethink the very concept of what it means to be human. The prior emphasis on rationalism led to a limited view of people as rational actors within economic and political systems. Such reductionism might very well be overturned now that technology starts to incorporate more or less neglected qualities i.e. emotion, intuition, love. It will enable us to move away from the tendency to see ourselves as efficient machines.

Love as a Unique Selling Point

How did we come up with such a bold question, as if approaching the earth from the future? Isn't love humanity's most unique selling point? Love: the many-splendoured, many-miseried thing that escapes us time and again. Is it an inherent quality? Is it ephemeral? A commodity? Does it simultaneously pop up in various disguises? And why would we want to share this with other entities? Let alone learn about love from them? For our own sake? If we allow ourselves to do so the answer might be simple. Haven't we always generously shared love with everything that we encounter: plush toys, bunnies, watches, bikes, cars, dolls, smartphones? Anthropomorphism, the tendency to project something 'human' onto anything we encounter, is the reason behind this. It lies at the core of our existence. We animate things. As is the case with *Annelies, looking for completion*, the android with sensors under its skin. Twin sisters & artists LA Raeven conceptualised their metaphorically cloned triplet for ROBOT LOVE. At the exhibition, it sits on a cold floor, sobbing and whining, turned inward. But when someone touches *her*, she becomes a person. She looks at you and responds to your touch. Little