

Hyper Robo Sapien Institute

Position Statement

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I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This interactive documentary explores the speculative evolution of female humanoid robots in East Asia through the lens of social, cultural, and technological development. Set in 2050, the project imagines the rise of the fictional company Hyper Robo Sapien Institute and its latest product, the Yumeji series robots, designed to fulfill societal demands for care, companionship, and labor. Inspired by Asian futurism, transmedia storytelling, and worldbuilding, the project incorporates real historical and cultural documents from East Asia, such as Japan's 2007 *Innovation 25* initiative, which aimed to integrate robots into family life. The project critically explores gender biases in robot design, the persistence of patriarchal control, and the ethical implications of creating robots for human purposes.

The interactive component is primarily presented as a web-based multimedia experience, allowing audiences to navigate the company's archives. These include fictional corporate promotional videos, interviews with the Yumeji robot, user testimonials, and incident reports (such as the infamous 2070 malfunction scandal). Additionally, a virtual tour experience created with Unreal Engine and Convai AI NPC technology enables audiences to interact with Yumeji and explore this speculative vision of the future in 2050. Through these elements, users can delve into the complex interplay between technology, culture, and gender.

2. INTERACTIVE AND DOCUMENTARY ELEMENTS

- **Search Engine Interface:** A worldbuilding tool presented in a search engine-like format. Users can explore a simulated archive to search for news, images, and videos about the company and its robots.

- **Virtual Tour Experience:** A virtual museum showcasing the design of female robots that have appeared in East Asia, as well as the gender performativity of female cyborg characters in films. To provide a comparative perspective, the exhibit also highlights Western approaches to gendered robot design, emphasizing the cultural influences of East and West on interaction design and technology.

- **Documentary Footage:** Machinima-style video sequences created in Unreal Engine, combined with speculative design narratives, capture key moments in the evolution of the Hyper Robo Sapien Institute. Additionally, many images and videos are generated using AI and Deepfake technology.

3. REFLECTIONS

The interactive documentary project *Hyper Robo Sapien Institute* positions itself within the frameworks of speculative and interactive documentaries. Before this course, I assumed all documentaries were inherently interactive. However, studying Kate Nash's "*Modes of Interactivity*" clarified the concept and informed this project's

interactive elements. Also, Speculative documentaries and Web Docs offer narrative possibilities that differ from traditional documentaries. By imagining the male gaze and gender biases in a future East Asia, the project aims to encourage audiences to reconsider the technological optimism perspectives. In "*Subjunctive Documentary*," Mark Wolf explores how computer imaging and simulation technologies are transforming documentary filmmaking, enabling the creation of documentaries that present hypothetical scenarios, thereby blurring the line between factual and speculative representation. He mentions that simulations, with their strong persuasive power and visual appeal, risk being uncritically accepted as truth (Wolf, 2003). This perspective aligns closely with *Hyper Robo Sapien*'s critique, particularly regarding how machine vision increasingly dominates the coordinates and "accuracy" of reality. As machine vision appears to have become the new "male gaze," this issue has become more urgent than ever, especially as AI and robotics technology is already available today. However, this project does not focus on humanoid robots per se; rather, it uses the topic of robots to provoke critical thought about how cultural factors influence technological design, presenting a "what if" exploration that bridges present reality and future societal imaginaries.

Moreover, *Hyper Robo Sapien* employs AI tools to construct a generative AI-dominated media production scenario set in 2050. This design highlights ethical considerations, such as the growing difficulty of distinguishing real content from AI-generated material and the potential for AI to manipulate truth. By integrating technologies like Unreal Engine and Deepfake, this project critiques AI's pervasive influence. From an ethical perspective, the project emphasizes the role of AI tools on the web page, making their usage explicit. This transparency invites audiences to critically examine the impact of AI-driven narratives, enhancing awareness of how AI might shape our perception of truth and reality in the near future.

Looking ahead, I plan to build on the research in this project for my master's thesis, refining the ideas further. In addition to exploring the possibilities of mixed reality interactions, I will focus on using transmedia approaches to create documentary-style speculative designs.

4. REFERENCES

- [1] Nash, K. (2012). Modes of interactivity: Analysing the web doc. *Media, Culture & Society*, 34(2), 195–210. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443711430758>
- [2] Stewart, M. (2016). The generative hope of Indigenous interactive media: Ecological knowledge and Indigenous futurism. In M. Loft & H. W. Reddick (Eds.), *Indigenous media art in Canada* (pp. 175–191). Cormorant Books.
- [3] Wolf, M. J. P. (2003). Subjunctive documentary: Computer imaging and simulation. In J. Gaines & M. Renov (Eds.), *Collecting visible evidence* (pp. 274–291). University of Minnesota Press.

****AI Tools Used in this Project:** Tripo3D (image to 3D model), Heygen (virtual human), ChatGPT 4.0 (for some fake news text contents), Midjourney (AI-generated image), Stable Video (AI-generated image), ElevenLabs (text-to-speech).