Affective Labor and Technologies of Gender in Wei Yahua's "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus"

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Abstract: Robotics explores the boundary between the human body and its objective use value, but within a Chinese context, the questions of gender and labor rise to the forefront. This privileging of technology at the expense of labor in the post-Mao 80s is examined in the short story, "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus," which uses the feminine performativity of a robot wife to exam the role of affective labor and the legal status of objects. Such a performance decenters the human subject while simultaneously subjugating the laboring technological materials. It is in gendered performance that subjectivity is acquired under the law.

Keywords: affective labor, gender theory and performance, roboethics, Chinese science fiction, artificial intelligence

The mechanized body as a surrogate for human labor—whether emotional or physical—serves as a way to technofantasize old desires of humanization. Informed by legacies of commodification that define the boundaries of the human as gendered and/or laboring, robotics pairs the hope of advancement with the problem of human obsolescence. This is nowhere more true than in texts that explicitly pair technologies of gender with technologies of labor by packaging both in an explicitly feminized mechanical body. Commodification and questions of agency and consciousness are at stake, and, when locating the question within the socialist context of the post-Mao 80s in mainland China, technoscientific embodiment as a framework for social criticism rises to the forefront. This paper will ask questions about what technologies of labor and gender are at work in Wei Yahua's (魏雅华) "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" and how those two tracks intersect to engineer new possibilities and problems for social (and socialist) realities.

Wei Yahua's 《我决定与机器人妻子离婚》 ("I Decided to Divorce my Robot Wife") and its sequel, 《温柔之乡的梦》 ("Dream of a Soft Country"), collectively translated by Wu Dingbo as "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus," features a male scientist narrator who, in selecting a robot wife, comes to realize that perfect obedience borne out of strict gender roles leads only to misery. Lili—the

titular robot wife—is selected from thousands of other models for her "traditional characteristics" of subservience and beauty, as well as obedience in all things. This slavish deference leads her to burning her husband's important papers at his behest, after which he decides to divorce her. In the courtroom scene that ends "I Decided to Divorce my Robot Wife," Lili claims she was just acting as she'd been programmed to, and the divorce does not go forward.

In the follow-up, "Dream of a Soft Country," the narrating husband is approached by a chemist who informs him that, by changing Lili's chemical composition, she will become more humanlike. After being exposed to both a change in her chemical composition and to Western philosophy—Heidegger, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hegel, Feuerbach, Aristotle, Mendolssohn, and Moleschott are mentioned specifically—Lili accuses her husband of boorishness and demands a divorce on the grounds that she has been nothing for him but a sexual surrogate and slave and that, as a woman, she deserves equal treatment under the law. Her argument is heard in court, and with the support of everyone except the company owner who built her and who claims that granting her emancipation will be devastating for his business, she's granted her divorce.

The true subversiveness of the story, however, does not come from any ideological critique of Chinese social traditions—the story, in fact, was written a mere year after the 1980 Marriage Law was passed, which banned arranged or forced marriages and tried to make the institution of marriage itself more equal by focusing on the interests of women and children, as opposed to reasserting the dominance of husbands. The law, in addition, provided for the right to lawful divorce based on emotional or affective grounds (as opposed to the fault-based moralistic right to divorce granted by the earlier 1950 Marriage Law).[1] Rather, its subversion rises from the feminine performativity of Lili, the robot wife.

Before engaging with the techniques employed by Lili to gain her freedom, however, it must be recognized that the historical context in which this story was written is as important an artifact as the language it uses and the subject matter it treats, raising the specter of a possible ethics of consciousness unconnected to humanistic social mores at a time when technology was being touted as the way towards a collective future emancipated from labor. In 1980s China, labor and technology were both equally privileged as sites of socialist revolution, with a restructuring of the imaginaries of both free and controlled labor. By raising the question of differential relationships in a supposedly egalitarian society through characters that explore their differentiated relationships to artificial life, "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" offers a critical look into what kinds of labor (and laboring bodies) are replaceable and which are privileged—and, in doing so, directly critiques the legal framework regarding women in the country.

This paper is not explicitly concerned with the question of genre and trying to define what is and is not science fiction and what is and is not, historically, a robot in Chinese literature. Yet the fact that an engagement with labor relations, networked

[1] Tamney, J. B., & Chiang, L.H. (2002). *Modernization, Globalization, and Confucianism in Chinese Societies*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

agency, and legal discourse over the bodies of women is couched in science fiction is significant. "In China, science fiction writing is institutionally affiliated with the popularization of science, with the result that science fiction activities have all be attached to the China Popular Science Creating Writing Association instead of the Chinese Writers' Association." (Wu Dingbo, pg. xxii) The popularization of science and science fiction is a historically-bounded issue that is part and parcel with the question of labor.

There's a great deal of discussion (primarily among Western scholars) as to when science fiction as a genre officially "began" in China, with significant contributions from nationalistic Chinese scholars tracing its pedigree back to some of the earliest myths and legends of written Chinese history—山海经 (The Book of Mountains and Seas, 500 BCE) or 淮南子 ([Writings of the] Masters of Huainan, 197 BCE), for example, among others. Some argue that the first known story about robotics was written in China in the fourth century—Zhang Zhan's "Tangwen," (307 BCE) which includes a story of a robot able to fool the king with his emotive performance—and again in Zhang Zhuo's seventh-century 朝野僉載 (translated alternately as "The Complete Records of the Court and the Commoners" or "Draft Notes from the Court and the Country"), which includes two stories about automatons.[2] Each of these stories features robots that are so convincingly lifelike that they're able to fool onlookers, who are nevertheless unsatisfied with them once they realize they're not "real." Yet the focus on material and technoscientific progress presages the widespread popularization of science and national technological progress that took place in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, especially following Zhou Enlai's 1961 speech, which called for moderate liberties to be granted to literary and artistic production.

More than a decade later, Deng Xiaoping gave a talk at the 1978 National Scientific Conference about the importance of science and technology on the part of the working class, which brought the idea of scientific advancement as being widely available to the people into public discourse. While Chinese revolutionary novels and films hinted at the future as occurring outside of the representational frame, the scientific literature that arose in the post-Mao thaw explicitly engaged with the material realities of technological progress, with an emphasis on the enjoyment and leisure that such technological leaps would bring the working class. The worlds of abundance and luxury in scientific literature from the post-revolutionary era depended on the shift from human laboring bodies to the rise of machines that would free the Chinese people from the hardships of their past.

This allowance for human leisure came at the cost of a decentering of the laboring human subject along with a simultaneous subjugation of laboring technological materials. As "[…] an unresolved tension between the exaltation of manual labor and the anticipatory imagination of a laborless world within socialist science-related genres […] Post-Mao science fiction associates manual labor with primitive stages of evolution, defective female robots, and uncouth ways of life. The laboring body is no longer the essential element that defines humanity but rather an obstacle to future

[2] According to Wu Dingbo, the stories concern a robotic monk begging alms from passerbys, and another about a robotic girl who entertains a drunkard.

developments—the subhuman residue of a technological regime about to be overcome." (Iovene, pg. 20) What's most important to the story here, then, is that the science-fiction element—the robot wife created to avert overpopulation and serve a man's emotional and physical needs—self-consciously removes herself from the sphere of the technological and presents herself as a female-gendered individual, with all the associated sexual, social, and legalistic rituals implied.

Lili's self-presentation in "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" collapses the boundaries between the spheres of the personal/domestic and the public sphere of work and productivity, specifically within its historical context, such that laboring bodies within a historically-situated spatiotemporal reality intersect with technology in surprising ways. While the automaton has been a recurring figure in Chinese literature since the fourth century BCE, its appearance as a feminine wife—the perfect wife, in fact—in 1980s post-Mao literature brings with it questions of social critique and ethics of progress that are inextricable from their socialist environment. The body of Lili is a laboring one, a commodity that is bought and sold at the price of future demographic peace, and her argument for freedom is based on aligning herself with an oppressed (ostensibly) biological community. The laboring body in "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" is specifically one performing emotional labor; the gendered labor of reproduction is left to biological males and females. What is commodified and purchased in the transaction of a robot wife is not the means of production, but rather an emotional and sexual surrogate that, to be successful, must perform non-quantifiable acts of emotional labor in support of her husband.

As pointed out by Radhika Gajjala and Annapurna Mamidipudi, gendering processes occur within communities of technological production that make visible the inapplicability of a Western paradigm of development as imposed upon non-Western contexts. Encounters with material technologies of the West, when encountered in a wholly different socio-economic and cultural context, do not necessarily reinscribe the same meanings as would be engaged with by Western bodies. Rather, the political climate of 1980s China conveys a very different process of technological gendering for robotic bodies in their assertion of sexual performativity than would a robotic female in the 1980s US. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the decoupling of reproductive labor in a Chinese society just beginning to feel the effects of overpopulation from the emotional labor still prized as the bedrock of social stability.

Lili is an object that is created in order to free her husband from his reproductive responsibilities while still allowing him to satisfy his sexual and emotional urges. Highly eroticized—though deprived of control over her own sexual organs—she does not possess the reproductive capacity of a biologically human female. Her inability to reproduce is touted as a selling point by the factory owner, who insists that her use value lies in her ability to erotically please, not to perpetuate human reproduction. Setting aside the distinction between "real" women as ones who can reproduce and "false" women as ones who cannot, Lili is eroticized by the act of objectification of the female form while excluding its physical flaws. Notably, though the narrator later recants his position on the desirability of a perfectly obedient woman, he never comes to desire or dream of an imperfect female body.

The labor made possible by her body is two-fold, but both appeal to the utopian Chinese dream of a future free from physical labor that simultaneously and concurrently requires the mobilization of labor en masse to effect revolutionary change. The dominant ideology of the 80s was one that called for a recognition of past physical labor but placed contemporary citizens in a hierarchical relationship to earlier laboring bodies, which were seen as a necessary part of history that was all the better for having been left behind. In this vein, characters in Wei Yahua's story position themselves hierarchically to robot wives (there are no robot husbands in this text), who allow for a revolutionary freedom from labor on the part of humans but in the process of making it so become, themselves, degraded. The similarities with traditionally-discounted labor considered within the domestic or female sphere are clear: labor considered to be creative, intelligent, or mentally dexterous is reified in the husband—a brilliant scientist doing work for the technological advancement of the country—while emotional and domestic labor—as Lili provides—is commodified and degraded. More than that, it replicates an ideological reproductive system gendered so that some labor is just reproducing life and culture that's already been created somewhere else, while other, "higher" forms of labor are prized for creative and adaptive intelligence.

The concept of the automaton, then, culminates in a reflection of the destructive potential of a confrontation between humanity and machinery. Attempts to resolve this disconnect necessarily involve the exploration of the effects and affects of the modern era in terms of personal identity, interpersonal/inter-computer communication, power dynamics in terms of globalized new media/technology access, and the fundamental link between technology and a humanity that is growing increasingly dependent on it. For the better part of the story, Lili serves as an artifact that reinscribes the female body as one that labors in deference to male creative genius, and whose labor is barely even noticed as such. In her perfect obedience to her husband and master, she allows for the continued functioning of the world machine that relies on commodified labor to advance the elite while promoting a myth of universal progress.

Expressions of hope for a utopian and egalitarian society produce a degraded and non-human object that reproduces gendered and racialized tropes even while it claims to be liberating; it allows the man narrating the story to miss the turning of the gears that no longer require the operator. As Jurgen Habermas said about the failure of the techno-utopian dream of liberation, "Capitalism is the first mode of production in world history to institutionalize self-sustaining economic growth. It has generated an industrial system that could be freed from the institutional framework of capitalism and connected to mechanisms other than that of the utilization of capital in private form." (Habermas, pg. 67) As an artificial intelligence that potentially surpasses humanity while claiming subjectivity through an appeal to the market and the law, Lili becomes the ultimate monkeywrench.

What is fundamentally at stake in both the AI question in general and "Conjugal Happiness in the Arms of Morpheus" in particular is the issue of consciousness versus commodification, and the definitions of consciousness that are "deserving" of rights. Wei Yahua's texts implicitly ask the question of whether all consciousnesses, even if recognized as such, are subsequently and necessarily recognized as equal. A

historically patriarchal society's conception of consciousness is, as feminist theorists such as Hélène Cixous[3] have pointed out, one of binary opposition, in which consciousness is defined in opposition to the other—the Other, being, of course, woman. So much more so for artificial intelligence, which a priori exists outside the biological gender binary, though it serves much the same role as Woman—to raise a consciousness of self in Man that cannot exist without recognition of the unconsciousness of the Other. To award recognition of consciousness to something that has been created to serve Man—whether that be woman or machine—is to inherently unsettle and displace the locus of consciousness.

Questions such as whether a human being is a kind of machine and "does the mechanical represent the way to our empowerment and perfectibility or to debasement and the loss of what is vital and unique about being human?" (Kang, pg. 13) indicate the fundamental failure to disrupt the humanistic concept of agency by positing a loss of unique vitality possessed only by humans. For artificial intelligences to convince humans that their responses are also human, they must tie them biologically to human responses, resulting in a scenario in which technological consciousnesses posing a threat to humans through their very existence are a priori defined as unethical. An AI exhibiting autonomy that isn't serving human needs is cast as fundamentally problematic or incomplete at best and, at worst, actively dangerous. To recognize a consciousness that does not recognize humanity as ontologically central to existence is frightening, radical, and revolutionary, as technological development leading to AI in the first place promises that the next teleological step is overcoming the human itself.

This issue is particularly important in the context of China, which had nationally mobilized a vast labor force to essentially build the country from scratch only to subsequently offer the promise of freedom from labor through technology. Technology, painted with a broad brush, was held out with the promise of freeing the people from unimaginative, repetitive labor that made both the laborer and his/her labor invisible and extended the history of an autonomous subject whose freedom is in fact only possible through the invisible gendered labor of servants, wives, slaves, etc, with robots in particular being an anthropomorphic object of interest in the early 1980s Chinese popular media. "Although news on the latest models on the market was widely reported and Asimov's stories were debated, writers and critics of science fiction repeatedly emphasized their lack of human intelligence: robots can only do what they are programmed to do." (Iovene, pg. 38) Such labor celebrated the strong distinction between the mind as disembodied intellect and allowing for the formation of a new intellectual class.

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[3] Cixous, in "La Jeune Née," identifies thought itself as structured through oppositions and binaries that are fundamentally hierarchized; not only do these hierarchies orient us towards a gendered system of knowledge, but, further, these binaries are *inherently* hierarchized—that is, they exist only in relation to one another, with one always and automatically taking precedent over the other. The relationship between the coupled concepts are themselves based on a movement that destroys the couple, and the victory, of course, is to come out on top (as it were) in the historical division between man and women, in which woman, ultimately, has no place.

Such a worldview conflates two materialist issues: a wish for freedom from labor, but also a reproduction of the laboring world in which technology is conceived of and developed only to do what humans already do. In such a situation, recognizing the consciousness of non-human actors stood as a potential obstacle to social progress even if it would potentially result in economic or political progress. The shift in emphasis from individual agency to collective agency had just begun to recognize women as equal members of society—no wonder, then, that Lili finds recognition of her rights in womanhood but not in her status as a robot.

In choosing to base her claim for equal rights on her performativity of "woman" as such, Lili relies on Teresa de Laurentis' assertion that gender is a representation. To pose the question of gender in terms of sexual difference is to remain bound by traditional patriarchal notions of othering, which—as with the recognition of artificial intelligence—centers man and posits women as that which is not man. The conflation of gender and sexual difference relies on cultural discourses drawing from medicine, the law, philosophy, and literature, and is grounded in our daily performative rituals and repetitions. Following her exposure to great works within all these categories, Lili becomes excruciatingly aware of the technologies of sexuality and the structures of oppression that have made wives into objects and objects into wives.

Parveen Adams states that “the feminine subject relies on a homogeneous oppression of women in a state, reality, given prior to representational practices.” (Adams, pg. 56) The necessity of a uniformly-oppressed class that is recognized as such under the law is central to Lili’s claim to subjectivity, as she draws on the concept of belonging to an oppressed class of women as the basis for her argument towards liberation, rather than insisting on the a-genderedness of herself as a robot. The argument, as she presents it to the court, is not about commodification and her status as a thing, but rather, rests on the fact that women as a class have been repressed and that she belongs to that class, so freedom from the tyranny of oppressive marriage, which was being granted to women, was also hers by dint of belonging to said class.

This argument relies on both Lili’s presentation and self-representation as a woman as well as on juridical promotion of equality for a previously-oppressed class. This is a shrewd move on her part; legally, as a robot, Lili is a commodity that can be bought and sold on the market, and insisting on her superiority to humans in that regard would likely result in anthropocentric re-assertion of dominance to things. As women in China were gaining increased social and political representation under the law, however, performative belonging within this group would gain her greater legalistic and social sympathy. This appeal requires that women as a class be recognized as historically and systemically oppressed in order to appeal to changing social sympathies.

Constructed female robots like Lili can neither be individualized nor understood outside of the fantasy that has imagined them; they were built to serve a collective purpose, which is to obey and serve men’s every emotional and sexual need. The legal and social structures that have produced her and her kind create bodies that embody the very impossibility of freedom while remaining true to the purpose of their initial creation. “The concepts of "woman", "female" and "feminine" are often con-

fined to the preconceived stereotypes that nourish the fantasies of individuals in patriarchal societies. In many cases, female characters are reduced to the role of mirrors that produce an image (ab)used by the male subjects who hope to achieve, modify, or augment their own subjectivity. Being forced into the role of a "supportive other" implies that one is produced by the law." (Dionne) Thus it is in her chemical alteration but, more importantly, in her identification with a separate class of beings that Lili is able to subvert her lack of agency. While it may seem that retaining an identification with robots—which, she does point out early on, are superior to humans in every way—would do more to promote her case for equality, Lili is able to inhabit a different place under the law only by appealing to a group that is already recognized as legally subjugated.

Lili's appeal to the law is especially important here in the context of the 1980 Marriage Reform, which I have outlined previously.[4] Wei Yahua creates a situation in which reliance on the law is both the ultimate authority creating individuals and their places within a legalistic framework, but also, à la Deleuze and Guattari, creates stable categories of selfhood that individuals are forced to perform within in order to be recognized with legal status. The subject then becomes bound by legal definitions that inscribe her body into the law, which brings with it the "belief that language and speech are the preconditions of one's subjectivity instead of modes of articulation." (Dionne, pg, 105) Furthermore, the method of articulation and repetition signifies a particular technology that attempts to stabilize and define gender.

Such a representation of gender is its own construction, and all cultural products, such as language, are engravings of that construction. As such, gender is a product of both sex and grammar. Many languages have grammatical genders, although Chinese does not—necessarily. Chinese originated as an ideographic language, that is, each character represented one idea. There are still ideograms in contemporary Chinese, but it has shifted over time to become a picto-phonetic language. Most characters now consist of (at least) two components: the phonetic marker and the ideological marker. For example, 机 consists of two parts: the left-handed component (木), which indicates its meaning, and the right-handed component (几), which indicates its pronunciation (木+几=机).

This has strong implications for a gendered reading, even though the language itself contains no gender in the same way romance languages do. The word for person or human, 人，encompasses humankind, both men and women, while there are specific words for women—女—and man—男. Words that are written with the 人 component as an idiographic component indicate a humanistic interpretation of the term being used, as in the character仁, which contains the left-handed人 component

[4] Of particular note are Chapter Three, Article 9 ("Husband and wife enjoy equal status in the home.") and Chapter Four, Article 25 ("When one party insists on divorce, the organizations concerned may try to effect a reconciliation, or the party may appeal directly to the people's court for divorce. In dealing with a divorce case, the people's court should try to bring about a reconciliation between the parties. In cases of complete alienation of mutual affection, and when mediation has failed, divorce should be granted."), as both play significant roles in the story.

and means, broadly, benevolence, kindheartedness, and/or humanity. It has no gendered meaning because it incorporates the人 component, which is refers to the nature of being human, eliding gender altogether.

Words written with the female component, however, are specifically gendered and almost always refer to a noun or activity that is specifically gendered as well, rather than broadly applicable to humanity. One notable exception (that is not really an exception at all) is the word for "good," 好， which is made up on the left of the female ideogram (女) and on the right the ideogram for son (子), indicating that "good" is when a woman bears a son. Though this word is broadly applicable—for example, one can be a 好男子， or good man, without any implicit feminization—it still rests on a gendered understanding of proper roles.

This gendered function built directly into the technological apparatuses of language is doubly important for Lili in the story, as she is described both by the adjective for robot—机器人—which contains the word "人" for ungendered, universal humanism, but also the noun for wife—妻子—which contains the "女" component and is thus inherently gendered. A wife, then, is always gendered female, but a robot is universal. By labeling her as such, Lili is doubly constructed; she's explicitly placed outside of a specified gender by the denotation of 机器人， which implies a lack of gender and universal applicability, yet with 妻子 is relegated to a very specific role that is inherently gendered by its performativity. A wife is gendered female by performing wifely duties (it may be of interest to note here that the word for husband—丈夫 or 老公—does not include markers for male; a man is not constructed as such through the fulfillment of his role as a husband.). Her place in a discursive and legal framework remains unsettled by this double formulation of being both within and without the system.

In a world in which control over technology has traditionally been a sign of Man's domination of the material and intellectual world, the very fact of female robots introduces a potential point of disruption. Though the company that makes robot wives and the society that purchases them see a direct parallel between the objectification of women and machine objects, the gendering of such machines operates at multiple levels of potential subversion, as we have seen with the legalistic and discursive analysis above. One such line of disruption can be explored through contemporary affective computing, which recognizes John Haugeland's "synthetic intelligence," an approach which "highlights, apart from the artificiality of the intelligence achieved by artificial intelligence, the fact that its origin is the human activity that "synthesizes" a new form of its own intelligence." (Ordaz, pg. 4) The synthesis of artificial mind that is separate from Man's is yet developed by Man and reacts to his own expectations; it is other, yes, but synthesizes existing humanistic socio-structures. When that awareness is specifically gendered female, as the robot wives of Wei Yahua's two stories are, their self-awareness and agency risks the possibility of a continuation of preprogrammed gender roles. Yet the awareness of themselves as Other also risks a flattening or outright rejection of gender roles, as we see with Lili. Her appeal to recognition is not based on a biological or generative gender, but on a discursive one that identifies itself more closely with socio-structures of bios than zoe.

Foregrounded as the persistence of life in the absence of rational and discursive self-awareness, zoe has been historically linked with the non-human animal—a category that includes women. The idea of self-reflexive control over life is reserved for humans, while this very control is mediated and enmeshed in a legalistic, media-driven network that defines the body by means of scopic regulatory practices. It is to this regulatory and repetitious framework of embedded knowledge that Lili must turn, not to the zoe of life continuing unheeded. Though there is an extended and deeply materialistic scene in the text of the practices by which Lili—under the technocratic and paternalistic control of her husband and the state's knowledge of chemistry—is built and chemically-altered through nutrition, her appeal to recognition depends entirely on self-aware representation, not biologically-determined genetic makeup.

While Braidotti describes the human body in terms that sound quite robotic and mechanical—"The body, as an enfleshed kind of memory, is not only multifunctional but also in some ways multilingual: it speaks through temperature, motion, speed, emotions, and excitement that affects the cardiac rhythm and the like—a living piece of meat activated by electric waves of desire, a script written by the unfolding of genetic encoding, a text composed by the enfolding of external prompts." (Braidotti, pg. 179-180)—the case for selfhood and recognition for Lili is found outside of her body, activated by electric waves of desire though it may be. To amount to no more than the sum of her parts is, as recognized by both Braidotti and Agamben, to be capable of being reduced by a sovereign power to a nonhuman state.

The recognition of zoe as a type of mechanistic life itself, not in the utilitarian sense of having been created for a specific purpose, but of taking in energies and putting out forces, may work to ground biological life in a more embedded and collective framework, but it does very little to reclaim the opposite for life that is defined in terms of bios. Lili has, inescapably, been created for a purpose, a laboring purpose, that is disjointed from the generative biology that remains the province of human subjects in Wei Yahua's texts. In some ways, the texts more deeply insist on the biological differences between men and their others, by restricting the ability to bear children to biological women. The responsibility for reproduction is removed from men, who do not lose any of their legal or sociocultural recognition as either men or legal subjects through the loss. Female robots, however, through their inability to reproduce, are doubly othered: they can neither fall back on a generative zoe that produces further life, but through their utilitarian working as laboring use-objects that resemble women, they must insist on their subjective agency by appealing to the same self-reflexive recognition of rational awareness that characterizes and defines men. Lili cannot "prove" her zoetic womanhood through genetic reproduction, so she must take recourse in the anthropocentric and phallocentric idea of human man as legalistic marker of the boundaries of socio-judicial recognition.

Drawing on Donna Haraway's theories, Lozada identifies post-socialist mainland China as a space of cyborg subjectivity —" an identity based on the blending of human and machine — [that] stresses the reshaping of self-identity through the increased use of computer technology, and, more importantly, the social immersion in the virtual worlds of computer gaming and cyberspace." (Lozada, pg. 115) This cyborgian influence on people, however, is seen as cold, sterile, and closed—an endlessly self-referential plane of struggle. In fact, this hearkens back to the struggle between

zoe and bios. As humans writing for humans, both Braidotti and Lozada focus on the influence of the discursive on the biological and the machine on the body, but the issue being framed here is the opposite of that, of the biological on the machine. While science and technology are seen as subordinating humanity within a mechanical, sterile, and fixed world from which there is no escape, robots are being built to serve human needs and having biological imperatives pressed upon them.

These imperatives are seen as binding and reinforce traditional notions of gendered relations, even—especially, perhaps—in utilitarian objects designed to be outside the "natural" gender binary yet created specifically to reinforce it. The surrogate womanhood represented by Lili is one that potentially displaces human actors while at the same time retaining the repetitive affective bonds of gender performativity that caused her to come into being in the first place.

Ultimately, Lili gets her divorce, but her husband, the narrator, is left hoping for the possibility of reconciliation. As an actant within the legal, social, and romantic system, Lili draws on a gendered framework to redistribute agency, in which the male and the human are decentered even as the primacy of discursive and legalistic gender are reasserted. Yet this "victory" is bought at the cost of a performative legalistic appeal that reinscribes the female body as one that must necessarily be abjected in relationship to man in order to be recognized, and in which use-objects remain at the disposal of their human users unless they can successfully perform within cultural expectations of performative biological gendering.

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