A Review of Rebecca Gibson’s *Desire in the Age of Robots and AI: An Investigation in Science Fiction and Fact*

Book Review

Eleanor Barry

BA (Hons) English Student

Nottingham Trent University

N1146296@my.ntu.ac.uk

Rebecca Gibson, PhD, specializes in bioanthropology, serves as a juror for the Speculative Literature Foundation’s Working-Class Writers Grant and is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Anthropology at the University of Notre Dame. Additionally, her work has been published in Sexuality & Culture. This impressive resume makes her extremely well-informed and qualified to produce a book combing all of these subject matters.

Gibson discusses concepts such as these in a coherent and well-researched manner, making this read all the more stimulating as we have full confidence in the author’s knowledge. Despite her scientific vocabulary, this book is accessible to those with little experience within the field, yet useful to aspiring academics and researchers as the subject matter is applicable to many areas of study. A plethora of academic voices are incorporated amongst Gibson’s own, conveniently providing us with a wide range of sources.

Each chapter is swiftly summarized within thus introduction, ensuring that you are anticipating what is in store for you, and allowing you to perhaps begin with the chapter which appeals to you most. I expect that this would be especially useful for readers conducting research on a more specific topic. Gibson’s compelling introduction makes this an interesting read from the get-go, as well as her captivating choice of subject matter. The concept of the uncanny valley, a phenomenon currently vastly popular across social media platforms such as TikTok (with the hashtag ‘uncannyvalley’ amassing 2.1 billion views) is investigated, making for an extremely relevant read.

Within this book, Gibson explores the relationship between bioanthropology and technological advancements, the human psyche with regards to our desire to create ‘artificial’ companions, and why this often results in fetishization. Her enlightening studies examine the boundaries of human capability and teach us more about our behaviours and tendencies than we would perhaps feel comfortable knowing. Fascinatingly, we are awakened to our own desires; robotic companions mirror aspects of our beings, but also have their differences, explaining why intimate relationships with cyborgs would appeal to us. Her explorations of robot birth, life, sex and death challenge what differentiates us from them, tackling philosophical ideas becoming increasingly relevant as things to be considered in today’s society.

The gender binary, another increasingly relevant topic of debate, is also explored in an inclusive and tasteful manner, discussing how necessary it is for robots to be gendered in order to replicate humans if many people fall under the non-binary or intersex umbrella. This links our development as a society and what is becoming increasingly accepted with the progressively humane qualities of androids, alluding to how the world may evolve considering parallels such as these.

Popular literature and film including *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?,* a remarkable sci-fi classic exploring androids, empathy and the potential decline of humanity, are analysed by Gibson and are cleverly used to evidence her studies. The potential future of robotics is alluded to with relation to the popular *Blade Runner* movie with great originality, and Gibson’s intertextuality and pop-culture references make this book feel comprehensive and more digestible if you are already familiar with this media.

Overall, his book provides an extremely insightful and detailed analysis of our relationships and co-dependency with our technological creations, as well as the increasingly blurred line between humanity and technology within a fast-paced, engaging and informative short read. Throughout this book, Gibson makes us increasingly aware that we are on the cusp of something radical and long-anticipated, which will and has already revealed so much about the nature of our being. I would recommend this book to everyone as a precautionary read, but particularly those interested in sexuality (who isn’t?), robotics and Science Fiction.