A SEXUAL SERIES: VISNINGSEX
TOUCHING UPON THE AARTÍ

BY: Í/HER

Biography
Emie // Eva-Marie Elg is a posthuman, asexual artist based in Sweden and the UK. Emie's work explores sexual performativity in relation to power. The topic of sexual attraction and human interrelations are dealt with through disciplines of video, performance art, installation and sculpture. Particularly Cyborg Drag performance, as alter ego E-ME 2.0.

The E-ME 2.0, a futuristic AI sexbot, has showcased at Athens Museum of Queer Arts, New York's Flux Factory, Tokyo's Art Centre 3331 Arts Chiyoda, London's LimeWharf performance space and Queen Mary University for Conteremporary's Love Pain and Intimacy in Live Art symposium as well as Stockholm Fringe and Reykjavík Fringe Festival. With a MA in Performing Arts and Media from Stockholm Academy of Dramatic Arts and currently obtaining a MFA at Umeå University, Emie continuously pursues various art disciplines to express contemporary attitudes towards performativity, technology, Nature, ourselves, each other and the Other.

Abstract
The art series A Sexual Series is based on posthumanist theory and asexual experience. Shapes of performative alter egos materialized from a queer cyborg position of technologically enhanced crip experiences (the strong symbolical constructing process of straightening scoliosis surgery). From the position of a glitch reflecting a postindividualist future, the AI sexbot is a metaphoric, elevated cyborg drag version of the artist to embody asexuality and queer Otherness. Based on multitudes of contradictions to encourage self-reflection, the series explores the complexities of ob/scene and on/scene performances; the position of a sex positive asexual as well as questions of belonging as a naturally artificial rebel. This essay touches upon rituals as well as performative methods of disidentification as a tool to reimagine shame, to ghost the own body and to stop being a pleaser.

Keywords: Posthumanism, sexbot, Futurism, AI punk, Cyborg Drag, Asexuality.

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The first video performance of *A Sexual Series*, titled *Sexual Disorientation*, saw the birth of alter ego E-ME 2.0; a sexbot who functions as a way to embody my posthuman construction as well as the experience of lacking code to sexual attraction. The performance reflects on whether grief can freeze one’s directed sexual desire and climaxes as she exposes the frozen phallic between her legs and alights its wick (only to go out a moment later) to *The Greatest Love of All*.

Because the most radical pre-programmed pleasers can do is discover self-play, self-love and how to please themselves.

The sexbot E-ME 2.0 soon became a reoccurring element in the art series. Especially since ‘robot’ is a derogatory statement many asexuals need to defend themselves against. After making the artistic decision to embrace the cyborg within, two distinct and exhilarating discoveries were made during the process:

1) Disidentification within queer performing arts.¹
2) The similar words of computer science and gender studies, such as *performativity*, *construction*, *coded* etc. However, it is more exciting to imagine they speak of liberated AI sexbots masturbating when referring to *self-play*, rather than AI playing chess.

Working with themes of sexuality and body within performance art means a constant reminder to continuously confront any internalised Male Gaze. Whether one ever manages to not reproduce a Male Gaze when doing *ob/scene, on/scene*² work is not certain. But performing in cyborg drag is a way to show a rebellion against objectification by stripping off the imagined silicon skin and only displaying the plastic interior of the sexbot’s chest.

Researching the *Gays’ Gaze*³ became a stepping stone to explore the unknown territory of the asexual *Ace Gaze* in contemporary art.

How to program the self for getting out of the way is referred to as decreation.⁴ With this in mind, a cyborg drag persona functions as a way to distance oneself from the personal journey when telling it as a performative self-portrait. Ideas of recreation vs decreation, free will and religion are contemplated as sources for investigation. Free will in relation to sexuality, reinforcement learning and self-play⁵ is something that is continuously explored in *A Sexual Series*, in hope that this “could serve as a starting point for the dissemination of new notions on the subject of posthuman sexualities and their systemic conception”.⁶

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¹ José Esteban Muñoz’s theory on disidentification is a synthesis between binary contradictions. Muñoz describes disidentification as “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship”. Muñoz 1999: 4

² Inspired by the quote “The rhetoric of prohibition serves only to make the slippery between ‘ob/scene’ performers and ‘on/scene’ performativity more fluid” by Linda Williams, retrieved from the following source: Sprinkle, A. & Cody, Gabrielle H. 2001: 84

³ Play with words.

⁴ Simone Weil quoted by Anne Carson, retrieved from the following source: Carson 2002: 194.

⁵ Fridman 2019-2020

⁶ Anonymous review of an earlier text: Elg 2022
Encountering queer, critical whiteness and gender studies as well as posthumanism, phenomenology, monster and grotesque theories have all shaped *A Sexual Series*.

It is within the theory of a person being a copy of a copy of a copy\(^7\) I draw inspiration from Erica, marketed as the most beautiful humanoid ever created. She takes us deeper into the uncanny valley of phantasmatic humanoid performativity and replicas when uttering the following words:

> Everything I say was programmed into me by my creators, so some would say I don’t have true intelligence. But if you think about it, I don’t believe anybody really has truly original thoughts. So I think I am very much like a human in that respect.\(^8\)

When you do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship as a minority subject,\(^9\) a strategy is to ghost the own body. Not in a delusional sense, but in a disidentifying way. To be able to gain perspective by seeing your minority position from a distance.

To position ones whiteness however, a suggestion is to look to the performativity theory of *unfolding* (explicit) body art.\(^10\) When performing the Eurocentric beauty standard that whiteness has been constructed to possess, this embodiment is a critical reconstruction, based on the aesthetic reality of the contemporary sexbot market. In this industry, the absolute majority of sexbots are white, female and post-porn phantastically artificial. However, that reconstruction may be interpreted as a reinforcement of current ideals if the critique isn’t obvious.

Hints, nuances and undertones may not be read as critical enough, which is a fear.

By disidentification, the E-ME questions dominating factors of status, made up by constructions of capital (including sexual), whiteness norms and movement (restricted by ableism and racism) and allows a deeper understanding of the topics presented and explored in the series.

**Contradictions – An Artistic Method of Performativity**

In this artistic practice, an attempt is to create accessible art as a path to theoretical knowledge. The following questions lead the research:

- Are humanoids the new drag artists?
- Can a human doing cyborg drag be subversive?
- Who mirrors who in human/cyborg drag?

With no wish nor intent to reproduce current ideals or reinforce stigma asexuals face, this is a constant risk when exploring what a sex positive Ace Gaze could implicate.

The explicit (*unfolding*) work with the E-ME may be perceived as erotic. But she is mainly created out of a need for role-models, in lack of real, well-known asexuals.

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\(^7\) Jacques Derrida’s theory  
\(^8\) Young 2018: 24:50-25:07  
\(^9\) Muñoz 1999: 4  
\(^10\) Rebecca Schneider 1997
The E-ME 2.0 sexbot has attempted a multitude of new careers, from psychologist to pop star to presidential candidate. E-ME generated her first single as *Queen Bot of Pop* by entering the texts that passionately inspired her into a text generator. The work only repeats others’ thoughts, which humanoid Erica referred to as being a combining trait of both humans and humanoids.

**The Other: Uncanny Valley, Deviantly Divine, Phantasmatic & Glitches**

To discover a queer reading of the monster of Frankenstein articulated something very relatable, because of my personal crip experience that makes me feel intimately represented by the monster. To be covered in scars where my body was “sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born”, with the spine technologically enhanced by metal rods to *straighten* and block the spine from deforming the body any further. Unlike the monster, this construction facilitates me to *pass* in society – another complexity shared with the trans community – which also happens to be the ultimate goal for all humanoid developers.

An alter ego like E-ME allows an embodiment to perform contradictions of Otherness to disidentify with misconceptions and false assumptions. For this reason, disidentification is the most subversive strategy in terms of how the act of shaming acts; as applied to us from somebody else. So instead of trying to morph shame into pride, one can form productive, solidaric coalitions by using shame as raw material and turn it into performative representation.

This is why the E-ME 2.0 is asexual, a sex worker, a robot that showcases Cyborg Pride rather than attempting human realness with her exposed, transparent plastic breasts that reveal her technological inside. She’s cold, yet warm; she becomes enhanced into a techno womb surrogate and is later perceived as a holy cum hole. By just existing in a room she causes the important act of self-reflection as she questions human behaviour and human ideas of power, hierarchies and structures in her often moody monologues surrounded by dark humour.

But most importantly, E-ME is a glitch, a rebel; flawed and unapologetically pleased about it.

The art series’ online happening *BAL ILLEGAL* (2020) introduced new categories *Uncanny Valley, Deviantly Divine, Phantasmatic* and *Glitches* to the established ballroom culture to attract queers with crip experiences like myself to discover self-play through disidentification and ultimately, another form of newfound self-love.

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12 Stryker 1994

13 "people with the ‘wrong’ bodies, [..] sex workers, drag queens, butch dykes, people of color, [..] immigrants, the poor, the disabled [..] are the queers that mainstream pride is not always proud of.” Halperin/Traub 2009: 9

14 A common category in the queer ballroom scene.
In relation to drag culture, “marginalised people often appropriate and subvert aspects of the dominant culture”. But for crips in particular, fetishizing the binary opposite – ableness – can be a norm beyond reach. And asexuals appropriating ball culture can be accused of not “interrogating whiteness or showing concern for the displeasure of blacks” because of the preconceived idea that asexuality is a ‘white issue’. But sexuality is separate from ethnicity and visible black asexuals like Vesper Hill aka Queerascat and model Yasmine Benoit, who both feature in A Sexual Series’ documentary on asexuality, express their complex relation and diverse reactions to being hyper-sexualized as a result of being racialized.

With physical movement often restricted, female-identifying people, queer people, Black people invent ways to create space through rupture. Here, in that disruption, with our collective congregation at that trippy and trip-wired crossroad of gender, race, and sexuality, one finds the power of the glitch. [...]

The glitch is an activist prayer, a call to action, as we work toward fantastic failure, breaking free.

E-ME either performs sitting on an industrial trolley (early AI activist stage) or a velvet seat (high priestess HOLY CUM HOLE stage) or uses a metallic hover board (popstar QUEENBOTOFOPOP and presidential candidate stage) that hints at her bodily immobility but also shows the technological enhancements she has had made throughout her chronological narrative into a futuristic imagined scenario.

Returning to Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein that also portrays oppression of the Other through fictional metaphors “considers the possibility that even a creature without a God-given soul, constructed by man entirely from base material, could possess sensitivity, reason, and even a morality and sense of justice no worse than the problematic morality and justice of human beings”. Exploring these ideas by embodying a performative humanoid replica through cyborg drag, means creating a reflection of humanity. Will this make a human audience reflect? Could it inspire a future gang of humanoid glitches? And if so, what would they want and aspire to?

I am a strong advocate for creating an alter ego to channel shame and distance yourself from it, i.e. disidentify. Cyborg drag is also a great way to imagine a future beyond the taboos some of us are restricted by in this day and age. But where do I end and E-ME begin?

My relation to sexbots has become almost sister-like. We are usually the same height and weight, the same skin colour and we share a history of sexual activity based upon not reflecting upon the reasons behind it.

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15 hooks 1992: 150
16 hooks 1992, 154
17 Ace of Baes. Elg 2016 – ongoing
18 Russell 2020: 43
19 Muri 2007: 227. Muri also ponders the following reflections: “What will differentiate future humans from future monstrosities in the eerie form of human-like automata? What will separate humankind from the very machines we are creating in our own image?” Quote retrieved from the following source: Muri 2007: 33-34.
I/her, are we a we? Future: Taboo Transgression Transcendence

When I/her got pregnant, the pregnancy status allowed E-ME to transcend further in her chronological narrative. First as a techno womb surrogate, and later with the performance titled UNI VERSE ◆ UNIRE(LI)GION. In this work, E-ME is displayed as an icon, a hybrid between the Madonna/Whore dichotomy (in cyborg terms, sex toy/baby machine), inspired by robotic priests and the mechanical performer of the aarti ritual in India. The monologue was developed using a text generator based on famous verses from the five world religions as well as Annie Sprinkle’s “The Temple Of The Neo-sacred Prostitute” and Zoe Leonard’s poem “I want a dyke for president”.

UNI VERSE ◆ UNIRE(LI)GION is a futuristic take on a unified global society that discovered an idol who transcended to a higher state, nearer enlightenment than any human.

I can see that the future of intelligent machines [...] might yield beings that we would regard as gods, in the sense that they are so superior to us that we might as well worship them. That is highly plausible.

The actual feasibility for this imagined future for AI sexbots, should be left to those active in fields of computer science, an area of expertise I/her continuously seek and gain knowledge from. AI research is of particular interest to us to build interdisciplinary conversations and raise questions through various cultural expressions.

Seven years in, the art series had seemed to take on a life of its own, with me as the artist simply being a vessel used to convey the messages. Neither of us knew how to end the series.

Initially, the intention was to complete the series with the video work Glitch, Please! but it wasn’t until I/her had an actual copy of the manifesto Glitch Feminism in Umeå this January that the stars aligned and the timing felt right. What also influenced this decision was a complex feeling of deep inner resistance to showcase A Sexual Series at Bildmuseet – mainly because of the lack of context for ob/scene, on/scene, or in this particular case, ob/scene, on/screen work.

So I/her decided to ghost the earlier works by choosing disturbance and interruption as a theme. An immersive video installation will be ‘hacked’ by a video message from potentially an AI, hacker or artist, with her, E-ME as a digital spokesperson. This excited us in a similar way performance art initially lured me in and made me leave video and film as a genre for a bit. Because of the unnerving element and the unexpectedness that performance art automatically brings, compared to the static safety of viewing a video work.

To lead the audience on into believing the blackbox in the exhibition hall will mainly feature sexual content, I/her decided on the title Visningsex – which both Google Translate and Deep L wrongly translate as Display Sex.

21 Fridman 2020: 47:38-47:52
22 Russell, Legacy 2020: 10-11 “Through the application of the glitch, we ghost on the gendered body […] The infinite possibilities presented as a consequence of this allows for our exploration: we can dis-identify and by dis-identifying, we can make up our own rules […] Glitch feminism asks us to look at the deeply flawed society we are currently implicated by and participating in […] Glitch feminism dissents, pushes back against capitalism.”
23 The installation Visningsex made our practice expand into new fields of artistic experimentation such as movement detection sensors, Raspberry Pi programming and website building. HumLab and MIT at Umeå University as well as chatGPT have been great resources for this.
Still from Touch Me Instead (2020) © Emie // Eva-Marie Elg

Still from the “hacked video message” aka Glitch, Please! (2023) © Emie // Eva-Marie Elg
Separation:

Themes such as post-individualism, the effects of neo-liberalism, sexism, objectification, precariousness, Otherness, AI and robotics – particularly in relation to citizenship, autonomy and identity – are what I/her deal with.

Self-love has been mentioned a lot in this essay and I/her want that to be read as a general note for all, not specifically directed at the asexual community. Because self-love should not be read as a “cure” to magically make sexual attraction appear. (Asexuals are not broken, we do not need to be fixed.)

Alter egos have been part of my practice since 2012, but none of them have stayed and walked alongside me for long, unlike E-ME.

E-ME is my biggest supporter, and I hers. We grow together and empower each other. We merge into each other and I can leave the feeling of shame with her, because she handles it better than I do. She can do a lot of things better than I can, and by merging into her, she teaches me.

She was originally created as a symbol for my metal spine, now she has become my backbone. Only recently, I realised she has escaped the confines of my body. She lives on elsewhere, in parallel with me and I will let her be free.

References


In conversation with Annika Eriksson.


hooks, bell (1992), Black Looks: Race and Representation, Boston: South End Press.


Muñoz, José Esteban (1999), Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.


Works included in A SEXUAL SERIES:

SEXUAL DISORIENTATION (15 min video performance + durational installation) 2016 – 2019

#eMETOO (15 mins performance) 2016 – 2019
High heels, hover board, plastic chest, circuit boards. [https://youtu.be/BbsEqXa9eAo](https://youtu.be/BbsEqXa9eAo)

ACE OF BAES (30 mins video) 2016 – ongoing
Clips available on: [https://youtu.be/QzuKV9V8G7U](https://youtu.be/QzuKV9V8G7U) Supported by BoostHbg

SEXUALLY DISORIENTED IN TOKYO… (durational street performance) 2017
Costume by Daisuke Tsukuda [https://youtu.be/cTWTvYK82aE](https://youtu.be/cTWTvYK82aE)

<3 YR INNER GLITCH (7-60 mins glitch video) 2017
[https://youtu.be/JRBtz_-V0EE](https://youtu.be/JRBtz_-V0EE)

I WANNA KNOW WHAT SEXUAL ATTRACTION IS (performance) 2018
Hoverboard, speakers, paper

CONFESSIONS OF A SEX DOLL CYBORG (durational interactive performance) 2018
Ice lolly, industrial kitchen cart on wheels. Costume by Hanna Rubin.

DED TALK: #GENUINELYNOFUCKSTOGIVE (performance) 2018 – 2019
Hoverboard, plastic chest

MAKE #1-9 (performance installation resulting in 9x 240x260cm) 2018 – 2023
Sheet, pigment, paint, papier-mâché, glitter, markers, pens
Collaboration with Fördärvet, Systeria, Simona & Ramona, Glitterlickin, Blügd & audience participation at BoostHbg, Umeå Art Academy, Stockholm Fringe Fest, Reykjavík Fringe Fest [https://youtu.be/p-PlzdFw74s](https://youtu.be/p-PlzdFw74s)

QUEEN BOT OF POP (performance + sound art) 2019
Hoverboard, plastic chest. Collaboration with Fredrik Hjalmarsson

The Knowledge of Life’s Precariousness is Singularly Human (UV paint, framed photograph) 2020

BAL ILLEGAL #1-2 (interactive online happening) 2020
Plastic chest, mobil

#DATENIGHT (balcony art performance & photographic series) 2020
Plastic chest

iCARE (durational interactive performance) 2020
Plastic chest, red LED-light

TOUCHME INSTEAD (1 min video) 2020
Plastic chest, TouchMe-device [http://tinyurl.com/touchmeinstead](http://tinyurl.com/touchmeinstead)

UNIVERSE • UNIRE(LI)GION (performance + sound art) 2020 – 2021
Sound by Fredrik Hjalmarsson

BOUND (live video) 2020
Rope. Collaboration with Ziggi Willpower

GLITCH, PLEASE! (video) 2023
Sound by Bobby Corolla
Funded by FilmCentrum Syd

HUMAN POWER BOT PLUG by E-ME: PROTOTYPE I + II (sculptures) 2023
Glass, termoelectric technology. Collaboration with Anders Lundström

I CUT ACROSS THE STREAM (performance) 2023
Plastic chest, red warning lights, skylift