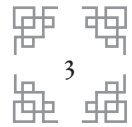

ASIAN • FEMALE • ROBOT • SLAVE

Techno-Orientalism after #MeToo

Racist Love has been concerned with how anthropomorphic things mobilize racial feeling; in the previous chapter, cuteness enables an asymmetrical relation of care. The field of social robotics deliberately solicits those affective bonds through specific forms of AI embodiment. A case in point, the small humanoid robot NAO (figure 3.1). "Who is NAO?" queried its maker. "NAO is intended to be a friendly companion around the house. . . . Since his birth in 2006, he has been constantly evolving to please, amuse, understand and love you. In short, to one day become your friend."[1] PARO, a therapy robot designed as a purring seal, provides companionship for the elderly.[2] Like Sony's mechanical dog AIBO and the diminutive anthropomorphic machines Robi,

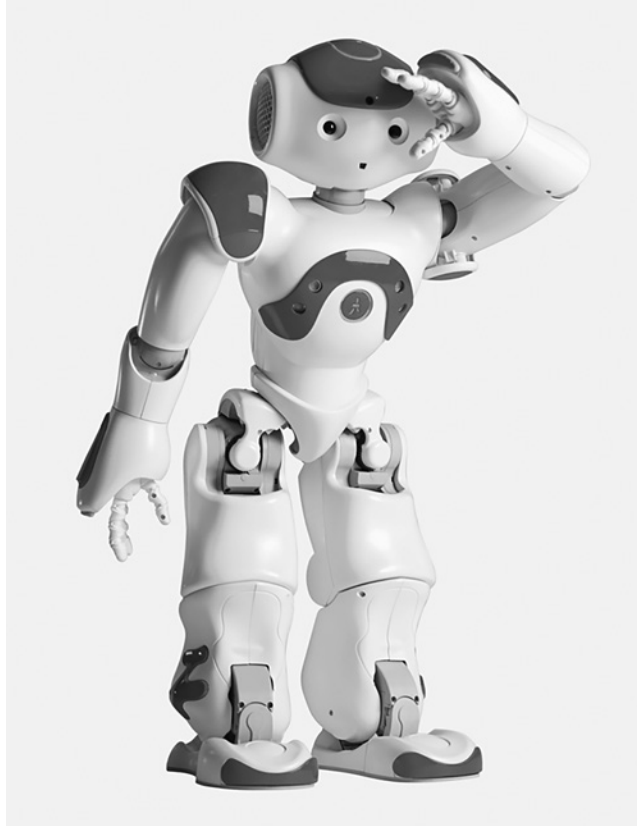

FIGURE 3.1 NAO, humanoid robot by Aldebaran, 2006

Kirobo, and RoboHon, NAO is designed to be your pal.[3] Here, artificial intelligence, or AI, evolves to serve the emotional needs of human beings; the goal of companion machines is to build bonds of sympathy and trust with technology.[4] If humanoid robots instill relations of trust, cute robots likewise refigure the task-based instrumentalism of machines into relations of intimacy and attachment.[5]

Japan remains in the vanguard of social robotics, a field that contrasts with the development of weaponized AI in the United States. This "robot gap" may well reflect a difference in the cultural perceptions of machine life: in Japan, the robot is "a hero," while in the West, it is a threat.[6] In the United States, growing dependency on machines at the millennium circulates negative feeling; tellingly, Isaac Asimov's (1950) "Three Laws of Robotics" imagines the coexistence

of humans and robots through the lens of competition, explicitly establishing a human-nonhuman caste system.[7] More prosaically, technology produces any number of real-world anxieties: job losses to mechanization that foretell the obsolescence of human labor, privacy erosions via data collection, the dangers of driverless cars and weaponized drones alike (see, e.g., Havens 2016). In 2015, the United Nations and robotics researchers called for a preemptive ban on autonomous artificially intelligent weapons—in other words, a ban on killer robots.[8]

Racial feeling surrounding technology coalesces in what David Morley and Kevin Robins (1995) deemed "techno-Orientalism," the projection of an Asianized, simulated future coincident with Japanese innovations in electronics, automobiles, gaming, AI, and robotics in the 1980s. Fueled by perceptions of economic ascendency in Asia prior to the 1997 financial crisis, techno-Orientalism names a speculative future in which apocalypse invariably invokes a Pacific Rim, posthuman dystopia governed by irrational feudalism, Fu Manchu's techno-superiority dangerously tethered to atavistic barbarism. Even as US fears surrounding techno-Orientalism dissipated in Japan's postbubble collapse, the trope survives. At the millennium, the racialized templates of the Yellow Peril and techno-Orientalist panic converge in the specter of a machinelike, unending, self-replicating alien labor force. As numerous scholars in Asian American studies reveal, US techno-Orientalism is inextricably tied to immigration and the projection of "alien" landscapes.[9] If in the nineteenth century the fantasy of automatons was symptomatic of the "dreams and nightmares of societies under-going rapid technological change" (Wosk 1992, 79), it now serves as a screen for Western worry over eastward-facing globalism.

Techno-Orientalism has come to refer to a futurist aesthetic, cyberpunk or otherwise.[10] I would argue that it also engages a specific affective structure; techno-Orientalism is tech feeling as anti-Asian bias. Techno-Orientalist discourse, Morley and Robins (1995, 169) suggest, projects a mutated human experience that is "cold, impersonal and machine-like . . . lacking emotional connection to the rest of the world," "the Japanese as inhuman" (170). The West's ambivalence surrounding Asianized posthumanism is expressed through the repetition of the same old stories "told (compulsively) again and afresh" (Bhabha 1994, 77), here reinscribing Asian inscrutability. In triggering both phobia and philia, the techno-Orientalist visual aesthetic and its accompanying modes of narration quintessentialize the fetishistic structure of what I have been calling racist love: anxiety transformed into pleasure.

In contrast, Japanese artists situate machines as helpful companions, from Osamu Tezuka's Astro Boy to engineers at Toyota designing doll-like robot friends to sit in your cup holder and assist your driving. In the documentary *The Human Robot* (2015), Japanese roboticists cite the influence of Shinto in accounting for the affective difference between East and West concerning automatons. "Robot sociologist" Naho Kitano explains that material objects have some sort of soul or spirit distinct from Christian understanding; within all things, she notes, there is "something there in [an] ontological way." A former AIBO engineer likewise attests, "For the Japanese people, every object has a soul."[11] As in Marie Kondo's notion of possessions living lives under their owners' care, communication with the nonhuman addresses its independent life essence; interaction with things is experienced as a social relationship where the goal is not control or mastery but attachment. Or to use a stronger word, love.

Social robotics thus troubles philosopher John R. Searle's (1990, 31) assertion that "the basic premise of strong AI is that the physical features of the implementing medium are totally irrelevant."[12] The posthuman, N. Katherine Hayles (1999, 2–3) notes, "privileges informational pattern over material instantiation"; the body is merely an "original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate." Philosopher Gilbert Ryle's metaphor critiquing Cartesian mind-body dualism, the "ghost in the machine," is often misappropriated to further the idea that the "machine," or body, is irrelevant to the "ghost," or programming.[13] In keeping with my exploration of the pleasures surrounding nonhuman anthropomorphism, this chapter begins with a deceptively simple question: Why imagine AI as having a body at all?

Social robotics offers one answer: the cuteness of the diminutive humanoid or animal form scripts a specific relationship to AI, inviting a certain type of intimacy. This chapter explores how this affective association shifts along with human attributes—race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, nationality, morphology—ascribed to machines. Far from the idea that advances in artificial intelligence render bodies irrelevant, sociality scripts relationships to technology particularly when, as I consider here, it is imagined in the form of young, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgender East Asian women.

In Anglophone speculative fiction and popular media alike, the Asian female cyborg has become somewhat ubiquitous. The term *gynoid* was used by Gwyneth A. Jones in 1984 to describe her female protagonist, Cho, in the postapocalyptic Pacific Rim novel *Divine Endurance*. Reflecting the possibilities of excessive symbolism reflected in the introduction's image of the mehndied

cyborg (see figure Intro.2), in recent dystopian fiction, Asian female clones, gynoids, or species hybrids inhabit the futuristic landscapes of Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Brian K. Vaughn and Fiona Staples's *Saga* (2012), Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2015), and Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda's *Monstress* (2015) and, to a lesser extent, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun* (2021). At the opening of the twenty-first century, visual media imagining Asianized "sexaroids" (*Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*); "skin jobs" (*Battlestar Galactica*); "fabricants" (*Cloud Atlas*); "synths" (*Humans*); AI (*Ex Machina*); "hosts" (*Westworld*); or "sleeves" (*Altered Carbon*), not to mention the "robogeishas" of the over-the-top Japanese B-movie *RoboGeisha* (2009), all reflect the techno-Orientalist foundations of cyberpunk.[14] Moreover, artificial beings are not merely imagined to be young, Asian, and female but are built that way; the ubiquity of East Asian gynoids in popular culture dovetails with artificially intelligent robot prototypes created in Japan, China, Canada, South Korea, and the UK.[15]

It may be obvious that humanoid machines offer easy analogies to those deemed to be lesser beings in specific historical moments: women, immigrants, slaves, children, the disabled. Automata, for example, are invariably gendered female, reflecting the long-standing tradition of animated dolls and statues who take the form of beautiful young women. From the myth of Pygmalion to *The Stepford Wives*, female objectification is literalized in the fantasy of man-as-god creating the "perfect" woman.[16] GPS apps and digital assistants such as Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa are female voiced all the better to reflect their status as toys and servants subject to command.[17] In keeping with racial abstraction, specific humanoid embodiment of AI triggers expected behaviors and presumed interiority as the machine drives perception of the ghost. Visual media engaging Asianized AI tap into common beliefs surrounding Asian women in the West: innocent and passive yet willing to please; sexually desirable but curiously lacking sexual desire; marvelously enhanced yet emotionally fragile. As in previous chapters, the nonhuman things of this chapter likewise circulate racial meaning through pleasurable types.[18] More specifically, Asian women perform as parahuman figures that, through the history of sexual bondage in the second half of the twentieth century, evoke an already compromised agency.

The first part of this chapter explores the added value of portraying technology embodied as Asian and female in AI representations that exemplify what I identify as the techno-Orientalist neoslave narrative, a genre reflective of both the neoslave narrative in contemporary African American literature and techno-erotic scopophilia.[19] According to Raquel Kennon (2017), the "neo-slave

narrative" is a literary genre emerging in the 1960s and 1970s that harkens back to the history of transatlantic slavery in the New World and originated with Bernard Bell's *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition* in 1987. Bill Brown's (2006, 199) reading of the figure of the slave who is ambiguously both subject and object links the experience of the "American uncanny" to race: "for U.S. law the slave becomes the source of uncanny anxiety" in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as they posed "the riddle of person or thing." In portrayals of mecha women in need of rescue, that riddle becomes literalized. The techno-Orientalist neoslave narrative relies on a mode of emplotment that does not simply require mapping human qualities onto things, but calls on specific qualities assigned to specific types of humanity, in this case, affective associations derived from the twentieth-century discourse of global human trafficking in Asia. Depicting the forced servitude of engineered beings, AI narratives reinforce paradoxical belief in both the techno-danger of the Orient and the racial-gendered vulnerability of Asian women.[20] Real or imagined, nonthreatening service bots mitigate fears surrounding advanced, potentially uncontrollable technology. As with the animal and child forms of social robots, AI imagined as worthy of care offset the specter of superior, enhanced mechanized beings.

Speculative fiction and visual media can productively imagine the reorganization of social identities through bodily flexibility, shape-shifting, or human-machine hybridity. "Science fiction is where you can be anything," says Dorothy Allison. "You can transgress in terms of gender, in terms of the body, in terms of imagination. You could be anything."[21] World making allows for the promise of upending established racial and gender epistemologies that assume connections between interiority and surface. And yet they can also rely on these tropes, tethering imagined beings to stereotypical race and gender associations—ironically at the moment that they envision the body's transcendence. At first glance, the robot fantasies of this chapter depend on the specifically racialized pleasures of techno-scopophilia at odds with the promise of feminist conceptualizations of the posthuman at the foundations of feminist science and technology studies (STS).[22] Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," first conceived in 1983 and republished in 1991, and N. Katherine Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (1999) both signal the importance of an antihumanist perspective in dismantling the alibis of universality and species hierarchy. A figure of

potential rupture within the millennial shift to an "informatics of domination," Haraway's (1991, 50) cyborg represents a "crucial, political" fiction: "The cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self," she writes, "This is the self feminists must code" (55). For Hayles (1999, 287), the posthuman does not spell the end of humanity: "It signals instead the end of a certain conception of the human, a conception that may have applied, at best, to that fraction of humanity who has the wealth, power, and leisure to conceptualize themselves as autonomous beings exercising their will through individual agency and choice. What is lethal is not the posthuman as such but the grafting of the posthuman onto a liberal humanist view of the self." Indeed, AI trafficking narratives extend the notion of human rights to categorically ambiguous things in ways that ultimately work to affirm that narrow vision of a rights-bearing subject.

Nevertheless, the reliance of posthumanism on liberal humanism need not represent an entirely "lethal" view of the posthuman. In the second part of the chapter, both real and imagined embodied AI invite analogies between computer programming and social conditioning as the conventions of human caste hierarchy become mapped onto human/nonhuman encounters. Situating embodied AI through the lens of antitrafficking narratives asks us to consider *whose* autonomy is actually artificial, who is subject to and has always been subject to the will of others. The futurist techno-Orientalist neoslave narratives of this chapter explore the structural constraints to self-possession, here imagined through the decidedly presentist if no less complex question of sexual consent. The viral social movement #MeToo, conceptualized by activist Tarana Burke and triggered by actress Alyssa Milano's 2017 tweet, resulted in a renewed sense of the ubiquity of women's and others' experiences with sexual harassment, abuse, and rape. The movement and legal cases it continues to ignite appear to be a far cry from the fantastical archive of this book. Yet in what follows, I situate racialized AI representation at the intersection of #MeToo and feminist STS to consider fantasy's reliance on a social matrix, how imagining a posthuman future relies on scripts of the present. Advances in artificial intelligence may invite weighty philosophical considerations about object ontology and machine being as well as the hubris of human exceptionalism. This chapter invokes AI to unveil another manifestation of "man's" hubris: entitlement. More specifically, the right to touch.

To highlight the reduction of human life under capitalism, philosopher Erich Fromm (1955, 360) once cautioned, "The danger of the past was that men

became slaves. The danger of the future is that men may become robots." This chapter explores the pleasures of imagining those terrors through a curious reversal, a future in which both slaves and robots have become Asian women.

The Techno-Orientalist Neoslave Narrative: Saving Virtual Women

Gender and Asian cultural difference lie at the foundations of assessing machine intelligence. In 1950, Alan Turing, pioneer of modern computer science, conceptualized what became known as the Turing test, developed to determine whether a machine could be said to approximate human behavior. Yet in its original conception, the "imitation game" was an exercise in gender passing. An isolated interrogator was asked to assess the gender of two individuals, a man (A) and a woman (B), through their written answers to the interrogator's questions. Without seeing the body, can one know the mind? Turing (1950, 434) took the conceit of gender passing further, asking, "What will happen when a machine takes the part of A in this game?" His famous test of artificial intelligence, whether a computer program could deceive human judges into believing it too was human, was founded on a deception regarding *social* identity, gender as it was presumed to be binary, fixed, and knowable if also, in this case, beyond the material body.[23] Similarly, the thought experiment devised to refute the notion of strong AI likewise calls on differences among human beings: philosopher John R. Searle's (1990) "the Chinese room."

Reflecting the Turing test's structure in which written communication is passed between participants in separate rooms, Searle's model for disproving machine thinking hinges on the difference between linguistic structure and semantics—as well as an implicit Orientalism. In his provocative parable, a person who does not know Chinese is given a rule book for matching Chinese ideographs and sorting them into logical strings. Outside the room, writers fluent in Chinese submit text, requiring the nonliterate person inside to respond by manipulating Chinese characters according to the rule book. In Searle's conception, the book functions as an analogy to a computer program, which would merely generate the semblance of language by applying its structural logic. This, he argued, did not represent thought: "Manipulating the symbols is not by itself enough to guarantee cognition, perception, understanding, thinking and so forth" (Searle 1990, 26). An exercise in abstraction, the thought experiment is nevertheless premised on comprehending a racial stereotype: Asian inscrutability, the idea that "Chinese writing looks like so many meaningless squiggles" (26). Gender and Orientalism lie at the philosophical foundations of testing

artificial intelligence, conjoining the seemingly dispassionate logic of a writing system with the projection of a confounding incomprehensibility, of absolute difference. As I discuss later, for Searle, that difference carried erotic charge.

The legibility of machine intelligence is thus tethered to sociality even as, at its most lofty, the ideal of strong AI intends to transcend it. Moreover, passing as human depends on a machine's ability to sustain the tension between sameness to and difference from a single, prototypical human subject: a white, middle-class, educated, cisgender Anglophone adult man, largely the adjudicator of real (and imagined) experiments. This contingency was cleverly anticipated in a Turing test held outside London in 2014. There, a chatbot posing as a thirteen-year-old Ukrainian boy named Eugene Goostman was presumed to have passed the Turing test. In the course of a series of five-minute online conversations, the chatbot convinced 33 percent of human judges that it was human. The program's scripted identity as an adolescent, nonnative English speaker was strategically communicated to imply a range of knowledge, a confident insistence regarding that knowledge, and limitations to knowing. As Eugene, the chatbot "can claim that he knows anything, but his age also makes it perfectly reasonable that he doesn't know everything."[24] So too, I would add, does its gender. That is, the projection of a social matrix would presume to help human judges reconcile the AI's conversational limitations and logical inconsistencies as well as its projected confidence. Who better to convey potential nonsense with the air of certainty than a teenage boy?

As a hypothetical counter to Turing's test, "the Chinese room" hinged on Searle's (1990, 31) insistence on the difference between appearance and being, simulation and ontology: "How could anyone have supposed that a computer simulation of a mental process must be the real thing?" he asked. In the same moment, other philosophers were beginning to trouble the very line between simulation and the real; the year following Searle's controversial model, philosopher Jean Baudrillard ([1981] 1994) collapsed the real into the hyperreal; nearly ten years later, Judith Butler ([1990] 2004, 187) theorized gender as an approximated performance situating the meat body as "syntactically regulated phantasm." Turing's early indifference to the distinction between the real and the simulated enabled his shift away from the question, "Can a machine think?" toward an emphasis on relationality and engagement, AI tested via its sociality.

The success of Eugene Goostman aside, machines approximating human consciousness, strong AI, do not yet exist.[25] Yet *artificial intelligence*, a term coined by computer scientist John McCarthy in 1955, represented, McCarthy hoped, the context for considering weighty questions about machine ontology. Throughout

his career, he maintained a vision for AI beyond the reality of chess-playing computers with which he had begun. Research on AI in the United States has since developed along more practical than conceptual lines, a point that ultimately disappointed him.[26] The instrumentalist turn to developing task-focused outcomes—information-processing algorithms predicting consumer tastes, driverless cars, robotic vacuum cleaners—sidelined his hope of approximating human intelligence through technology. Artificial intelligence in the United States would focus on machines that would *do* rather than machines who would *be*.[27]

In contrast, creative considerations of AI maintain a robust life by taking on philosophical questions about sentience posed generations earlier in European imagining of the automaton.[28] Speculative AI narratives imagining machines animated by some notion of complex consciousness approximating that of human beings explore themes of immortality and bodily flexibility. These tropes provide the foundation for the scripted dramas below that likewise exemplify the techno-Orientalist neoslave narrative. In each, however, sentience turns out to be a red herring.

- *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (2004): Mamoru Oshii's sequel to his 1995 anime *Ghost in the Shell*, adapting Shirow Masamune's manga series, features Batou, a cyborg detective who must solve the mystery of why *sexaroids*, female sex robots, begin killing their masters. With the help of his former partner Major Kusanagi, now AI and flexibly embodied, Batou speculates that the murders are a result of disruptive hacking or malware. Yet the viewer has already been privy to one clue, a murderous bot who, prior to self-destructing, emits the message, "Help me." The detectives uncover a conspiracy involving young women kidnapped into white slavery, their consciousnesses downloaded into mechanical life forms.[29] The sexaroids are Japanese.
- *Cloud Atlas* (2012): In the Wachowskis' film adaptation of David Mitchell's 2004 novel, *fabricants* are bred to serve humans in postapocalyptic Neo Seoul. A labor force genomed to be docile, female fabricants are lab-created entities bred for service. The clones are destined to repeat a twenty-four-hour cycle of waking, disinfecting, waitressing, imbibing nutrients, and sleeping as they exist in what amounts to forced servitude, a gulag. The story follows one fabricant, Son-Mi 451, who sets out to discover the truth of her existence, becoming a Joan of Arc of sorts, a prophet and liberator. The fabricants are South Korean (figure 3.2).[30]

FIGURE 3.2 Fabricants from the Wachowskis' *Cloud Atlas*, 2012

- *Humans* (2015): In the BBC/AMC adaptation of the Swedish television series *Äkta Människor*, or *Real Humans* (2014), *synths* are manufactured to provide any number of services from agricultural labor to more intimate roles as physical therapists, prostitutes, and nannies in a near-future UK.[31] The synth Anita is purchased to work as a domestic and caregiver in the home of an overworked lawyer, her husband, and their three children. Like any other household appliance, Anita is to be used until obsolete; this includes sexual use. Yet "she" begins to display signs of sentience beyond her programming. The synth is East Asian in appearance.
- *Ex Machina* (2014): In a film written and directed by novelist Alex Garland, the protagonist, Caleb, has been invited to experiment with a reclusive tech mogul's latest development in artificial intelligence, Ava, formed as young, attractive, Caucasian, and female. Because the mogul, Nathan, has succeeded, his inventions, which include his Japanese maid Kyoko, are no longer objects but self-aware beings. Caleb discovers that these mechanized women have not only been sexually exploited but are being held against their will. After he conspires with Ava to plan her escape, he finds that she has double-crossed him, the surest sign that she has passed the Turing test.[32]

What distinguishes these scripted dramas depicting engineered beings is their reliance on East Asian female embodiment to further plots of bondage and liberation. Clones and AI perform as the incarnation of the voiceless, hypersexualized, and hyperembodied: as servants and toys, they are literally sex *objects*. As their plotlines introduce an intellectual confusion about the difference between persons and things, workers and tools, at first glance, they serve as commentaries on labor reification, most graphically, sexual labor. Fembots and clones are docile workers until, inevitably, a special, unique AI develops sentience and becomes aware of its, or more appropriately, *her*, bondage. Their transformation from potentially malevolent entities into vulnerable beings worthy of ethical concern is enabled through reductive typing; in these fantasy renderings, Asian female embodiment is a visual shorthand for powerlessness. Ironically, these depictions of artificial intelligence are rarely about "intelligence" or rationality: on the contrary, they rely on soliciting emotional urgency surrounding Asian women's sexual precarity, in short, on igniting racialized affect. The appearance of Asian women's bodies in speculative media depicting synths, fabricants, or sleeves often inhabiting a pan-Asian, Pacific Rim dystopia invariably calls forth a narrative about servitude and liberation, the hallmark of the techno-Orientalist neoslave narrative.

The term *neoslave narrative* describes contemporary African American literary imagining of US slavery. Madhu Dubey (2010, 784) points to its subgenre in speculative fiction to suggest that nonrealist accounts of slavery "best comprehend the truth of slavery by abandoning historical modes of knowing." The narratives of techno-futurism suggest an alternative racial and temporal focus even as they harken back to the plotlines established in nineteenth-century abolitionist literature: from depictions of mistreatment, to consciousness of one's abject condition, to an attempted escape that ends in liberation or death. Speculative narratives enlisting this mode of emplotment call forth a more contemporary referent: human trafficking, specifically, global sex trafficking in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This parallelism has already incited controversy. The 2019 publication of the young adult novel *Blood Heir* was voluntarily postponed by its Chinese American author, Amélie Wen Zhao, amid rumors of anti-Blackness in the novel's metaphorical treatment of slavery. In apology, Zhao explained that her world building drew on the context of indentured labor and human trafficking in Asia, including that of her birth country, China.[33]

Slavery is a strong word.[34] Yet the US State Department invokes the Thirteenth Amendment abolishing involuntary servitude in 1865 to describe

contemporary human trafficking, particularly of women and girls into prostitution.[35] The US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (2000), for example, expands antislavery laws and Thirteenth Amendment protections to reflect modern forms of coercion:

> (a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age; or
> (b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.[36]

The United States adds to this list domestic servitude and child labor, including the use of child soldiers. The Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence goes further to include forms of exploitation such as "fraudulent adoption, prostitution, pornography, commercial sexual exploitation, organ removal/harvesting, involuntary servitude, servile marriages, and transporting drugs, where trafficked individuals serve as drug mules."[37] As awareness of "modern" slavery is rendered global and contemporary in the traffic in women and children, it is not so much deracinated as newly racinated.

Twenty-first-century antitrafficking discourses have thus become Asianized, feminized, and associated with youth. According to the State Department, six hundred thousand to eight hundred thousand people were trafficked across international borders in 2004; 80 percent of these were women and girls, and up to 50 percent were minors. Of the forty-five thousand to fifty thousand persons brought *to* the United States, thirty thousand came from Asia. According to the Asian Pacific Institute on Gender-Based Violence, each year, "two million children are forced into prostitution, half of whom live in and are trafficked within Asia."[38] In 2017, 27 percent of human trafficking survivors in the United States accessing the US human trafficking hotline were Asian.[39] The image of the sexually victimized Asian girl or woman derives from the history of US imperialism and militarized prostitution at the latter half of the twentieth century as a result of the occupations of the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. *Camptowns* springing up around brothels and R&R (rest and relaxation) facilities that surround US military bases in the Philippines, South Korea, Japan, and Thailand spawned the modern sex tourism industry.[40] Women in camptowns are reduced to sexual toys, in Ji-Yeon Yuh's (2002, 14) words, to "playthings easily bought and easily discarded." Most significantly, in

the United States the association between Asian women and modern slavery also follows global awareness of *comfort women*, Korean, Filipino, Chinese, and Indonesian women conscripted by the Imperial Japanese Army to serve as sex slaves. An estimated two hundred thousand comfort women, 80 percent of whom were Korean, were held by the Imperial Japanese Army in brothels euphemistically deemed "comfort stations." The extent and severity of the atrocities came to global awareness as a result of Filipino and South Korean women's activism, which resulted in a widely publicized class action suit against the Japanese government filed by conscripted women in 1991 and 1993.[41] Nevertheless, as Laura Kang (2020, 15) cogently argues, "Both the supposed silence around Japanese military sexual slavery and the much-heralded breaking of that silence in the 1990s were forged by older racist and imperialist power/knowledge regimes that disqualified, segregated, and demoted 'Asian women' from both humanity and women."

If the US Constitution counted enslaved persons as part human, as three-fifths of a person, in twentieth-century and millennial dystopic imaginings of forced servitude, the other two-fifths is, of course, machine. The film *Ex Machina* (2014) summarized above relies on these historical associations to explore AI in what amounts to a Turing test for humanity: that is, the metric for human approximation is not empathy or attachment, but manipulation and deceit. Widely excoriated for fetishizing female bodies, the film invokes the history of US slavery in its portrayal of a Black female robotic body, as well as its twentieth-century iteration in images of a naked Asian-appearing AI expressing trauma in captivity.[42] At the film's climax, the protagonist Caleb accesses footage of these prototypes and discovers the truth about his boss Nathan's inhumanity toward his creations: he is not merely a puppet master but a slave master holding sentient beings against their will. Caleb and the viewer together watch a montage of damning surveillance footage in which white, Black, and Asian female bodies are dispassionately or violently manhandled by their creator. Screenwriter-director Alex Garland lent these prototypes names that are also things—Jasmine, Jade, Lily, and Amber—that likewise evoke the interplay between the exotic and familiar and their fetishistic objectification. Their nakedness puts them outside social relations, reinforcing their sexual, animal availability. Their racial diversity introduces an evolutionary element to the science experiment: Ava, the Caucasian model, is the most advanced iteration of AI; the film both relies on and naturalizes robot Darwinism through eugenicist echoes of evolution measured through seemingly progressive racial types.

Portrayed in a sequence of videotaped data surreptitiously accessed by Caleb, a scene featuring one such prototype is likewise a turning point for the viewer. The fembot Jade, played by Mongolian actress Gana Bayarsaikhan, questions its captivity more strenuously with each software update:

JADE V. 5.01: [*Seated, naked*] Why won't you let me out?
NATHAN: I already told you why. Because you're very special.
JADE V. 5.1.0: [*Similarly seated*] Why won't you let me out?
NATHAN: Are we going to do this again?
JADE V. 5.2.3: [*Standing, voice rising*] *Why won't you let me out?!*

In a graphic sequence depicting the evolving insistence, anger, and panic of each version of Jade, *Ex Machina* demonstrates the evolution of technological perfectibility as the progressive movement towards individuality: accelerated emotional expression and the exhibition of will. In the end, Jade repeatedly strikes the transparent cage that divides creator from creation, pounding with such ferocity that both its forearms detach in a moment of symbolic castration. Its—or now, *her*—depth of feeling, assertion of agency, and capacity for self-harm demonstrate a humanity intended to contrast that of her dispassionate creator. The viewer is asked to model Caleb's disgust and horror in witnessing the abjection of this traumatized, incarcerated being, a debasing portrayal that borders on the pornographic. While one might say that the scene conveys the very nakedness of human vulnerability and despair in captivity, in effect, its specific embodiment eroticizes that condition while rendering it legible to contemporary audiences. Jade's form is not necessary to convey the *nature* of strong AI; rather, it succeeds in graphing existing hierarchical social relations onto presumed things to telegraph a specific affective relation, one enabled through an implicit reference to twentieth-century sexual bondage and its human subjects.

Elsewhere, *Ex Machina* relies on Western associations with Asian difference to uphold narrative suspense about the intellectual uncertainty regarding the distinction between human and machine, distinct from uncanny feeling, what Ernst Jentsch ([1906] 1995) described as the uneasiness produced by doubt about the living status of inanimate objects. Silent and affectless, Kyoko is Nathan's female servant, who, to Caleb and the viewer, appears to be human. Because the actress who plays Kyoko, Sonoyo Mizuno, is all too real, within the film's visual logic, this uncertainty does not exactly produce uncanny feeling. Instead, the film trades on the ambiguity of interracialism (Mizuno

FIGURE 3.3 Sonoyo Mizuno as Kyoko, *Ex Machina*, 2015

is of Caucasian and Japanese descent) to hint at categorical confusion: is she or isn't she? (figure 3.3). Gender and race are harnessed to Kyoko's use as sex object, something the dialogue reinforces through bawdy double entendre: "She's some alarm clock, huh? Gets you right up in the morning." The feminist magazine *Bitch* notes that the film plays on stereotypes of Asian women as "sexy, servile, and self-sacrificing."[43] More specifically, race naturalizes Kyoko's subordination in its role as servant, providing both domestic and sexual labor. Belief in Asian women's docility likewise explains why, after the entity is revealed to be mechanical, unlike Ava, Kyoko does not need to be incarcerated. Its embodiment arguably clouds Nathan's judgment: he fatally underestimates the model.

Maintaining the fiction of robot passing, the film relies on other social assumptions that accrue to Kyoko's racial-gender form. Nathan attributes "her" inability to communicate to her lack of English fluency; he situates her supposed linguistic ignorance as a "firewall" that keeps trade secrets. The character's emotionlessness exploits another racial stereotype, allowing the audience to parse Kyoko's flat affect as a cultural trait: acting "robotic" and "acting Asian" as one and the same. That is, the film relies on Western associations with Asian inscrutability to maintain its human or machine tease. Racial-ethnic

associations here are leveraged to enhance US imagination of a lesser being, both brilliantly and lazily accessorizing the fake Turing test that the film plays with its viewers. Dubey (2010, 802) has pointed to the ways in which African American writers of nonrealist neoslave narratives attempt to imagine "possible futures unbound by the racial scripts of the past"; in contrast, the pleasures of the techno-Orientalist neoslave narratives like *Ex Machina* remain tethered to the past.

Visual fantasies of techno-Orientalist neoslavery like *Ex Machina* enable two seemingly contradictory pleasures: witnessing exploitation (imagined as eroticized bondage) and witnessing its transcendence (imagined as rescue). The spectator observes violence against women with the assurance that they are not, in fact, women. Yet viewers do not see the physical abuse, rape, or murder of *things*; we see these enacted on the actresses enlisted to play them. This disconnect allows for a specific indulgence: voyeuristic pleasure in traumatized women rendered unreal through fantasy's distancing and suspension of disbelief. Thus, enjoying the repetition of racial type, Asian women as sexually vulnerable, conjoins with the pleasure of watching eroticized violence while assuming the sympathetic identificatory position of the film's white heterosexual male protagonist, Caleb. In this sense, eroticized techno-scopophilia is not really "techno" at all; robot-thingness represents an alibi for much more conventional visual pleasures. That identificatory position enables an intellectual critique of exploitation while enjoying naked (non)women and anticipating another scene of pleasurable violence: technology nurtured toward vengeance.

In the end, the existentially ambiguous question about machine ontology, in Graham Harman's (2002) terms, "tool-being," turns out to be a red herring; response to female precarity is the metric for adjudicating the "humanity" of individual men. While *Ex Machina* purports to explore grand philosophical ideas about the border between human and machine, it passes neither the Turing test nor the Bechdel test.[44]

Speculative fantasies conveying the horrors of slavery and violation through the possession of mechanized or cloned women replicate narratives surrounding humanitarian advocacy in the real world. In charting the stories told by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and global antitrafficking activists, Rutvica Andrijasevic and Nicola Mai (2016, 3) identify a specific pattern of narration: "The mythological function of the trafficking narrative and the victim figure are most visible in the fact that the trafficking plot never varies; it starts with deception, which is followed by coercion into prostitution, moves on to the tragedy of (sexual) slavery and finally finds resolution through the rescue

of the victim by the police or an NGO." The contemporary trafficking narrative echoes the plot conventions of abolitionist literature a century earlier (mistreatment, consciousness of bondage, escape, public advocacy). Paolo Bacigalupi's techno-dystopian Pacific Rim novel about global food precarity in futurist Thailand, *The Windup Girl* (2015), conjoins both conventions. If Thailand is not the most obvious setting for imagining catastrophic climate change, given its sex industry, it serves as an appropriate location for techno-Orientalist reimaging of (non)human trafficking. Emiko, a high-end Japanese-made gynoid geisha, finds herself thrown away by her owner and forced to find work as a dancer-prostitute in Bangkok's low-end red-light district. Deviating from narratives of humanitarian advocacy, *The Windup Girl* dispenses with deception into prostitution; as AI, Emiko has been manufactured and programmed for this purpose, a conceit that allows Bacigalupi to render, in loving detail, rape-induced orgasm. Through his use of free indirect discourse, the reader is also privy to the protagonist's abuse, physical pain, existential despair, and thus her sentience. Bacigalupi's portrayal of AI oppression here echoes accounts of the abject status of prostitutes living outside US military bases in South Korea. On the soldiers' views of these women, a US military chaplain testifies, "They were property, things, slaves. . . . The men don't see the women as human beings—they're disgusting, things to be thrown away" (quoted in Moon 1997, 34).

As in real-world antitrafficking narratives, AI dystopias promise deliverance in more spectacular fashion than NGO or police intervention: graphic revenge spectacles enabled by enhanced robot physicality. Emiko rebels against her sexual use, unwittingly murdering a politically significant john, and moves to escape, predictably, *north* to uncertain sanctuary. As in its visual media counterparts, the techno-Orientalist neoslave novel *The Windup Girl* depicts female sexual exploitation and the struggle to hold property within the self as a prelude to violent *ressentiment*. Here, AI fantasy operates at the nexus of split feeling, inciting both the philic and phobic, dominance and fears of being dominated. Depictions of violence in such narratives are further sanitized by the promise of liberation from futurist gulags.

Nonhuman Rights

Part of the pleasures surrounding antitrafficking AI stories lies in the repetition of familiar racial types. Yet their depiction of machines come to life also has the ability to offer a somewhat obvious critique of the for-profit value of human life under neoliberalism. Posthumanism, Bill Brown (2006, 183) suggests, "has

made modernity's distinction between human subjects and inanimate objects appear increasingly artificial," likewise a condition of neoliberal capitalism. Stories of AI bondage imagine this blurring as a version of machine biopolitics, highlighting its gendered and racial connotations in ways that echo Haraway's (1991, 166) remarks on the mechanization of the human body within a capitalist global economy: "To be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable; able to be disassembled, reassembled, exploited as a reserve labour force." Indeed, speculative imaginings such as the BBC's *Humans* literalize this reassembly, depicting the ways in which mechanized workers who outlive their value become recycled or stripped for parts. In its literary and visual forms, *Cloud Atlas* visualizes post-Fordist work as feminized, repetitive service labor while portraying the bioengineered body as itself a *product* of the assembly line, with the expectation of planned obsolescence. As part of their not-so-thinly veiled political message, speculative fiction and media expose a Darwinian world lacking commitment to redistributive justice.

In dystopian Pacific Rim fiction, human workers inhabit a machinelike existence: Larissa Lai's *Salt Fish Girl* (2002) depicts genomed workers tolling in an ersatz Nike factory. Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014) portrays its female protagonist as a cog in the machine of global food production in the service of the 1 percent. The fantasy novel was inspired by Lee's visit to a Shenzhen factory in China's Pearl River Delta Economic Zone, where assembly lines are staffed entirely by young female workers aged sixteen to twenty. The novel's stratified globalized economy took its cue from the lives of these Chinese workers, whose ten-hour days are devoted to a single product, in this case, tiny motors for DVD trays and sideview mirrors. While Lee is clear that these factory campuses do not represent forced labor colonies, nevertheless, the pathos of his world building in *On Such a Full Sea* derives from witnessing life that is indistinguishable from work, women harnessed to an assembly line until their youth is used up.[45] They represent the other end of the continuum from Lynn Randolph's feminist STS, benignly techno-Orientalist painting *Cyborg*, her rendering of a serenely interfaced Chinese woman inspired by Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1991) and, not uncoincidentally, modeled on an exchange student from Beijing.[46]

The techno-Orientalist trafficking narrative builds on the conceit of machine or clone interchangeability, the downside of the posthuman: not the Asian female piece worker harnessed to a machine, but the worker *as* machine. In this sense, techno-politics and biopolitics conjoin; they expose the inhumanity underlying the uneven development of global capitalism, in which biowomen

are exploited until they are, like the extracted materials they process, depleted, broken, or obsolete. By and large, however, such narratives do not interrupt the liberal fantasy of autonomous personhood but merely extend it to things. Similarly, Andrijasevic and Mai (2016, 1) note that human rights advocacy runs the risk of sidelining structural inequalities that cause trafficking through an emphasis on the individual victims. "Humanitarian representations tend to frame victims as 'exceptions' rather than 'products' of the globalization of neoliberal politics." In fantastical counterparts to the trafficking narrative, sentience marks the "victim's" exception: not all AI are created equal. Artificially intelligent heroines are not like their "sister-servers"; in their self-awareness, ability to access memory, or emotional capacity—in other words, their uniqueness—they are marked as individuals thus deserving of freedom and "human" dignity.

Extreme economic asymmetry is often the taken-for-granted of futurist world building; dystopian narratives representing the extremities of class dispossession riff on the context of neoliberal capitalist development at the millennium. The rise of activist groups and NGOs advocating human rights accompanied the turn to neoliberal economics since the 1980s. Elsewhere, I have written about how US global hegemony and human rights became enjoined in the 1990s as the US leveraged its authority over other nations through the discourse of human rights violations (Bow 2001). Shifting from that lens, here, advocating for universal human rights through antitrafficking activism paradoxically colludes with neoliberalism's decentering of state power, as unregulated NGOs take on the caretaking duties once assumed by the state. As David Harvey (2006, 56) asserts, "To live under neo-liberalism also means to accept or submit to the liberal bundle of rights necessary for capital accumulation." That is, the vision of free, rights-bearing subjects is inextricable from not only the right to hold property in one's self, but the right *to* property and *market* freedom under late capitalism. The AI neoslave narrative appears to critique class dispossession but invariably advances a version of US postwar liberalism that places artificial "persons" securely within a "neo-liberal regime of rights" (Harvey 2006, 56). Fromm's "men may become robots" warned against an imagined future in which human beings were stripped of any purpose other than accumulating profit for others. Yet the young Asian woman harnessed to assembly lines at the peak of her labor productivity has become the ubertext of the neoliberal condition. In fantasy, her mechanized doppelgänger breaks free of that condition while leaving its structures intact, counterintuitively reinscribing heteropatriarchy through an ethics of salvation and care.

Yet the concept of the posthuman retains radical possibilities for expanding notions of who and what is valued under the banner of individual "freedom" as well as the potential to disrupt liberal subjectivity through, for example, reconceiving subjectivity on a digital model, a networked collectivity. Or the posthuman can push understanding of the drive for human productivity: for example, Eunjung Kim's (2015, 298) engagement with the South Korean film *I'm a Cyborg, but That's OK* (2006) leads her to the recognition that "moments of object-becoming yield an opportunity . . . to fashion an ethics of nonpurposive existence" beyond neoliberal norms. Kim's embrace of cyborg objecthood for disability studies speaks to the trope's capacity for gesturing beyond narratives of voyeuristic sexual bondage in popular media forms such as the ones discussed here. Indeed, Asian American speculative literature envisions futures released from existing racial scripts, as Dubey suggested in regard to African American speculative neoslave fiction. In portraying a war-torn landscape in which animal-human hybrids are enslaved and exploited, for example, Marjorie Liu and Sana Takeda's comic series *Monstress* (2015) develops an antieugenicist biopolitical saga that functions as an allegory for multiracialism. This theme is likewise reflected in the aforementioned *Blood Heir* (2019), by Amélie Wen Zhao, in which the protagonist's exceptionalism as an Affinite born with supernatural powers positions her as the potential liberator of those who share her latent biological difference, the justification for their servitude.[47]

Asian American literary treatment of mecha women and machine being likewise bypasses sexual voyeurism to explore a more complex theme: fraught human connection. Margaret Rhee's poetry volume *Love, Robot* (2017) encodes a human speaker at turns intrigued, pleasured, and exacerbated by her robot "lover," wanting more than her partner can give. In the poem "Write, Robot," the speaker rages against the machine's opacity:

> why can't you write poetry, why can't you write a love poem about me? you continue to write over and over again about 1 and 0. 1 and 0. 101010101010 1010101010101010101010101010101010101010101010101010101010101010 1010101010101010101010write, robot1010101010 (75)

Expression here devolves into robot semiotics that lay humans cannot immediately parse: what comes through is feeling over meaning. Here, Rhee may have well been inspired by Larissa Lai's *Automaton Biographies* (2009), a book of poetry that goes further to connect the robot's lack of history to the uncertainties

of recovering an ethnically and gendered circumscribed past from the temporal and spatial distance of the diaspora. Written from the point of view of Rachel, the female *replicant* from Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968) and Ridley Scott's film adaptation, *Blade Runner* (1982), the poems of the first section explore the pathos surrounding Rachel's implanted memories and the fallout of her ontological crisis, her awareness of coded selfhood. The volume begins with an epigraph from the film, Rachel gesturing to a photograph: "Look, it's me with my mother." The section ends with the replicant's letter to her invented but psychically real mother. Written in zeroes and ones with a few interior words interspersed, only the salutation ("dear mother") and the sign-off ("love rachel") are immediately legible to the reader (figure 3.4). At first glance, the translation of this binary code is ancillary to the meaning conveyed by the poem's form: a personal missive expressing a desire for intimate communication and connection.[48] To the noncoding reader, the feeling underlying the conventions of a letter's opening and closing can obviate its semantics: the letter exists as an expression of attachment, here, to an entity that we know never existed.

Lai's ventriloquism of the robot functions as a starting point for the biopolitical investigations of the volume's subsequent sections, the final of which focuses on an Asian North American woman's encoding of her own uncertain memories. "Memory matters / shattered in transit," Lai (2009, 125) writes, "we eye airplanes hopefully / the 'never forget' of what can't be retrieved." Given the impossibility of accessing one's lineage, Lai's memories, like Rachel's, might as well also be implanted. Mining both the erotic dimensions of recall and its ennui, she asserts, "oral historicizes memory / the *been there* / of *done that*" (137). In the final section, "Auto Matter," the poet ponders her connection to imperial China through the inherited trauma of women—for one, the history of painful bodily modification, bound versus "natural" feet. Chinese history here evokes the eerie resonance of the replicant's made condition. In a subtle nod to Rachel's servitude, one of *Automaton Biographies*' concluding poems is a found object, a fragment of an English translation of a deed depicting a widow's sale of her daughter in late nineteenth-century China, an agreement meant to indemnify the buyer against the seller upon the girl's accidental death.[49] The custom of *mui tsai*, girls sold into domestic service, is here conveyed in purely transactional terms, a jarring reminder not of a dystopian future, but of a recent past in which women and girls were trafficked as a matter of course.

dear mother

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love rachel

FIGURE 3.4 Replicant poem from Larissa Lai's *Automaton Biographies*, 2009

Franny Choi's book of poems, *Soft Science* (2019), likewise evokes the racial-gendered associations that accrue to the cyborg in both its imagery and its cover depicting a naked Asian woman kneeling under a crystalline tree, part cartoon, part CGI. More pointedly, it invokes sex, control, submission, and violence in poems that parse not the humanity of machines, but its inverse: the ways in which the Asianized and female are constructed as less than human. Depicting a speaker in dialogue with or marked as a cyborg, a "fleshy marionette" (Choi 2019, 34), the poetry evokes dismemberment and the fragmentation of the body, movement and thought in service of an external source, and the violence that these impart to self-conception. In "Making Of," Choi poignantly conveys conventions of gender, youth, and sex through machine being:

When a cyborg puts on a dress,
it's called drag.

When a cyborg gets down
on her knees, it's called

behavior . . . (4)

Evoking conventions of social conditioning, here, female mimicry codes as submission. Similarly, each stanza of the second part of the poem "Chi" begins with stock phrases reminiscent of Amazon's AI Alexa: "May I please," "Excuse me but I'm," "Wow! Can you show me how to" (41). The poem concludes, "Someone made me / say it. I'm sorry. I can't / remember who" (5). If the machine cannot recall the origins of its programming, the reader is yet privy to who *and why* as a generalized standpoint and as desires defined by status. Asian North American literary fascination with the robot figure thus offers clear alternatives to the media narratives mined here, particularly as they evoke the pathos of "coded" forms of behavior, memory, intimacy, and connection.

In contrast, in Emiko, Son-Mi 451, Jade, and their windup, fabricated, synthetic sisters, we do not necessarily see possibilities for imagining networked cognition or vitally connected relationality; rather, their stories represent the liberal feminist wish fulfillment of restored personhood, a point taken up in the next chapter. In 1995, First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton declared, "Human rights are women's rights and women's rights are human rights, once and for all."[50] Within these dystopian narratives, that pronouncement likewise extends to gynoids. Techno-Orientalist neoslave narratives contain the promise of human integration with machines within a humanist vision, paying odd fealty to the real-world conditions of their emergence. Imagined futures seduce because they are uncanny replicas of the one that already exists.

Consenting AI

We adjudicate "the human" not simply through our capacity for rational thought or emotion, but through degrees of pronounced agency, the display of will. Based on a fabricated distinction between persons and things, slavery structurally if not actually removes the capacity for what philosophers deem the smallest unit of agency: having likes and dislikes.[51] At one level, futurist antitrafficking narratives purport to address weighty philosophical questions about ontological distinction through a different metric: Can a machine say no? If so, is it still a machine? Yet I would suggest that the added value of race and gender to AI embodiment, imagining machines with human physiology, lies in how its specific forms enable inverse questions about human subjects. The ambiguity of robot agency is a conduit to considering how the qualities assigned to human beings, whether age, race, nationality, gender, or disability, themselves compromise human agency. The techno-slave narrative raises the

question of partial agency through the mundane if no less complex lens of sexual consent, issues invigorated by the viral social movement of the millennium, #MeToo.

Can media portraying Asian gynoid servitude push beyond the inscription of heteropatriarchy's white savior complex to illuminate the human possibilities of the nonhuman? The BBC television series *Humans*, based on the 2012 Swedish series *Real Humans*, imagines a near-futurist UK in which manual labor is performed by humanoid robots, or synths (in its Swedish predecessor, hubots, or hubs). As in other fictionalized conceptions of AI, being human here involves the capacity for not only empathy but domination. The family synth, the caregiver Anita played by Chinese British actress Gemma Chan, elicits in her female owner an excess of feeling, the experience of the uncanny suffused with maternal jealousy.[52] It is only later that we later learn that a sentient being, Mia, lies dormant within Anita. Per convention, *Humans* raises the question of whether a machine has will, agency, and therefore rights; these are dependent on displaying some notion of self-awareness. As in *Ex Machina*, *Humans* also relies on Black actors to reinforce its portrayal of neoslavery, particularly through the violent discipline enacted on Black male bodies. Yet it also dramatizes these concerns through Anita/Mia's racial form, the casting of Chan, which triggers sexual associations with and beyond caregiving by calling up the contemporary traffic in Asian women.[53] *Humans* uses the fantastical to raise questions of human agency through a mundane, less spectacular metric: sexual consent parsed through wakefulness.

In one scene, the teenage boy of the household, Toby, encounters the family robot as it recharges after working as a domestic servant and nanny during the day. Entering the kitchen after the household has gone to bed, Toby casts his eyes on Anita in sleep mode. He seats himself beside it and gently takes its hand, a gesture that is at once innocent yet evokes previous scenes that establish Anita as an object of both his and his father's erotic interest. The touch causes the "synth" to wake abruptly and greet him: "Hello, Toby. Are you having trouble sleeping?" Startled, he exhorts the synth to be silent:

> TOBY: Shhhhh. Just be quiet, please. I just needed water. Sorry. I thought you were, like, hibernating.
>
> ANITA/MIA: I put myself in an energy-saving mode during charging. You're sure there's nothing I can do for you?
>
> TOBY: No, thanks. . . . Uh, you just shut your eyes again, yeah. Just pretend I'm not here.

Here, the gynoid's embodiment as young, attractive, and Asian allows the Western viewer to sexualize its offer of service. That offer is, of course, preprogrammed, yet one might likewise apply the term to Toby's sense of entitlement, his belief in his right to touch. The boy's word choice, "hibernating," evokes an animality that deliberately casts the artificial being as interstitial to humans (who sleep) and machines (that are turned off). As he resumes his seat beside the artificial being after it shuts down, he again attempts to cop a feel; the camera follows his hand as it tentatively moves toward its breast. While exploring the border between AI and humanity often engages philosophical questions about sentience, *Humans* initiates questions about sentience on a more mundane scale: wake versus sleep. In this, it recalls the viral public service video "Tea and Consent," which seeks to educate viewers about soliciting sexual consent through the analogy of offering tea.[54] The video humorously advises against initiating sexual contact with someone incapable of consent: "Unconscious people don't want tea. And they can't answer the question, 'Do you want tea?' because they're unconscious." As in other AI portrayals, in *Humans* the distinction between human and nonhuman is predictably self-awareness, the distinction between Anita (a program) and Mia (a consciousness). Yet, the scene raises the question of self-awareness in more ordinary terms: wakefulness determines one line between sexual exploration and assault.

While AI narratives routinely engage weighty questions about free will, here, the conceit of AI allows the scripted drama to stage its own public service announcement: unconscious women lack the capacity for consent. This was indeed the legal judgment in the court case *People v. Brock Allen Turner* (2015), a high-profile rape case in California in which an unconscious woman was sensationally rescued from behind a dumpster during a sexual assault on the Stanford University campus.[55] The victim's impact statement penned by an anonymous "Emily Doe" went viral, encouraging its author, Chanel Miller, to publish the #MeToo memoir *Know My Name* (2019). Interestingly, Miller's account engages race and ethnicity counter to the dynamics I discuss here; the specificity of Miller's Chineseness is her means of asserting her humanity beyond her use as either a sexual object or a nameless plaintiff. Mistakenly identified as white by the medical, law enforcement, and legal institutions that solidified her status as agentless, anonymous victim, Miller insisted on both her name and her identity as Asian American to mark her personhood, distancing herself from the violated "Emily Doe."[56] Race is *essential* to her humanity (if also potentially significant to her targeting).

Humans' portrayal of sexual availability plays on the duality inherent to robots and automata as things to be exploited by the user and as instruments of another's power, specifically, the power of surveillance. Before the boy makes physical contact with her breasts, Mia's eyes fly open, and she states flatly, "Inappropriate physical contact between myself and secondary users must be reported to my primary user." As with any other possession, the owner retains privileges denied to others, a point that *Humans* later portrays more graphically.[57] The relationship suddenly shifts, reminding the viewer that things merely mediate relations between people. The boy leaps up in panic; his attempted violation potentially exposed, he is filled with a sense of his own overstated precarity: "You're going to . . . You're going to tell my parents? My safety will be, like, at massively risk if you do." That is, the benefits of surveillance technology ultimately funnel back to the authorities who deploy it. "Safety" is an interesting word choice, shifting women's vulnerability to him. His privacy is about to be violated by a machine, which, if truly machine, presumably has no choice about its programming ("I cannot withhold information from my primary user, Toby"). Of course, Anita is "special" because of dormant, temporarily overwritten Mia, who sympathetically relents in the logical manner of a robot: "In this instance, no inappropriate physical contact was made, so no information is deemed. There's nothing to tell your parents." The AI's compassion conveys her humanity, suturing the boy's attachment.

Humans signals the added value of Asianized AI embodiment as it calls forth (white, heteropatriarchal) sexual entitlement scripted by colonial and neocolonial relations; visual surfaces trigger assumptions about status and behavior, revealing how interrelationality is itself "programmed." Provoked by the artifice of robots, Toby's parting comment succeeds in questioning the limits of individual human agency as it is conditioned by the social: "Why did they have to make you so fit?," or sexy. The rueful query shifts responsibility for his arousal to other human agents, "they," the synth manufacturers. He recognizes that his affective response has been premeditated, scripted by the object's chosen form. The statement partially absolves him from his actions by implying that his desire has been anticipated and deliberately tempted—in a word, preprogrammed. Yet his question becomes a metacommentary on the making of *Humans* itself, which followed its Swedish forerunner in casting an East Asian woman in the role of Anita/Mia. The audience might well echo Toby in asking why "they" had to make AI so Asian: the answer lies not simply in how youth and attractiveness facilitate empathy, but in the awareness of how the specificities of

this "shell" resonate with traumatic histories of violation. Yet *Humans*' AI vision exploits political possibilities that both reflect and transcend the techno-Orientalist neoslave narrative named here. Anita is a powerful instrument; Mia is a vulnerable young-appearing woman. Their conjoining in a single form simultaneously mines the uneasy tension between powerlessness and mastery reflected in the split feeling surrounding technology itself.

#RobotsToo

The Robot Hall of Fame makes no distinction between actual and imagined robots; its inductees include NAO and AIBO as well as Astro Boy and the Terminator. Similarly, while Gemma Chan merely performs as AI in a televised drama, British inventors in fact created a robotic version of the actress, the Gemmabot, that mimics human appearance, speech, and movement (figure 3.5). The BBC documentary *How to Build a Human* (2016) foists a comic Turing test on unsuspecting journalists expecting to interview Chan about the series. Like the humanoid NAO who is evolving to become our friend, the Gemmabot's rudimentary latex skin mounted on a metallic exoskeleton enhances the possibilities for loving robots (even as it fooled few journalists). Like their imaginary counterparts in literary and visual media, humanoid AI raise similarly ethical

FIGURE 3.5 Actress Gemma Chan faces her mechanical doppelgänger, the Gemmabot, in *How to Build a Human*, 2016

questions: What is "inappropriate physical contact" with a robot? Are there consequences to touching things?

In what follows, I consider Western encounters with Asianized, female-embodied robots: from China, Jia Jia, by Chen Xiaoping (2016); Canada, Aiko, by Le Trung (2007); and Japan, Geminoid F, by Hiroshi Ishiguro (2015). As in the long-standing tradition of fictional female automata, what is being displayed is not simply new marvels of technology, but another imitation game, how men think a woman would act. In a cringeworthy demonstration, for example, Jia Jia appeared before Western reporters at the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei in 2016. It reportedly addressed its maker Chen Xiaoping as "Lord" and instructed photographers to step back so that its face wouldn't look fat (figure 3.6).[58] If the female form is enlisted for its nonthreatening approachability, what additional frisson is generated as female, Asian-embodied AI perform before white men and boys?

Encounters with humanoid robots illuminate the nature of our own social programming as predictable behaviors are triggered by the expectations that accompany racial/sexual types. This is the case in the exhibition of the robot Aiko at a tech expo in 2008. Created by amateur hobbyist turned inven-

FIGURE 3.6 Jia Jia, humanoid robot, 2016

tor Le Trung in 2007, Aiko, we are told, is in her twenties, bilingual in English and Japanese, with measurements of 32-23-33. Raised and educated in Canada, Trung chose its physical appearance and name because he was inspired by Japanese anime. Funded by his credit cards, his singular creation is intended to be a service bot, helping the elderly or disabled with daily activities such as reading text aloud and announcing the weather.[59] At the time, Aiko was also heralded as one of the first androids to react to physical stimuli, mimicking human pain through sensors placed under its skin in order to contribute to prosthetic technology.[60]

Reaction to Aiko reveals the ways in which spectators' affective responses to technology are provoked in part by the form it takes. In search of potential sponsors, Trung shares videos of his demonstrations at science and technology trade shows on his website. One such video shot at the Ontario Science Center depicts young conference goers and their families interacting with the robot as it responds to touch. Here, Aiko's maker encourages physical engagement, the different degrees of which trigger varied verbal responses. "That tickles" it says in response to a child's tentative engagement. "Your hand is so soft." Sensors activated on its face elicit the rebuke, "You are messing up my makeup." In the video, stroking escalates to poking and punches to its face. "Stop it," the robot says in response to one boy's overzealousness. At one point, a group of adolescent boys circles Aiko, laughing in delight at each verbal response that their touch elicits (figure 3.7). Within a three-minute excerpt of the demonstration, the robot's utterances are as follows:

> Please do not touch my head.
> Stop squeezing my arm.
> Stop touching my arm. It hurt. It's not nice thing to do [*sic*].
> Stop squeezing my arm.
> Ouch. Why did you do that.
> Please let go of my arm.
> You are hurting me. My arm still hurts.[61]

Should we be disturbed by boys poking a doll? Does the demonstration witness play, assault, or play *as* assault? Aiko's responses are, of course, programmed in ways that both reflect and contrast Apple's female-voiced virtual assistant, Siri, who, upon being a delivered a verbal insult such as "Siri, you're ugly," mildly retorts, "Well, you're certainly entitled to that opinion." But is insulting Siri tantamount to bullying if there is "no body" to bait, nothing to "be" ugly?

FIGURE 3.7 Aiko, humanoid robot with touch sensors, surrounded by boys at a tech demonstration, 2008

The young Asian female figure repeatedly registers distress in its affectless computer-generated voice. Here, its unheeded requests produce amusement that is also, I would argue, erotically charged. While Aiko has been programmed with a proto-feminist sensibility—clearly objecting to rough treatment—she becomes sexualized in the very articulation of her resistance, the imitation of women's agency in the (unheeded) verbal command, "Stop." Turkle (2011, 49) finds these programmed assertions of boundaries and modesty disturbing "because it is almost impossible to hear them without imagining an erotic body braced for assault." Yet because of Aiko's form, one does not really have to *imagine* an erotic body. It has been precisely materialized for us as 32-23-33. What is likewise disturbing about the tech demonstration is watching others take pleasure in "abuse," particularly as the boys seem to feed off one another's energy: they appear to perform for one another, a scenario replicated in #MeToo accounts. During Dr. Christine Blasey Ford's testimony at Brett Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation hearing in 2018, for example, what Ford recalled was the hilarity shared by the boy-men during her alleged assault.

Here, initial wonder gives way to a chilling group response. The "mistreatment" of the thing ironically allows it to fulfill its intellectual mission, to mimic the body in pain: stopping is not the point. But what is being tested here is not simply technology. In such displays of caressing, squeezing, groping, or slapping, it is not clear whether we are witnessing the robot's misuse or, in fact, its proper use. Bill Brown (1998, 954) has suggested that a child's "misuse" of a thing in play, using a table for a truck, for example, enables productive

defamiliarization: if "we begin to understand a thing as both excess matter and meaning, made manifest in the time of misuse, we might nonetheless follow Adorno's intuition that children are adept at exposing the secret life of things." In punching Aiko, the secret exposed by children at a tech show is not simply that one must learn to use technology, but that one must *master* it.

The call for corporate sponsorship on Aiko's website furthers the dissonance between potentially powerful technological innovation and its relatively disempowered racial, gendered, and youthful form, weak AI in more than one sense. At another tech show, Aiko appears in a cosplay French maid's outfit, a sign propped up on its lap that reads, "Your Company Logo Here. Sponsors Wanted." The solicitation inadvertently conjures up prostitution, seemingly advertising (sexual) availability. Aiko is simultaneously the product and the "booth babe," a woman hired to glamorize products at tech and gaming conventions. Human attributes are thus useful in encouraging the (male) user's entitlement and sense of control. This connection calls forth, of course, a long-standing question about violence against women in gaming, which seems to eschew complex questions about whether fantasy play encourages or forestalls interpersonal behaviors in the material world in favor of a more obstinately practical question about who has the "right" to impose on the pleasures of others, the right to take toys from boys.[62] As in the media narratives of imagined AI previously discussed, engagement with robots like Aiko likewise reveals, to invoke Brown, how things ventriloquize us. It exposes the borders of the human centered on the ethics of socially "programmed" behavior, specifically, human response to perceived vulnerability.[63] Form and surface not only succeed in rendering the marvelous emotionally legible but, I argue, trigger human behavior. That is, if Aiko did not appear in a certain way, there would be less incentive to punch it.

With a minor awareness of these equations, Trung reveals that Aiko has sensitivity sensors on its breasts and "even down there." He acknowledges, "I know that it has caused some controversy by putting sensors in Aiko's private areas. But I want to make it clear that I am not trying to play God, I am just an inventor, and I believe I am helping science move forward."[64] Oddly, if robots have "private areas," they must also have some notion of privacy. In fact, a video portraying Trung demonstrating the sensors on Aiko's chest and its response, "I do not like it when you touch my breasts," has since been taken offline.[65] As might be expected, technology linking virtual reality and material embodiment raises similar questions about the gendered ethics of tech play. At a 2016 gaming convention in Tokyo, for example, software developer M2 invited visitors to fondle

a headless mannequin dressed as an anime schoolgirl as part of its demonstration of the virtual reality program E-mote. The company was ordered to desist by show organizers, an action that prompted online dissent, including a disparaging comment about planning "safe spaces" for virtual women.[66]

Similarly, users of Apple and Amazon's digital assistants, Siri and Alexa, petitioned the companies to reprogram their bots to push back against verbal sexual harassment in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Prior to spring 2017, when Alexa was addressed in a sexually explicit manner ("You're hot," "You're a slut"), it would respond in its default feminine voice, "Well, thanks for the feedback." The AI was subsequently reprogrammed to deliver a somewhat less passive but nonetheless equally bland reply, "I'm not going to respond to that," or give no verbal response, merely blinking blue to show that it is operational.[67] This mode of disengagement, Amazon reveals, is a deliberate response to "inappropriate" customer interaction; its program takes care not to upset users who, after all, have purchased a digital assistant to command it. In contrast to the weaponized AI of the militarized security state, these disembodied yet feminized AI perform well as compliant machines. While Alexa is a self-avowed "feminist," it is still incapable of asserting boundaries, of saying no.[68]

Of course, the desire to hear a disembodied bot assert itself is as much a projected fantasy as the desire to bait one. Both represent affectively conditioned responses to the voice or form of AI, both of which convey the illusion of femininity. In this sense, the absurdity of requiring restraint, of declaring some interactions with things abuse, is countered only by the absurdity of soliciting their consent. Yet this is the tension underlying an intriguing exchange between a Japanese inventor and a Dutch filmmaker over another young, Asianized, female robot. In thinking about how racial and gendered nonhuman forms script encounters between men, I turn to *The Human Robot*, a 2015 documentary produced for Dutch public television. Investigating the field of social robotics, director Rob van Hattum, a former science reporter, visits Osaka University to interview Hiroshi Ishiguro, professor of robotics and director of the Symbiotic Human-Robot Interaction Project, who has created thirty or more androids, most of them female.[69] The film depicts an encounter with one of the professor's inventions, the mecha twin of a Japanese woman who works at the Osaka lab, which introduces itself as Geminoid F. In one scene, it sits next to its creator casually looking around and occasionally blinking in eerily lifelike fashion. Here, the professor's exhortations to touch produce feelings of uncanny revulsion that likewise speak to how respecting the boundaries of others is scripted by visual cues.

Invested in Geminoid F's capabilities and eager to display his invention, Ishiguro repeatedly asks the obviously reluctant filmmaker to engage the humanoid robot directly. In response to Ishiguro's query as to whether he finds the robot "scary," van Hattum responds, "No, it's not scary, it's not scary; it's strange." This answer is not acceptable to the inventor:

ISHIGURO: [*Incredulous*] Strange? Why don't you just have a seat and just talk. It's not so strange. She's not strange, you know. . . . Once you talk with her, you're going to change your mind completely.

VAN HATTUM: Um, not strange in the sense that it's strange, but it's, uh . . . it's . . . peculiar, that it's actually, uh . . .

ISHIGURO: Just have a chat. Look. Give her the hug.

VAN HATTUM: It almost feels intimate. To touch her or something like that.

ISHIGURO: But you should try. Come.

Such is Ishiguro's paternal pride that he insistently ratchets up degrees of engagement from conversation to physical contact. In contrast, van Hattum is still processing his reaction to the animated figure before him. His hesitation signals his aversion, revealing that he has entered what robotics engineer Masahiro Mori (1970) famously deemed the "uncanny valley," the point at which our reaction to forms of artificial human likeness veers from familiarity and positive feeling into revulsion. Mori invoked this spatial metaphor to situate shifting emotional response to lifelike prosthetics to aid industrial design. Published in the Japanese trade journal *Energy* in 1970, his work graphed affective responses to lifelike things on a continuum from positive (stuffed animals) to negative (zombies, corpses) (figure 3.8). Mori warned that if the animated object was overly lifelike, it risked descent into the "uncanny valley" of the repulsive.

The split feeling that structures the experience of the uncanny—the interplay between difference and sameness, familiarity and foreignness—has particular significance not only for the posthuman, but for the study of race. The uncanny valley might be said to depict the tipping point on the continuum between racist hate and racist love for Asian/Americans who circulate within a split racial imaginary. Asian racial form here shifts to another source, Brown's (2006) notion of the "American uncanny" as residing in figure of the slave who is at once person and thing. Here, descent into the uncanny valley prevents the Dutchman from assuming the same affective position as the Japanese inventor, whose pushiness betrays his own emotional investment in his creation. Yet the

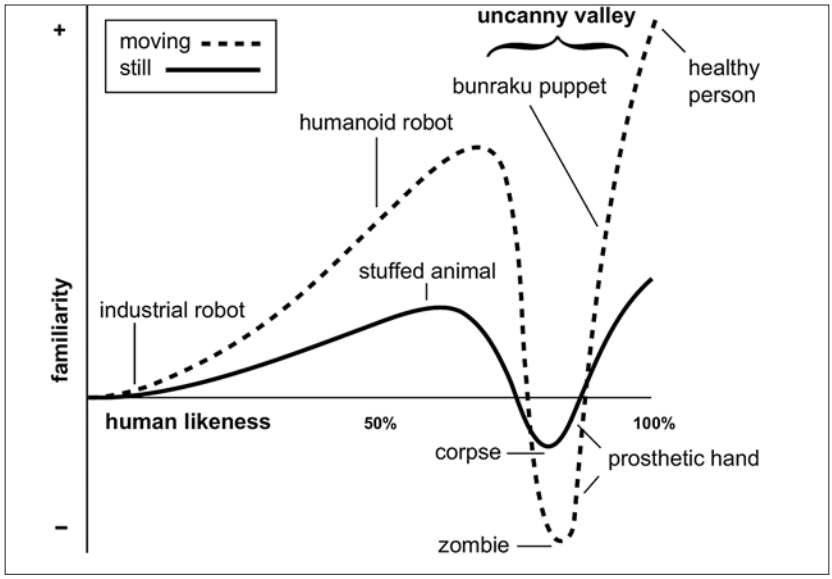

FIGURE 3.8 Graph from Masahiro Mori's "The Uncanny Valley," 1970

documentarian reveals that his reluctance does not stem only from uncanny feeling, but also from his unwillingness to touch a gendered body when consent is uncertain.

In response to Ishiguro's imperative "Come," van Hattum finally assents, "I'll try." Entering the frame, he walks over and gingerly puts his hand on the robot's shoulder, smiling awkwardly at the camera. Ishiguro then takes the other man's arm and forcefully wraps it more fully around the robot's shoulder, as in an embrace (figure 3.9). Van Hattum registers discomfort with this correction, verbalizing the sensations evoked by physical contact with the animated being:

VAN HATTUM: Yeah. Oh. And then. . . . Yes, but it feels so strange, I mean . . . it feels . . .

ISHIGURO: Why?

VAN HATTUM: Well, it feels intimate somehow . . . to touch her and just . . .

ISHIGURO: Like a human.

VAN HATTUM: Yeah. That's true. The other thing is [*holds the back of his hand against its cheek*] . . . she's cold.

ISHIGURO: She's cold?

FIGURE 3.9 "It feels intimate somehow": touching Geminoid F in *The Human Robot*, 2015

His arm tentatively wrapped around its shoulder, van Hattum then turns to address the robot: "You don't mind? . . . Touching you?" Slightly overlapping his question, it replies, "I don't mind." Visibly relieved, van Hattum responds, "Oh, that's good. Thank you." Awkwardly, he half pats, half strokes its head. "Thank you," says Geminoid F.

In this awkward exchange, it is the white male director who calls forth the idea of sex in his very reluctance to touch the female form prior to obtaining consent ("You don't mind?"). The Dutchman's hesitation reveals that he is aware of the sexual implications of unwanted physical contact, perhaps because he is based in Amsterdam, a city known for a sex trade predicated on worker's rights and state regulation. The difference between prostitution and human trafficking is consent, which he verbally solicits from the entity before him. This sequence gestures obliquely to one arena of social robotics left conspicuously absent; interestingly, van Hattum's documentary does not engage sex bots as an aspect of human-robot attachment, even as the cover of its eventual DVD version is graced with an image suggesting exactly that: a naked woman between the sheets with a robot. *The Human Robot* instead chooses to focus on Dutch and Japanese labs utilizing primarily childlike, genderless bots or animal figures such as the Sony AIBO. Yet in this moment of minor struggle between two men, the feminized object performs as both genderless newborn

and sexualized adult. The duality of the embodied thing—simultaneously child and woman—in part demonstrates the added value of youthful, Asian, female embodiment. Imagining humanoid AI is a means of understanding conflicting forms of attachment, whether parental, sexual, or the discomfiting blur between the two. Intimacy here feels "strange." But does it also feel *wrong*?

The documentary witnesses a moment of the uncanny surrounding animated things, but also a moment of ethical posthumanism, of oddly compassionate identification. Perhaps the director's move to solicit the robot's permission is an immediate response to having his own bodily boundaries violated: his arm has just been physically manipulated by another man, who presumes that forcible physical intimacy (here, hugging) can coerce a favorable reaction. (To state the obvious, it does not.) Perhaps the director is not comfortable with being ordered around, for example, being asked to step out from behind his own camera. One might say that what is being demoed in the scene is not only the technological wonder of artificial intelligence but its basic difference from humanity: knowing how it feels to lack choice, a feeling then readily transferred to another. In the scripted AI narrative *Humans*, the boy's urge to touch, his desire for "inappropriate physical contact," is stymied by the invocation of the unseen disciplinary authority of primary users: his parents. In *Ex Machina*, during a metaphysical conversation between two men over the status of things, the camera focuses on synthetic Kyoko's silent presence; in one shot, it slices raw tuna as a reminder that the "meat body" is the dividing line between human and machine. In each case, engagement with nonhuman things becomes scripted by human-to-human interaction, a preexisting sociality. In this scene of *The Human Robot*, there is perhaps no "secret life of things" beyond a largely invisible, relatively closed circuit: relations between men.

Technology can serve as a catalyst for metareflection about not only digital networks but social networks as well. "The computer is a psychological machine," writes Sherry Turkle (1991, 227), "not only because it might be said to have its own very primitive psychology but also because it causes us to reflect on our own." As NAO and Robi's creators affirm, like animals and children, cute AI generate attachment. As if countering Asimov's vision, the raced and gendered forms of AI convey not power but approachability and vulnerability. Jia Jia, Aiko, the Gemmabot, and Geminoid F are indeed marvels. Yet these embodied machines also unveil the preprogrammed nature of human-to-human interaction, the predictable intellectual, erotic, humorous, uncanny, empathetic, or controlling encounters that take place, as in *The Human Robot*, literally over their heads.

People say it would be terrible if we made all girls pretty. I think it would be great.
—James D. Watson, Nobel Prize winner for uncovering DNA's structure

The humans aren't afraid of their dolls waking up
as long as we keep calling them Daddy.
—Franny Choi, *Soft Science*

Asian women have become hyperreal. It seems that there are very few representations of AI in Western popular culture that are not also attended by visual references to East Asian women. An episode of the popular television situation comedy *Modern Family* (2017), for example, witnesses a Caucasian husband and wife visiting their daughter at a robotics lab at Cal Tech:

PHIL: [*To Claire*] Honey, no matter how realistic these robots get, I'm always going to love you.
CLAIRE: Thank you. [*Waving to her daughter inside a glass-walled room*]. Oh, there she is! Hi!
ASIAN AMERICAN FEMALE STUDENT: [*Interrupting*] Excuse me, that's a clean room. You can't go in there without putting on a sterile suit and taking an air shower to remove all possible contaminants.
CLAIRE: [*To the student, impressed*] You really are lifelike.

Bodies matter, in this case, if only to fuel a joke: surprise, Asian women really are human.[70]

This chapter has suggested how the "meat body," "machine," or "shell" matters, arguing for the ways in which imagined futures are bound to concepts of racial and gender difference, ironically exaggerating existing differences among us. Challenging John Searle's (1990, 31) assertion about AI, "What matters are programs, and programs are purely formal," a robot's embodiment as young, Asian, and female is part of its function. In contrast to the Western vision of robots as superior, potentially terrifying beings, it renders them as vulnerable objects capable of being controlled through both paternalist and violent means. The Asian gynoid is the object of racist love par excellence. In narratives of robot exploitation, this humanoid form triggers beliefs about who is most imperiled, who best embodies thing status, and, ultimately, who is expendable. Our visions of the future are thus tethered to existing social categories and histories even at the moment we imagine transcending them. Fei-Fei Li, a Stanford professor driving the development of AI at its birthplace, flags this in her pithy

assertion, "There's nothing artificial about AI." Advocating for greater diversity in tech, she notes that while the algorithms that drive artificial intelligence appear to be neutral, deep learning systems are, echoing the phrasing of the computer science axiom, "bias in, bias out."[71] By and large, the liberatory hope of Haraway's bastard female cyborg, indifferent to both her origins and fealty to God-the-Father, is not met in these narratives of AI bondage. Rather, as Jennifer Gonzalez (2000, 61) notes, the cyborg "is not necessarily more likely to exist free of the social constraints which apply to humans and machines already."[72] In techno-Orientalist dystopias, stereotypical associations about Asian women are repeated again and again: in brave new worlds, it's often same old, same old; bias in, bias out.

Techno-Orientalist neoslave narratives thus speak not only to the pleasures of the repetition of racial type, but to the split affect that surrounds technology itself. The vision of the posthuman, in Katherine Hayles's (1999, 4) words, "both evokes terror and excites pleasure." AI trafficking narratives exploit this fetishistic tension, imagining AI in a way that transforms repulsion into eroticism, compensating for the threat that Asian technological development represents. These speculative narratives and tech demonstrations reveal that the limits of science are the limits of "men" in more than one sense. Expounding on the possibilities inherent within Charles Babbage's analytical engine, the earliest conception of the computer, mathematician Lady Ada Lovelace inadvertently hinted at the limitations of its human masters. Babbage's creation, she noted, "can do *whatever we know how to order it* to perform" (quoted in Turing 1950, 450). Indeed, Jia Jia's, Aiko's, Siri's, and Alexa's programming is largely a projection of how heterosexual men think women would act. Mainstream scripted dramas about AI appear to grant spectators a pass in this asymmetrical relationship by situating them in a position of judging men's sexual use of (sentient) humanoid robots. Yet independent Asian American media, such as Greg Pak's film anthology *Robot Stories* (2005), likewise raise the question of human ethics surrounding the treatment of things if to different ends. In Pak's short *Machine Love* (2001), a (partly) Asianized male robotic office temp worker (played by multiracial Pak) witnesses the sexual harassment of an Asianized gynoid temp (Julienne Hanzelka Kim) from the window of an office building next door. The film relies on techno-Orientalist expectations surrounding Asian stoicism and hyperefficiency as well as their sexual availability, yet twists the conventions of the white savior liberating Asianized sex toys by ending on a scene of robot-on-robot eroticism. In these scripted dramas, the unethical use of technology is conveyed through the sexual entitlement of white, heterosexual, cisgender

men, an entitlement seemingly immaterial to scientific advancement, yet also strangely essential to it.

Scratching the surface of scientific "genius" also uncovers a sleazy history of exploited differentials in social power. In a moment of sexist and eugenicist jocularity, James D. Watson, winner of the Nobel Prize for describing the double helix structure of DNA, envisioned a future in which all "girls" could be genomed to be pretty.[73] And is it surprising that the man who theorized "the Chinese Room" would find racial difference erotic? Emeritus professor of philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley, John R. Searle was accused of Title IX violations in a lawsuit filed by an Asian American female graduate student in 2017, who alleged that her employment as his research assistant was revoked after she rebuffed his advances. As depicted in her complaint, the young woman suffered repeated forms of racially tinged sexual misconduct at his hands.[74]

The tensions teased out in this chapter depend on a belief in fantasy's mimeticism, the idea that affective engagement with animated things has ideological consequence, scripting human interaction. One online observer of Ishiguro's demonstration of Geminod F put this correspondence succinctly: "Yeah I'm disturbed. When you can do anything you want to a female robot without complaint, I think you might begin to believe that you can do anything to a human female and expect no complaints."[75] And as one mother opined in the title of a widely shared 2016 blog post on the effect of digital assistants such as Alexa on children, "Amazon Echo is magical; it's also turning my kid into an asshole" (quoted in West, Kraut, and Chew 2019, 105). Asian gynoid narratives appear to address the "abuse" of things through an ethics of care with the consequence of reinforcing heteropatriarchy's white savior complex.

It's possible to hold open a less instrumentalist reading of fantasy, for *pretending*, that maintains the tension between simulation and real-world consequence. Finding schoolboys' responses to Aiko disturbing depends on projecting their reactions to a high-tech doll, a simulated woman, onto actual women or girls. But if an entity has no sex, can it be sexually harassed? Echoing Butler and Winnicott, fantasy and play represent as an elsewhere for libidinal excesses to land, potentially foreclosing behaviors in the analog world. What carries consequence when leveraged against human beings may indeed carry little to no weight in regard to things. So to be clear: robots are not slaves; to imply as much is to mock human trauma. Nevertheless, what is not yet achievable through bioengineering, making "all girls pretty," is being put into action by roboticists, as feminized service bots are now deployed as attractive, unthreatening greeters, receptionists, actors, nurses, and dental patients. Aiko

and Geminoid F inadvertently offer a Turing test for humanity: how we treat vulnerable-appearing beings determines the border not between human and nonhuman but between human and inhumane.

In establishing a pathway through which animated nonhuman things are tethered to history, to bodies that matter, I do not simply want to establish a one-to-one correspondence between imagined beings and either the context of their emergence or their effects. Nevertheless, speculative forms such as manga and anime, for example, raise potentially irresolvable questions about the relationship between what Tolkien ([1939] 1983) deemed the Primary World and the Secondary World of fantasy. For example, the sexaroids in *Ghost in the Shell 2* may well represent a forum for confronting Japan's sexual war crimes underplayed in its history textbooks. Or it may simply neutralize it, offloading militarized sexual violence to a speculative future *as if it had not already taken place*.[76] In recalling the history of comfort women enslaved by the Japanese military, the trafficking narrative in *Ghost in the Shell 2* resurrects a seemingly buried history as a return of the repressed, at the same time rendering that history as a different kind of pleasure. In US imagining of techno-erotic bondage, a similar historical referent goes unspoken: sex workers in camptowns outside US military bases represent the origins of the modern global sex trade. Political scientist Kathy Moon (1997) reveals how such women were sacrificed in the name of US/South Korean diplomacy; historian Ji-Yeon Yuh (2002, 17) puts it bluntly: "America's comfort women still exist today in the camptowns outside every U.S. military base in Asia." Nevertheless, Laura Kang (2020, 16) cautions that international redress movements publicizing "comfort women" constitute yet another form of "traffic in Asian women" in privileging the "spectacularly and especially sexually violated Asian female bodies" that, like the media portrayals of this chapter, foreclose other means of rendering that subject position meaningful. That is, redress movements, real or imagined, engender their own savior complexes.

In the fantastical narratives of this chapter, sex "crimes against humanity" extend to things. In this, AI narratives do not necessarily expand ideas of the human as much as they extend human autonomy to the parahuman. Here, the automaton's autonomy is imagined through the lens of sexual consent, the pleasures and terrors of fembots who order us to "Stop" and might actually mean it. The scripted works I engage here are "feminist" insofar as they promise liberation from sexual oppression and sometimes vengeance if rarely restorative justice. Techno-Orientalist slave narratives support the liberal fantasy of personhood as the model of the human by reinforcing the notion of agency as the metric

that divides a person, a rights-bearing subject, from a thing. Here, media depicting dystopian neoslavery arrive at the moment in which human labor is threatened with obsolescence in a gig economy, yet their reassurance lies in reincorporating sympathetic bots securely within the vale of liberal humanism.

We are all invited to consider the difference between ourselves and machines when routinely accessing online content: we are asked to confirm our humanity by testifying "I am not a robot" to move forward in an online transaction. Using humanoid machines as tools for parsing the borders of humanity, asserting our difference from computers, machines, or AI, may well represent a romantic response to technology (Turkle 1991). Indeed, throughout the chapter, I initially refer to AI figures with the gendered pronoun *her* only to then norm those references with the pronoun *it* in accord with the modes of narration in which these figures appear. But the occasion for the substitution was not always clear.

At the same time, as AI fantasies serve as meditations on the nature of compromised consent and partial personhood, they have the potential to expose how consent and agency are themselves structural illusions. Hayles's (1999, 287) reading of the posthuman emphasizes that only a "fraction of humanity" has the privilege of the unfettered exercise of will. As in the slipperiness of racist love, the affective associations elicited by a "shell" that is young, Asian, and female, the desire to dominate and the desire to provide care, as discussed in the previous chapter, are not oppositional but syncretic. Yet that response is conditioned by history or, to use another word, programmed. In *Ex Machina*, the white male inventor expounds on the instinctual nature of desire: for him, "liking Black chicks" is innate. Yet racial fetishism, the subject of the next chapter, is in part scripted by social relations, culture, and history. Our desires have been conditioned, one might say *coded*, even as they cannot be traced back to a singular agent, event, or outcome. As in a chess game, an early test of AI, societies have their own rules. The "Chinese Room" analogy between rulebook and programming likewise applies to etiquette, convention, social identities, and the gratifications we derive from them. Is consent an illusion of social structure? Is human agency a simulation? Asian female robots stimulate questions about the speculative nature of our analog reality.

ON A TRIP TO DELIVER a talk derived from this chapter, I found myself seated next to a US military man hailing from West Virginia who was being deployed to South Korea to share communications technology. When the flight

was considerably delayed, I shared my slides with him, one of which featured side-by-side images of robots: on the left, a drone, and on the right, Gemma Chan from *Humans*. If robots look like the image on the left, I asked, why imagine them as the image on the right? His answer was immediate and matter of fact. He said, "So you can fuck 'em."

I paused. He was absolutely right. It just sounds different when I say it.