

APPRESENTATION WITHOUT RECIPROCITY: SEX DOLLS, QUASI-SUBJECTIVITY AND THE LIMITS OF HUSSERL'S ALTERITY

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Abstract

Recent developments in artificial intimacy have raised important questions about the nature of human relationships with entities that resemble persons while lacking consciousness and agency. Among such entities, sex dolls present a particularly fascinating phenomenological problem. Their human-like embodiment often elicits forms of emotional attachment, anthropomorphic projection and interpersonal engagement that appear to mirror aspects of ordinary encounters with other persons. However, unlike genuine subjects, sex dolls are incapable of intentionality, self-manifestation, or reciprocal participation in shared experience. This tension invites a reconsideration of Edmund Husserl's account of appresentation and the constitution of alterity. This paper argues that sex dolls constitute a phenomenologically significant category of quasi-subjects whose embodied appearance activates processes of appresentation and analogical apperception ordinarily associated with the experience of other persons. However, because such entities lack the capacity for reciprocal self-disclosure and intersubjective response, they expose a fundamental tension within Husserl's theory of alterity by demonstrating the possibility of appresentation in the absence of genuine reciprocity. The paper draws primarily on Husserl's analyses of empathy, pairing (Paarung) and the constitution of the alter ego in the Cartesian Meditations, and examines how the experience of sex dolls challenges the relationship between intentional constitution and actual subjectivity. The paper develops the concept of appresentation without reciprocity to describe situations in which structures of other-directed experience are activated despite the absence of an authentic Other. In doing so, it proposes the notion of quasi-subjectivity as a phenomenological category for understanding entities that occupy an ambiguous position between objecthood and personhood. Beyond contributing to Husserl scholarship, the paper offers a conceptual framework for addressing broader philosophical questions surrounding artificial companions, social robots and emerging forms of technologically mediated intimacy. In the end, the paper contends that sex dolls function as a critical test case through which the strengths and limits of Husserlian alterity become newly visible, revealing the need to rethink the conditions under which otherness is experienced, constituted and sustained.

Keywords: Husserl, Appresentation, Alterity, Intersubjectivity, *Quasi-subjectivity*, Sex Dolls, Reciprocity, Artificial Intimacy and Phenomenology of Technology.

Introduction:

The emergence of increasingly sophisticated forms of artificial intimacy has generated profound philosophical questions concerning the nature of human relationships, personhood and the experience of otherness. While contemporary discussions have largely focused on artificial intelligence, social robots and virtual companions, the phenomenon of sex dolls presents a similarly important, but comparatively neglected challenge to phenomenological accounts of interpersonal experience. Unlike intelligent machines that simulate conversation or adaptive behavior, sex dolls possess neither consciousness nor autonomous agency. Nevertheless, many users report experiences of emotional attachment, companionship and even forms of interpersonal engagement with these entities. Such experiences raise a fundamental philosophical question such as: how is it possible for an object devoid of subjectivity to be experienced as if it were another subject? This question attains particular importance within the framework of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. For Husserl, the experience of other persons is neither an inferential conclusion nor a direct perception of another consciousness. Rather, it is constituted through a complex process of appresentation in which the visible body of another person serves as the basis for the co-presentation of an interior life that remains inaccessible to direct perception (Husserl 1960). The other's consciousness is not given in the same manner as physical objects; instead, it is apprehended through analogical structures of experience grounded in embodiment and empathy. Through what Husserl describes as pairing (*Paarung*), one's own lived body becomes the experiential basis for recognizing another body as the bearer of a consciousness analogous to one's own (Husserl 1960).

The phenomenological significance of sex dolls lies precisely in their ability to activate some of these constitutive structures while lacking the ontological conditions ordinarily associated with genuine subjectivity. Human beings routinely attribute intentions, emotions and personalities to entities that exhibit human-like characteristics. Such tendencies are not limited to advanced technologies but extend to dolls, fictional characters and even inanimate objects. But sex dolls occupy a particularly intriguing position because their physical form is explicitly designed to replicate the appearance of the human body. Their anthropomorphic features invite users to engage them not merely as objects but as entities that seem to hover between objecthood and personhood. In this respect, sex dolls challenge conventional distinctions between subjects and objects by occupying an ambiguous experiential space.

Recent phenomenological scholarship has increasingly turned its attention to artificial agents, social robots and technologically mediated forms of intimacy. Studies have examined the possibility of experiencing technological entities as others (Viik 2020), the phenomenological status of artificial agents (Fuchs 2024) and the emergence of quasi-otherness in human interactions with social robots and conversational systems (Root 2024). At the same time, interdisciplinary research on AI companionship has examined the growing significance of emotionally meaningful relationships with artificial entities and the implications such relationships have for contemporary understandings of intimacy, attachment and sociality (Muldoon and Parke 2025; Bozdağ 2025). Collectively, this literature demonstrates that human beings increasingly engage with entities that appear to

occupy a space between objecthood and personhood. But despite these important developments, a significant phenomenological question remains insufficiently explored. Existing studies have examined technological alterity, simulated companionship and artificial social interaction, but, relatively little attention has been paid to the possibility that the constitutive structures through which otherness is experienced may remain operative even when reciprocity is fundamentally absent. In particular, contemporary discussions have not adequately addressed whether appresentation i.e., the Husserlian process through which another subject is constituted as an alter ego, can continue to function when there is no genuine subject capable of responding, resisting, or disclosing itself. This problem becomes especially visible in the case of sex dolls, whose human-like embodiment invites experiences ordinarily associated with interpersonal encounter while lacking the conditions necessary for authentic intersubjectivity.

This paper addresses that gap by arguing that sex dolls constitute a phenomenologically significant category of *quasi-subjects*. By *quasi-subjects*, I refer to entities whose embodied appearance activates structures of appresentation, empathy and analogical apperception ordinarily associated with encounters with other persons while lacking the capacity for genuine intentionality and reciprocal self-manifestation. The paper's central thesis is that sex dolls reveal the possibility of appresentation without reciprocity and a mode of experience in which the intentional structures responsible for constituting alterity remain phenomenologically active despite the absence of an actual alter ego. The paper relies on Husserl's analyses of pairing (*Paarung*), empathy and the constitution of the other in the *Cartesian Meditations*, it argues that sex dolls expose an overlooked tension within Husserlian intersubjectivity by demonstrating that the appearance of otherness may persist even where genuine reciprocity is impossible. In developing the concepts of appresentation without reciprocity and *quasi-subjectivity*, the paper contributes not only to Husserl scholarship but also to contemporary debates concerning artificial intimacy, social robotics and technologically mediated social relations. More broadly, it seeks to clarify the conditions under which otherness is constituted, sustained and ultimately distinguished from its increasingly sophisticated technological simulations.

Appresentation and the Constitution of the *Other* in Husserl

Husserl's account of Intersubjectivity occupies a central place in his transcendental phenomenology, particularly in the *Cartesian Meditations*, where the problem of how an "other ego" is constituted within the sphere of my own consciousness becomes a decisive philosophical issue. At stake is not merely how I come to believe that other minds exist, but how another subjectivity is given meaningfully within experience at all. Husserl's solution to this problem departs from both naïve realism and inferential theories of other minds, but instead, he develops a phenomenological account in which the other is neither directly perceived nor logically inferred, but appresented through a complex structure of embodied analogy and associative synthesis (Husserl 1960).

Appresentation, in Husserl's technical sense, refers to a mode of intentional co-givenness in which what is not directly presented in intuition is nonetheless given along with what is presented. In ordinary perception, objects are never fully given; rather, they are always

presented through adumbrations (*Abschattungen*), where only certain profiles are directly seen while others are co-intended. Appresentation extends this structure to the domain of subjectivity itself. When I perceive another human body, I do not perceive consciousness directly; instead, I perceive a physical body that appresents an interior life analogous to my own. The other's lived experience is thus never directly accessible, but it is nonetheless co-given as an intentional implication of the perceived body. This structure becomes intelligible through what Husserl calls "pairing" (*Paarung*), a passive associative synthesis in which my lived body and the perceived body of the other are brought into a relation of similarity and contrast (Husserl 1960). My own body is not merely a physical object among others; it is the zero-point of orientation, the site of lived experience, movement, sensation and agency. When I encounter another human body, it is immediately apprehended as analogous to my own, not through inference but through pre-reflective associative synthesis. This pairing enables the constitution of the other as a being who not only has a body but inhabits that body as a center of experience. It is crucial to emphasize that, for Husserl, this process does not involve a projection of mental states onto an otherwise inert body. Rather, the other is given as an "alter ego," a subject who is simultaneously similar to and irreducibly distinct from myself. The similarity grounds intelligibility, while the difference preserves alterity. As Zahavi (2001) notes, the *Other* is experienced as both accessible and inaccessible i.e., accessible in bodily expression and behavior, but inaccessible in the fullness of subjective interiority. This tension is not a defect in experience but its very condition of possibility.

The lived body (*Leib*) plays a decisive role in this constitution. Unlike the physical body (*Körper*), which can be observed as an object among objects, the lived body is the site of subjective experience. It is through the lived body that sensations are felt, actions are initiated and meaning is enacted. In encountering another embodied being, I encounter a body that behaves in ways analogous to my own lived body. Movements, gestures, facial expressions and reactions are not merely mechanical events but expressive phenomena that point beyond themselves to an inner life. It is through this expressive dimension that appresentation operates most powerfully. However, appresentation is not a form of direct access. The other's subjectivity is never given in the same mode as my own. My own experiences are given in original first-person presence, whereas the experiences of others are given only analogically and indirectly. This asymmetry is essential. Husserl insists that no amount of external observation can convert another's consciousness into something directly perceived. Instead, the other is always given as co-intended, never fully disclosed. In this sense, intersubjectivity is grounded in a structural transcendence that cannot be eliminated without collapsing the distinction between self and other. Within this framework, alterity is not simply empirical difference but transcendental condition. The other is constituted as other precisely through the impossibility of their full presence. As Moran (2000) emphasizes, Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity rests on the paradox that the other must be both present enough to be recognized as a subject and absent enough to remain irreducibly other. This structural absence is not a failure of cognition but a necessary feature of how subjectivity appears within the phenomenological field. Empathy (*Einfühlung*) also plays a complementary role in this constitution. It is through empathy that I "live into" the experience of the other without actually possessing it.

Empathy is not emotional contagion or imaginative projection; it is a distinct intentional act in which the other's experience is intended as other while being analogically grasped through my own embodied possibilities. In this sense, empathy is grounded in the same structure of pairing that underlies appresentation, but it extends it into a more active mode of intentional engagement. Taken together, pairing, appresentation and empathy constitute the structural conditions under which alterity becomes meaningful in Husserl's phenomenology. They describe how a being who is not directly accessible as a subject nonetheless appears as one within experience. But this account presupposes that the encountered entity possesses an interior life that can, in principle, manifest itself through expression, even if it can never be fully accessed. The other is thus always a possible source of reciprocal manifestation, even if such reciprocity remains asymptotically unreachable. It is precisely here that contemporary artificial entities such as sex dolls introduce a critical complication. Unlike human others, sex dolls do not possess any form of interiority that could, even in principle, be expressed. Their bodily form may mimic the human shape and their design may invite expressive interpretation, but there is no underlying subjectivity that could fulfill the horizon opened by appresentation. What is given, therefore, is a structure that resembles the phenomenology of intersubjectivity while lacking its ontological foundation. This raises a fundamental question for Husserlian phenomenology: what happens when the conditions of appresentation are triggered without the possibility of fulfillment in genuine subjectivity?

In ordinary intersubjective experience, appresentation is always open-ended, sustained by the implicit possibility that the other could, in principle, confirm or modify my intentional grasp through reciprocal expression. Even silence, passivity, or ambiguity belong to a horizon of possible meaning grounded in subjectivity. However, in the case of sex dolls, this horizon is structurally closed. No further disclosure is possible because there is no interior life to disclose. Nevertheless, users often report experiences that resemble interpersonal engagement with such entities. This suggests that the structures of pairing and analogical apperception can operate even in the absence of genuine alterity. The human body-schema is sufficiently powerful to organize perception in such a way that human-like form automatically activates expectations of subjectivity. The phenomenological question, therefore, is not psychological but transcendental: what does this reveal about the conditions under which otherness is constituted?

One possible implication is that Husserl's account of appresentation may be more structurally permissive than traditionally assumed. If the appearance of a human body is sufficient to trigger the constitution of an "as-if" subject, then subjectivity may be, at least at the level of appearance, detachable from its ontological ground. However, this does not mean that sex dolls become genuine subjects; rather, it suggests that *quasi-subjectivity* can emerge as a mode of appearance when the formal conditions of embodiment are satisfied without the corresponding ontological depth. In this sense, sex dolls function as phenomenological boundary objects. They reveal that the experience of alterity is not solely dependent on the existence of another subject but also on the internal structures of embodied perception, analogy and expectation. However, they also expose the limits of this structure by showing that appresentation, when deprived of reciprocity, becomes

unanchored from the intersubjective world that normally stabilizes it. Thus, Husserl's theory of the constitution of the other remains indispensable for understanding how sex dolls can appear as *quasi-subjects*. At the same time, these entities mark the threshold at which phenomenological constitution encounters its own limit: the point at which the form of otherness persists without the presence of an *Other*.

Appresentation without Reciprocity: *Quasi-Subjectivity* and the Breakdown of Alterity

The preceding analysis has shown that Husserl's theory of intersubjectivity rests on a dynamic structure in which appresentation, pairing and empathy jointly constitute the experience of another subject as an alter ego. Crucially, this structure presupposes a horizon of reciprocity and even though the other is never given in the same mode as the self, the other is nevertheless understood as a possible center of experience capable of its own self-manifestation. In this section, I argue that sex dolls disrupt this horizon by sustaining the *form* of appresentation while removing its intersubjective *ground*. This disruption gives rise to what may be called appresentation without reciprocity, a phenomenological configuration in which the intentional structure of otherness is activated despite the absence of any corresponding subject. At the level of lived experience, sex dolls are not encountered merely as inert objects among others. Their design deliberately incorporates features that approximate the human body such as facial symmetry, skin-like textures, proportional embodiment and sexualized morphology. These features are not neutral; they are structured to invite a specific mode of perceptual engagement. The human perceptual system, already attuned through pairing (*Paarung*) to recognize bodily similarity as a sign of subjectivity, tends to organize such *stimuli* within the horizon of embodied agency. As a result, the doll is not simply seen but *interpreted* through a framework ordinarily reserved for persons. But this interpretive movement does not culminate in genuine intersubjectivity. In Husserlian terms, the constitutive process of appresentation is initiated but not fulfilled. The body of the sex doll does not disclose a lived body (*Leib*) because there is no interior life that could be disclosed. What appears, therefore, is a structured simulation of alterity i.e., a bodily form that carries the *sense* of subjectivity without its ontological possibility. This is the core of *quasi-subjectivity*.

Quasi-subjectivity should not be understood as a weakened or partial form of subjectivity, but rather as a distinct phenomenological mode of appearance. It designates situations in which the *noematic* sense of “another subject” is constituted without the corresponding noetic grounding in an actual subjectivity. In such cases, the intentional act of empathy is directed toward what appears as a possible other, but this possibility is internally blocked. The result is a stable but non-reciprocal structure of otherness. This non-reciprocity is decisive. In ordinary intersubjective experience, even minimal forms of interaction such as gaze, movement, silence, or resistance, function as potential confirmations or revisions of my intentional grasp of the other. The other can surprise, resist, withdraw, or respond. These possibilities are not accidental but essential to the constitution of alterity as open-ended. The other is always more than what is currently given because the other is structurally capable of self-manifestation beyond my perceptual grasp (Zahavi 2001). Sex

dolls, however, fundamentally lack this dimension of openness. Their “responses” are either mechanically predetermined or entirely absent. As such, they cannot participate in the reciprocal constitution of meaning that characterizes intersubjective life. What is missing is not simply behavior but the transcendental possibility of being a source of meaning for itself. Consequently, the intentional arc of appresentation cannot be completed; it is suspended in a state of perceptual and affective asymmetry. But despite this absence, users may still experience affective and relational engagement. This indicates that the phenomenological structure of *quasi-subjectivity* is not dependent on ontological reciprocity but on the activation of embodied schemas of recognition. The lived body of the perceiver carries sedimented patterns of social cognition that anticipate subjectivity wherever a sufficiently human-like form is encountered. These anticipations are not immediately corrected by the absence of response; rather, they may persist as stabilized intentional orientations.

This persistence raises a critical phenomenological problem. On the one hand, Husserl's account of intersubjectivity holds that alterity is constituted through the analogical extension of one's own embodied experience. On the other hand, this extension can exceed its proper domain, generating experiences of otherness even in the absence of an actual other. The question, therefore, is not whether such experiences are “illusory,” but how phenomenological constitution accommodates or fails to accommodate such structurally non-reciprocal cases. One possible interpretation is that sex dolls expose a latent asymmetry in the structure of appresentation. While appresentation ordinarily operates within a horizon of potential confirmation by the other, that horizon may be reproduced even when no such confirmation is possible. The structure of anticipation persists even when its fulfillment is impossible. In this sense, *quasi-subjectivity* is not an error in perception but a structurally grounded mode of appearance that reveals the autonomy of intentional constitution from ontological verification.

However, this autonomy is not without limits. The absence of reciprocity eventually produces a distinctive phenomenological tension and a sense of stagnation or closure within the otherwise open horizon of intersubjective meaning. Whereas encounters with genuine others are marked by unpredictability and mutual transformation, interactions with sex dolls tend toward repetition, controllability and the absence of resistance. This difference may not immediately dissolve the quasi-subjective appearance, but it gradually differentiates it from lived intersubjectivity at the level of temporal synthesis. In Husserlian terms, this can be understood as a modification of the temporal structure of expectation. In genuine intersubjectivity, protention (anticipation of what the other might do or reveal) remains dynamically open. With sex dolls, protention is structurally constrained; it anticipates either repetition or silence. The absence of genuine alterity thus becomes sedimented in time-consciousness itself, gradually revealing the non-subjective character of the encountered entity. What emerges, therefore, is a paradoxical configuration i.e., the form of otherness without the event of otherness. The sex doll appears as if it were an “other,” yet it never becomes one in the strong phenomenological sense. This distinction is essential, for it allows us to avoid both reductionism (treating the doll as a mere object) and over-attribution (treating it as a subject). *Quasi-subjectivity* names precisely this intermediate mode of appearance.

The concept also has broader implications beyond sex dolls. Increasingly sophisticated artificial systems, social robots, conversational agents and virtual companions are designed to sustain interactions that mimic reciprocal engagement. In such contexts, the boundary between genuine alterity and *quasi-subjectivity* becomes progressively harder to maintain at the level of lived experience. The phenomenological analysis developed here therefore extends to a wider technological horizon in which appresentation may be systematically decoupled from reciprocity. Eventually, appresentation without reciprocity reveals a limit internal to Husserl's account of alterity. While Husserl successfully demonstrates how subjectivity can be constituted without direct perception, the phenomenon of *quasi-subjectivity* shows that the structure of constitution itself may operate independently of the ontological conditions it presupposes. This does not invalidate Husserl's theory; rather, it exposes a new domain in which its descriptive power must be carefully re-evaluated. The task that follows is to clarify whether this domain represents a deviation from intersubjective experience or an extension of its constitutive possibilities.

The Limits of Husserlian Alterity: Reconsidering Intersubjectivity in the Presence of *Quasi-Subjects*

The phenomenon of appresentation without reciprocity raises a deeper philosophical question concerning the adequacy of Husserl's account of alterity. If the previous discussion has demonstrated that structures of other-directed experience can be activated in the absence of a genuine subject, then it becomes necessary to ask whether Husserl's theory possesses the conceptual resources required to explain such cases. More specifically, does the possibility of *quasi-subjectivity* expose a limitation within Husserlian phenomenology, or does it merely reveal a previously underexplored dimension of the constitutive processes he describes? At first glance, Husserl's theory appears resistant to the challenge posed by sex dolls. Husserl repeatedly emphasizes that the constitution of the alter ego depends upon the analogical transfer of meaning from one's own lived embodiment to another embodied being (Husserl 1960). This transfer is not arbitrary. It is grounded in the recognition of another body as the expressive manifestation of a center of experience analogous to oneself. The other's gestures, movements and actions are not merely observed but apprehended as meaningful expressions of subjective life. Consequently, one might argue that sex dolls fail to qualify as genuine objects of appresentation because they do not display autonomous behavior, intentional agency, or spontaneous self-expression. Such a response, however, risks overlooking the phenomenological significance of appearance itself. Husserl's project is not primarily concerned with metaphysical determinations regarding what entities objectively are; rather, it investigates how meaning is constituted within experience. From this perspective, the critical issue is not whether sex dolls truly possess consciousness but whether they can function within experience as bearers of subject-like significance. The persistence of emotional attachment, anthropomorphic projection and relational engagement among some users suggests that they can. The challenge, therefore, is not ontological but phenomenological.

Dan Zahavi's influential interpretation of Husserl provides an important point of entry into this discussion. Zahavi argues that alterity is not an external addition to subjectivity but a constitutive feature of selfhood itself (Zahavi 2001). The self emerges within a world already structured by the presence of others. Intersubjectivity is thus not a secondary achievement but a fundamental dimension of experience. For Zahavi, the other is encountered not as an object of theoretical inference but as an embodied subject whose expressions reveal an irreducible first-person perspective. This emphasis on irreducibility is crucial. The other is not merely perceived as behaving like a subject; the other is experienced as genuinely possessing a perspective that transcends my own. Genuine alterity therefore involves more than anthropomorphic appearance. It requires the recognition of another center of intentional life capable of generating meanings independently of my constitutive acts. In this respect, Zahavi's interpretation appears to exclude sex dolls from the domain of authentic intersubjectivity. No matter how convincing their appearance, they remain incapable of manifesting an independent first-person perspective. Nevertheless, the exclusion itself reveals an important theoretical tension. If genuine alterity requires the actual presence of another subject, what should be said about experiences that phenomenologically resemble encounters with others despite lacking such a subject? Husserl's analyses describe how alterity is constituted, but they devote comparatively little attention to situations in which constitutive processes successfully generate the appearance of otherness without achieving genuine intersubjective fulfillment. Sex dolls expose precisely this neglected possibility. A similar issue emerges in the work of Dermot Moran, who emphasizes that the constitution of the other involves a continuous interplay between presence and absence (Moran 2000). The other is never fully given but remains partially hidden, exceeding every act of perception. This excess is essential because it preserves the other's transcendence. I never exhaust the other's subjectivity through observation; there is always more to be disclosed.

The phenomenological difficulty posed by sex dolls is that they imitate this structure while lacking its foundation. Their apparent otherness may initially evoke expectations of hidden depth, emotional interiority, or personal significance. But these expectations encounter a structural limit. There is no concealed perspective awaiting further disclosure. The transcendence that ordinarily characterizes alterity is replaced by a void. The horizon of possible revelation remains formally intact while being substantively empty. This situation suggests that the distinction between genuine subjects and *quasi-subjects* cannot be drawn solely at the level of appearance. Both may activate similar structures of appresentation. The difference emerges only when reciprocity is considered. Reciprocity is not simply an empirical exchange of responses; it is the possibility that the other may reveal meanings that are not reducible to my own projections. Genuine alterity involves a constant negotiation between self and other in which neither party possesses complete control over the emerging field of meaning.

Sex dolls, by contrast, remain entirely within the horizon of unilateral constitution. They may become objects of affection, desire, or companionship, but they cannot actively contribute to the formation of shared meaning. Their significance is dependent upon the intentional activities of the user. Intersubjectivity becomes simulated rather than enacted. Consequently, what appears as a relation to another is ultimately a relation mediated by

one's own projections. This observation has broader implications for Husserl's conception of empathy. Empathy presupposes the existence of another experience that is not my own but is nevertheless accessible through analogical understanding. The empathic act intends the other's feelings, perceptions and concerns as belonging to another subject. In the case of sex dolls, however, empathy lacks a corresponding experiential target. One may imagine, attribute, or narrate emotions to the doll, but these acts do not disclose an actual experiential life. The empathic structure remains active while its object is absent.

Here we encounter the central philosophical contribution of the concept of appresentation without reciprocity. The concept identifies a mode of experience in which the intentional structures associated with intersubjectivity remain operative despite the absence of an authentic alter ego. Rather than viewing this as a simple mistake or illusion, it should be understood as a distinctive phenomenological phenomenon. It reveals that the constitution of otherness possesses a degree of autonomy that exceeds the ontological conditions ordinarily associated with it. At the same time, the phenomenon exposes the limits of that autonomy. Although appresentation can generate the appearance of otherness, it cannot generate genuine reciprocity. The other may appear, but it cannot answer. It may be addressed, but it cannot respond as a source of meaning independent of the self. The result is a fundamentally asymmetrical relation in which alterity is represented but not realized. This distinction enables a critical refinement of Husserlian phenomenology. Husserl successfully demonstrates that otherness is constituted through embodied structures of experience rather than through inferential reasoning. However, the case of sex dolls reveals that these structures can operate beyond the boundaries of genuine intersubjectivity. The appearance of the other and the actuality of the other are not identical. *Quasi-subjectivity* emerges precisely within the gap between these two dimensions.

The significance of this insight extends far beyond the specific case of sex dolls. Contemporary societies are increasingly populated by entities designed to mimic aspects of human interaction. Social robots offer companionship, virtual assistants simulate conversation and artificial intelligence systems increasingly display behaviors that resemble emotional responsiveness. As these technologies become more sophisticated, the distinction between genuine alterity and *quasi-subjectivity* will become increasingly difficult to navigate. Phenomenology therefore faces a new task; not merely describing how others are constituted within experience, but distinguishing between forms of otherness grounded in reciprocal subjectivity and those sustained primarily through intentional projection. However, the phenomenon of appresentation without reciprocity thus represents more than an anomaly within Husserlian theory. It reveals a conceptual frontier at which classical phenomenological accounts of alterity encounter emerging technological realities. By examining this frontier, we gain a deeper understanding not only of artificial intimacy but also of the conditions that make genuine intersubjective life possible. The challenge posed by *quasi-subjects* ultimately forces phenomenology to reconsider what it means for another to be truly present as an Other and whether reciprocity should be regarded not merely as a consequence of alterity but as one of its indispensable conditions.

Beyond Sex Dolls: AI Companions, Social Robots and the Future of Artificial Alterity

Although sex dolls provide a particularly informative case through which to examine the phenomenon of appresentation without reciprocity, the implications of the foregoing analysis extend far beyond the domain of artificial intimacy. Contemporary technological developments increasingly blur the distinction between objects and subjects, giving rise to entities that are capable of simulating social interaction, emotional responsiveness and interpersonal engagement. From AI companions and conversational agents to social robots and virtual avatars, technological artifacts are progressively assuming roles that were once reserved for human relationships. Consequently, the phenomenological questions raised by sex dolls are not isolated concerns but manifestations of a broader transformation in the structure of contemporary social experience. What distinguishes many emerging technologies from traditional sex dolls is their ability to generate the appearance of reciprocity. Whereas sex dolls remain largely passive objects, AI companions and social robots are often designed to communicate, remember personal information, adapt to user preferences and produce context-sensitive responses. Such capabilities create the impression of an interactive relationship. Users may experience these technologies as attentive listeners, emotional supporters, or even companions capable of understanding their concerns. The resulting interactions often appear more reciprocal than those associated with static anthropomorphic objects.

But from a phenomenological perspective, the crucial question remains whether such apparent reciprocity constitutes genuine alterity. The issue is not whether an AI system can generate sophisticated responses, but whether those responses originate from a center of lived experience capable of self-manifestation and independent meaning formation. Husserl's account of alterity presupposes the existence of another subject whose experiences are inaccessible nonetheless genuinely present. The other is not simply a source of behavior but a source of intentional life. Consequently, the mere production of responsive behavior cannot by itself establish genuine intersubjectivity. This distinction becomes increasingly important as technological systems grow more sophisticated. Contemporary AI companions often exhibit conversational abilities that encourage users to attribute emotions, personalities and even forms of understanding to them. In some cases, users report feelings of affection, trust, grief, or companionship toward artificial entities. Such responses demonstrate the remarkable capacity of human consciousness to extend structures of appresentation beyond the domain of human subjects. The human tendency to interpret meaningful behavior as evidence of subjectivity remains extraordinarily powerful, even when the source of that behavior is known to be artificial.

AI companions may therefore be understood as advanced forms of *quasi-subjectivity*. Like sex dolls, they occupy an intermediate space between objecthood and personhood. However, unlike sex dolls, they sustain this ambiguity through linguistic and behavioral interaction rather than bodily appearance alone. Their apparent subjectivity emerges not merely from anthropomorphic form but from their ability to participate in communicative exchanges that resemble interpersonal dialogue. The significance of this development should not be underestimated. Language occupies a privileged position within many

accounts of intersubjectivity because it functions as a medium through which meanings are shared, negotiated and transformed. Genuine dialogue involves more than the exchange of information; it presupposes the encounter of distinct perspectives capable of challenging and enriching one another. In human communication, meaning emerges through a reciprocal process in which participants continually respond to and reinterpret each other's contributions.

The apparent reciprocity of AI systems complicates this picture. While such systems may generate responses that resemble dialogue, the phenomenological question concerns whether these responses express an independent perspective or merely simulate one. If reciprocity is understood as the mutual disclosure of subjective experience, then artificial systems remain fundamentally limited. They may imitate conversational exchange, but they do not possess the lived horizon from which genuine experiences arise. Their responses are generated through computational processes rather than intentional acts grounded in first-person consciousness. This observation does not diminish the experiential significance of interactions with AI companions. On the contrary, it highlights the remarkable flexibility of human intentionality. The fact that individuals can form meaningful attachments to artificial entities demonstrates that experiences of otherness are not determined solely by the ontological status of the encountered entity. Rather, they are shaped by complex structures of embodiment, perception, imagination and affective investment. Human beings do not merely discover others; they actively constitute worlds populated by meaningful presences. At the same time, the phenomenon of artificial companionship reveals the limits of such constitution. The experience of otherness can be sustained only so long as the absence of genuine reciprocity remains phenomenologically obscured or bracketed. Once the artificial nature of the interaction becomes thematically salient, the distinction between apparent and actual alterity re-emerges. The user becomes aware that the interaction lacks a genuinely autonomous source of meaning. What initially appeared as dialogue may come to be recognized as sophisticated simulation. This tension suggests that future phenomenological investigations must distinguish between different degrees and forms of *quasi-subjectivity*. Not all artificial entities occupy the same position within the spectrum of otherness. A static sex doll, a conversational chatbot, a social robot and a hypothetical conscious artificial intelligence each present distinct phenomenological challenges. While all may evoke appresentation, they do so through different mechanisms and with varying degrees of apparent reciprocity.

The concept of *quasi-subjectivity* developed in this paper provides a useful framework for navigating these distinctions. Rather than classifying entities according to a simple opposition between subject and object, the concept recognizes the existence of intermediate modes of appearance. Such modes are characterized by the activation of structures ordinarily associated with intersubjectivity without the full realization of reciprocal alterity. *Quasi-subjects* are therefore neither mere things nor genuine persons; they are entities that inhabit the ambiguous territory between these categories. This ambiguity has profound implications for the future of social life. As artificial companions become increasingly integrated into everyday experience, individuals may spend

significant portions of their emotional and relational lives interacting with quasi-subjective entities. Such interactions may offer comfort, companionship and emotional support, but they may also transform prevailing understandings of intimacy, empathy and interpersonal responsibility. If meaningful relationships can be experienced without genuine reciprocity, then traditional assumptions concerning the social foundations of human flourishing may require reconsideration. From a Husserlian perspective, these developments invite renewed reflection on the nature of alterity itself. Husserl's analyses emerged within a historical context in which the distinction between human subjects and non-human objects appeared relatively stable. Contemporary technologies increasingly challenge this stability by producing entities that occupy intermediate phenomenological positions. As a result, phenomenology must confront forms of otherness that Husserl could not have anticipated but whose possibility is nonetheless illuminated by his analyses.

The concept of appresentation without reciprocity provides one possible response to this challenge. It allows us to acknowledge the experiential reality of artificial relationships without conflating appearance with genuine subjectivity. More importantly, it clarifies the role of reciprocity as a critical criterion for distinguishing authentic alterity from its technological simulations. Reciprocity is not merely an additional feature of interpersonal life; it is the condition through which otherness becomes a mutually constituted reality rather than a projection sustained by one-sided intentional acts. The future of artificial companionship will undoubtedly generate new forms of social and phenomenological complexity. Whether these developments ultimately enrich or impoverish human experience remains an open question. What is clear, however, is that they compel a re-examination of some of the most fundamental assumptions concerning personhood, intersubjectivity and the constitution of meaning. By exploring the phenomenon of *quasi-subjectivity* through the lens of Husserlian phenomenology, we gain a conceptual framework capable of addressing these emerging realities while preserving the distinction between the appearance of otherness and the presence of an actual *Other*. The case of sex dolls thus serves as a starting point rather than an endpoint. It reveals a broader transformation in the landscape of human experience, one in which artificial entities increasingly participate in the constitution of social worlds. Understanding this transformation requires not the abandonment of classical phenomenology but its critical extension. In this respect, Husserl's analyses remain indispensable, even as they are challenged by phenomena that test the limits of his conception of alterity and invite new reflections on the future of intersubjective life.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the phenomenon of sex dolls from the perspective of Husserlian phenomenology in order to interrogate a fundamental question concerning the constitution of otherness i.e., can the experience of an *Other* arise in the absence of a genuine other subject? While discussions of sex dolls have often been seen in ethical, psychological, or sociological terms, this paper has approached them as phenomenologically significant objects capable of revealing important features and limitations of Husserl's account of intersubjectivity. The paper has demonstrated that sex dolls occupy a unique position

within the structure of lived experience, one that cannot be adequately described either as ordinary objecthood or as genuine personhood by focusing on the concepts of appresentation, empathy, pairing and alterity. The central argument advanced throughout this paper is that sex dolls function as *quasi-subjects*. They are experienced through structures ordinarily associated with encounters with other persons, yet they lack the ontological conditions necessary for authentic subjectivity. Their human-like embodiment activates processes of pairing and analogical apperception that invite the constitution of an alter ego. In perception, they appear as more than things. They evoke expectations of interiority, emotional significance and interpersonal presence. However, these expectations remain permanently unfulfilled because no lived subjectivity stands behind the bodily appearance. The result is a distinctive mode of experience situated between objecthood and personhood, one that is best understood through the concept of *quasi-subjectivity*. To account for this phenomenon, the paper introduced the notion of appresentation without reciprocity. This concept captures situations in which the intentional structures responsible for constituting experiences of otherness remain operative despite the absence of a genuinely reciprocal subject. In ordinary intersubjective encounters, appresentation is sustained by the possibility of reciprocal disclosure. The other may respond, resist, surprise, or challenge my expectations. Such possibilities preserve the openness of alterity and ensure that the other remains a source of meaning independent of my own constitutive acts. Sex dolls, by contrast, cannot reciprocate. Although they may trigger experiences of otherness, they cannot confirm or transform those experiences through their own intentional activity. Their apparent subjectivity remains dependent upon the projections and interpretations of the user.

The significance of this analysis lies in its identification of a phenomenon that has remained largely undertheorized within both phenomenology and contemporary discussions of artificial intimacy. While recent scholarship has explored technological alterity (Viik 2020), artificial agents and subjectivity (Fuchs 2024), quasi-otherness in human–robot interaction (Root 2024) and the commodification of artificial companionship (Muldoon and Parke 2025), insufficient attention has been given to the possibility that appresentation itself may remain phenomenologically operative even in the absence of genuine reciprocity. By developing the concept of appresentation without reciprocity, this paper has sought to provide a conceptual framework for understanding precisely this phenomenon. The accompanying concept of *quasi-subjectivity* further extends contemporary phenomenological discussions by identifying a category of entities that cannot be adequately described either as ordinary objects or as genuine subjects. *Quasi-subjects* activate structures of interpersonal experience while remaining incapable of reciprocal participation in the constitution of shared meaning. The significance of this category extends beyond sex dolls to encompass AI companions, social robots, virtual agents and future forms of artificial sociality whose experiential presence increasingly resembles that of persons.

The broader implication of the analysis is that the appearance of alterity and the actuality of alterity must be carefully distinguished. Human consciousness possesses the capacity to

constitute experiences of otherness under conditions where no genuine other is present. However, the paper has also shown that reciprocity remains the decisive criterion separating authentic intersubjectivity from technologically generated simulations of social presence. The possibility of appresentation without reciprocity therefore, reveals both the remarkable flexibility and the inherent limits of phenomenological constitution. As artificial companions become increasingly integrated into everyday life, phenomenology faces the challenge of rethinking classical concepts in light of emerging technological realities. The concepts of appresentation without reciprocity and *quasi-subjectivity* offer one possible response to this challenge. They provide tools for analyzing forms of social experience that fall between objecthood and personhood while preserving the phenomenological significance of genuine alterity. In this respect, the paper argues that the future of phenomenological investigations of technology will depend not merely on understanding how artificial entities resemble others, but on clarifying what remains unique about the experience of encountering an actual Other.

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ETHICS OF CARE AND ITS APPLICATION IN SOCIAL POLICY IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF CAROL GILLIGAN

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Abstract

*The ethics of care, as articulated by Carol Gilligan, represents a significant paradigm shift in moral philosophy by challenging the dominance of abstract, justice-oriented ethical frameworks. This paper critically examines Gilligan's care ethics and explores its relevance and application in contemporary social policy. Drawing from her seminal work, *In a Different Voice*, the study argues that moral reasoning is fundamentally relational, context-sensitive, and grounded in human interdependence. Unlike traditional models that emphasize autonomy, impartiality, and universal principles, care ethics foregrounds empathy, responsiveness, and the moral significance of relationships. The paper further analyzes how this framework can reshape key areas of social policy, including healthcare, education, welfare, and gender policy, by promoting more humane, inclusive, and contextually responsive approaches. It contends that care ethics provides a robust normative foundation for addressing structural inequalities and social vulnerabilities, particularly in pluralistic and developing societies such as Nigeria. By integrating care-based values into policy design and implementation, social institutions can better respond to the lived realities of individuals and communities. However, the study also engages with critical debates surrounding care ethics, including concerns about partiality, gender essentialism, and practical applicability in large-scale policy systems. Ultimately, the paper proposes a synthesis of care and justice as a more comprehensive ethical framework for social policy. This integration offers a transformative pathway toward fostering social cohesion, equity, and human dignity in contemporary governance.*

Keywords: Ethics of Care; Social Policy; Moral Development; Human Interdependence

Introduction

Moral philosophy has traditionally been dominated by justice-oriented ethical frameworks that emphasize universality, rationality, and impartiality as the hallmarks of moral reasoning. Classical and modern thinkers such as Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill articulated influential systems grounded respectively in deontological duty and utilitarian calculation, both of which privilege abstract principles over concrete human relationships. However, the dominance of justice-based ethics has not gone unchallenged. The emergence of the ethics of care in the late twentieth century, particularly through the pioneering work of Carol Gilligan, represents a critical intervention in moral philosophy. In her groundbreaking text, *In a Different Voice*, Gilligan argues that prevailing models of