



Should Robots Be Granted Legal Personhood?

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Posted on April 15, 2019 23:04

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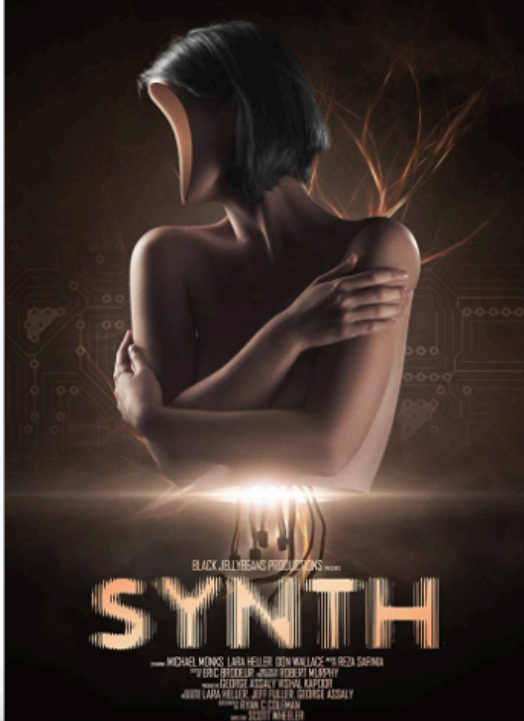
Synth, an intriguing short film now on the festival circuit, is about scientists Anza (Lara Heller) and Marcus (Michael Monks) who develop a line of self-learning robots. One is a beautiful automaton named Grace who is physically indistinguishable from a human and seems to feel complex emotions such as anger, love and jealousy. Directed by Scott Wheeler, the film explores the intimate bond between people and AI devices, and what happens when a robot is given human rights.

Human rights for a mechanical device might sound preposterous, but the concept of robot “personhood” is already playing out globally. European lawmakers, for example, have been **debating** whether to give high-functioning androids legal status – a decision that would determine who is legally responsible for robots' actions.

A **2017 report** issued by the European Parliament suggested that robots could be given “legal personhood,” putting them on par with corporations that already have worldwide legal status. The lawmakers' reasoning is that these high processing machines are too complicated to understand, and if an algorithm makes a wrong decision, and injures people or damages property, there would be no one to hold legally responsible. Granting personhood would mean that robots could be insured individually and held liable. (Personhood, however, does not mean that robots are like people in that they benefit from human rights such as getting married.)

AI experts are in **disagreement** over granting robots personhood. Some believe that it's immoral to treat machines like humans, while others, manufacturers especially, welcome the release of legal responsibility for their robots' actions. These liability issues will only become more complex as AI technology advances.

The field of robotics is thriving as demand accelerates. The market for “cobots,” machines created to work alongside humans, is projected to reach \$3 billion by 2020. The demand for household robots is expected to rise to \$14.9 billion by 2023. And industrial robots – sophisticated machines designed to work in factory assembly lines – will hit \$40 billion by 2020.



Synth's character Grace was inspired by a **real-life robot named Sophia**, manufactured by Hong Kong-based Hanson Robotics. Physically modeled after the actress Audrey Hepburn, she can make jokes, has about 50 facial expressions and appears to be able to converse with humans. But its creator, Hanson Robotics chief scientist and CTO Ben Goertzel, admits Sophia is more of an interface than a human being, and that she can piece together phrases contextually but doesn't truly understand what she's saying.

Nevertheless, Sophia was **granted citizenship** by Saudi Arabia, the first country in the world to grant citizenship to a robot.



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