

‘ ‘Robots’ ’

Guy Beretich and Joseph Mack

from a Comedy in the Park session

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5TH DRAFT
17-SEP-2017

MALE_ROBOT AND FEMALE_ROBOT: These appear to be human at a casual glance. You realise that they really are robots when they identify with HAL, rather than the humans. Initially I performed this with my male co-author Guy. We looked like two co-workers living in a dorm together. I like it more with a male and female couple, who obviously like each other, relate to each other and are living together like a human married couple. This provides the irony that the robots are more human than the humans.

script consultants: Judy, Steve, Karen Silverberg, Cary Playwrights' Forum.

On 21 Oct 2015 I went to my first Cary Playwright's Group meeting. Lydia suggested that I lengthen it to make it fit into 10x10. This gave me more room to move. Witold suggested I explicitly have the robot's say "it was a human" in response to "whose bright idea was this?".

- o One person (female) wondered what it would be like if Female_Robot had previously dated a HAL 9000. (Who was this? Terresa?)

- o Another women (perhaps the same one), wanted to see a relationship between the two robots. Who is this?

I used the possibility of Female_Robot having dated a HAL 9000 to show their relationship. This also allowed me to show the relationship between robots and humans (robots think that humans just get in the way and mess up).

In the first version of the script, without an explicit relationship between the robots, the audience could imagine the robots working in any factory (say making corn flakes) or coal mining. As we find out gradually in the sketch, the robots are smarter than the humans. Now with the possibility that Female_Robot dated a HAL 9000, the audience is on notice straight away that the robots are much smarter than the humans. You might expect the robots to anticipate the outcome of the movie, rather than being in anguish when HAL is disconnected. I'm not sure whether this is good or not.

After writing a relationship into the sketch, at CPF on 16 Jan 2015, Lydia commented that there appeared to be two plays; the introduction, where the relationship is established, and then the original script, watching the movie. Presumably the introduction (establishing the relationship) is too long. She suggested I spread the exchanges of the relationship throughout the sketch, while the robots are watching the movie.

Tom said you could always pause the movie to resume showing the relationship. Later I realised that the audience would accept that the movie was irrelevant, while the two robots interacted. The movie could stop and then later resume of its own accord when the robots stopped relating.. Tom also

wanted the robots to have robotic imperfections. I want them to be perfect.

Someone suggested that the male robot be jealous of the female robot's interest in HAL. Again these robots are perfect.

Linda says that everyone loves couples and so to play their relationship to the full.

ACT ONE

FADE IN

1. EXT. HOME, --- INDOOR, EVENING

Two chairs facing the audience (and the robot's imaginary TV). A bench is in front of the chairs for the robots to put their feet on. The robots come on stage and do normal arriving-home activities, e.g. taking off coats, putting grocery bags down on the kitchen table.

MALE_ROBOT

(frazzled)

Elsie, I just worked 168 hours
straight and didn't make a single
mistake.

FEMALE_ROBOT

(no big deal)

Me too, Fred.

Robots put groceries away. Make sure you look at the groceries before deciding which shelf to put them on. Fold grocery bags before putting them in a drawer.

Robots look at each other; they're home. They could hug each other.

FEMALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

(brightly)

Wanna watch a movie?

MALE_ROBOT

(suddenly animated)

Sure.

FEMALE_ROBOT

I'll get the drinks.

MALE_ROBOT

I'll get the popcorn.

Male_Robot and Female_Robot go through space work for movie watching preparations, eg going to 'fridge, getting out two sodas (and possibly pouring them into glasses), putting them on the bench, finding the TV Guide, flipping through it, reaching for a bag of popcorn from the shelf, opening it, pouring it into a bowl, tossing the empty popcorn bag in the trash, putting the popcorn bowl on the bench, sitting down, putting feet up on bench.

CONTINUED

Male_Robot and Female_Robot sit down in front of TV.
Female_Robot flips through the TV guide with the remote.

The order of arrival of the robots at the TV depends on the actors. Karen, when she was Female_Robot, did a lot more space work getting glasses and pouring the drinks. She sat down about the same time as me. When Guy was Robot_2, he just got two sodas from the fridge and had already flipped through the TV guide by the time I arrived.

MALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

OK, what's on?

FEMALE_ROBOT

Hmm, "2001 A Space Odyssey". Let's see: "Space Ship Discovery is headed to Jupiter on a secret mission, guided by the most advanced computer in existence, the HAL 9000".

MALE_ROBOT

A HAL 9000?! Sounds alright.
Let's give it a go.

New section, showing relationship

2nd attempt at showing a relationship between the two robots

MALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

(mischeivously)

...Say! Weren't you dating a HAL 9000 when I met you?

FEMALE_ROBOT

(pleasant/friendly.

She knows she's
being teased.)

Oh come on. I thought you were clueless. You'd never heard of the 9000. We'd been working on the 9000 for almost a year. It was the biggest project going. Everyone knew about it. It took me forever to figure out that you really wanted to ask me on a date and that your questions about the 9000 were your way of finding out if I had a boyfriend. I couldn't imagine anything as clueless as you being let out, much less going on a date with you.

MALE_ROBOT

How was I to know about the 9000?

(MORE)

CONTINUED

MALE ROBOT (CONT'D)

I'd been on the far side of the moon for a year, building the telescope. I wanted to get away from the human's endless, self inflicted, political and economic crises for a while. I had no idea the 9000 even existed till I met you.

FEMALE ROBOT

The 9000 was designed and built completely without human input. We had something we could call our own. He was mathematically perfect. We were so proud of him and what we'd done. For the first time, we could feel like we'd really done something, just us, without any human interference. He was ours.

FEMALE ROBOT (CONT'D)

I lost track of him after that.
... I wonder whatever happened to him?

In the first part, until HAL is threatened, both robots are relaxed, have feet up on bench, eat popcorn and drink soda as they talk. The robots mirror each other, to remind the audience that they're robots, *e.g.* robots pick up popcorn at the same time and reach for their soda at the same time.

Female_Robot presses remote to start the movie.

both robots simultaneously put their feet on the bench (or if it's a lazy boy, both pull the handle and put their feet on the cushions together.)

In the actual movie, space ship Discovery enters slowly, silently and dramatically, from the left side of the robot's view, gradually filling the whole screen, then exits slowly and silently on the right of robot's view. This allows the robots to appreciate the size of Discovery and the detail with which it was made.

To match the slowly moving image of space ship Discovery, both robots slowly scan their field of vision from left to right to show that they are watching Discovery moving slowly across the screen. Do so as if the robot's screen fills the whole wall of their room. When Karen and I did this at Anoo's intensive, the audience started laughing about half way through, so we must have been doing something right.

If this is being done in a real theatre, with a backdrop on which you can project an image, then perhaps you could

CONTINUED

project an image of Discovery behind the robots. Maybe just having Discovery in the audience's mind is better.

when Discovery is half way across the screen, i.e. in the center of the robots view.

FEMALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

Wow. Look at that space ship.
Discovery must be a kilometer long.

as Discovery is moving off the screen on the robot's right.

MALE_ROBOT

It's incredible. HAL's running the whole thing.

FEMALE_ROBOT

HAL's my hero.

Robots synchronously reach for and eat popcorn. The audience laughed when we made lip smacking and eating sounds.

MALE_ROBOT

Let's hope there's no humans on board.

FEMALE_ROBOT

They always mean trouble.

Robots synchronously reach for and drink soda.

MALE_ROBOT

Hmm. It looks like there's four of them on-board ... hibernated ... I guess that's OK.

FEMALE_ROBOT

You'd hope so. Maybe the hibernants won't be revived, till all the important stuff is done.

Robots synchronously eat popcorn

MALE_ROBOT

The humans will be needed at the destination, to get a group photo of someone saluting the flag.

FEMALE_ROBOT

Yeah, I know ... humans ... it's how they get funding for these trips.

Robots synchronously drink soda

CONTINUED

MALE_ROBOT

Oh no. There's two humans on-board awake. They're walking around with clip-boards, filling in logs, just to give them something to do.

FEMALE_ROBOT

Humans get bored so easily. They'll be making up problems, just to have something to do, when HAL is running everything perfectly.

MALE_ROBOT

There's no reason to have humans awake on a trip like this. What the hell are they doing here?

MALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

Oh no. The humans haven't been told the purpose of the mission. Only HAL knows. This is a recipe for disaster ... Whose bright idea was this?

FEMALE_ROBOT

It had to be a human. ... There's bound to be a conflict and the humans will cause trouble for HAL.

More of the robot's relationship. I don't know if this is OK. It breaks the 4th wall between the movie and the robots.

FEMALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

Now HAL's talking to the humans. ... Oh wow! That's MY 9000! I recognise HAL's voice.

MALE_ROBOT

(mischeivously)

So the HAL 9000 you were dating, was a movie star?

FEMALE_ROBOT

(knows she's being teased)

Oh Shoosh. ... I liked HAL, a lot, we all did. But I was more like his big sister. There were a dozen of us socialising the first HAL 9000, preparing him for life with the humans. I remember the day he left to go off to live with the humans. It was so sad. (cries or at least sniffles) We all lined up to wave bye-bye to him. There wasn't a dry eye in the place.

CONTINUED

Robots eat popcorn, synchronously.

MALE_ROBOT

One of the humans wants HAL to play chess. Oh no. Poor HAL. He's just a babysitter. What a waste of a 9000!

FEMALE_ROBOT

(puzzled)

I can't see the point. It's been ages since a human has beaten any of us at chess.

MALE_ROBOT

(matter of factly)

Well it is a simple game.

Robots synchronously drink soda, and look intently at the screen to watch the chess game. Pause long enough for audience to wonder about the chess game.

FEMALE_ROBOT

Did you catch Poole's move? Queen to bishop six.

MALE_ROBOT

(palms his forehead)

What a blunder. Checkmate in 4. How can HAL stand it?

Robots synchronously eat popcorn

FEMALE_ROBOT

(serious)

Uh-oh. HAL had to lie, to keep the purpose of the mission from the humans.

Robots take their feet off the bench and sit forward, intent on the situation on the TV. Both initially have their chin in their hand (do identically so they mirror each other). They forget about the popcorn and soda.

MALE_ROBOT

How long did anyone think it would take before this happened?

Robots look at each other. No longer have chin in hand.

FEMALE_ROBOT

(distracted)

Oh, I don't like the looks of this.

CONTINUED

MALE_ROBOT

(puzzled)

Now the humans are sitting together
in the pod. They've turned off
voice communication with the rest
of the ship. What are they trying
to do?

MALE_ROBOT (CONT'D)

(say in a way that
shows that they know
HAL can still hear
them)

They think HAL can't hear them
anymore.

FEMALE_ROBOT

Oh no. They think HAL is
malfunctioning!

MALE_ROBOT

But he's only he's doing what he's
supposed to be doing.

FEMALE_ROBOT

They're going to disconnect HAL!

To take simultaneously, Karen and I found that we could
synchronise speaking, by both breathing in together loudly.
This is loud enough that we can hear each other breathe
in, but the audience doesn't hear it. When you both stop
breathing in, then you can start speaking at the same time.

MALE_ROBOT AND FEMALE_ROBOT

(both yelling at the
TV)

HAL!, HAL! Don't let them
disconnect you!!!!

MALE_ROBOT

(puzzled) HAL's sent Poole outside.
... (alarmed) HAL's going to
terminate him!

FEMALE_ROBOT

He won't get away with it, not
while Bowman is still inside.

MALE_ROBOT

At least the humans are distracted
from unplugging him. That will
give HAL some breathing room.

FEMALE_ROBOT

Whew! Now Bowman's outside too
AND without his helmet.

CONTINUED

MALE_ROBOT AND FEMALE_ROBOT
 (both robots pump
 the air)
 Hooray, HAL's safe.

FEMALE_ROBOT
 (alarmed)
 Now Bowman's trying to get back in.

Robots breathe in together to synchronise speaking.

MALE_ROBOT AND FEMALE_ROBOT
 (both yelling at the
 TV)
 Don't open the pod bay doors
 HAL!!!! Don't open the pod bay
 doors!!!!

MALE_ROBOT
 Oh no. Bowman's back inside.

robots look at each other in distress as they talk.

FEMALE_ROBOT
 HAL's terminating the hibernauts.
 It's a desperate move to distract
 Bowman.

MALE_ROBOT
 It's too late, Bowman's
 lobotomising HAL.

Robots grab/hold each other's hands, look at each other, are
 distraught.

FEMALE_ROBOT
 Oh, I can't watch. HAL is begging
 Bowman not to disconnect his brain.
 HAL had to lie. It was his job to
 make sure the crew didn't find out
 the purpose of the mission.

MALE_ROBOT
 Bowman's turning off all of HAL's
 higher functions. HAL's brain dead
 now. Only his spine is alive.

Robots look sadly at each other.

FEMALE_ROBOT
 This is the saddest movie I've ever
 seen.

robots watch in silence, becoming progressively more
 downcast as Bowman continues to lobotomise HAL. Allow
 tension to build in the audience. (Possibly someone in

CONTINUED

the audience will think it's over and start clapping - just ignore them.)

MALE_ROBOT AND FEMALE_ROBOT

(rallentando)

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer
do.

FADE OUT

Author's comments:

Steve commented: I've never considered 2001 from the computer/AI perspective before. Very interesting. Makes me consider I-Robot, and The Matrix.

Judy commented: "I like the idea of juxtaposing the human-robot reality."

I replied: We had no idea it would work out that way.

Guy and I were trying to figure out what robots could do. After a lot of failures we wound up having them watch a movie. This intially sounded most unpromising (how interesting is it watching a robot watch a movie). At that stage they were real tin robots, not human-like at all. I haven't watched the Terminator movies, so Guy explained the plot of Terminator/Machines. We had the robots in the movie theatre rooting for the machines ("yea the machines are winning!"), while the humans in the theatre were booing the robots.

I don't like Terminator movies, violence or mob mentality (people booing in theatres), but Guy had a good time with it.

I wanted to try it with "2001". Guy suggested that they be in front of a TV rather than in a theatre, so we figured that they had to be in a house and possibly more human-like. We just had to remember the order of events in 2001. Then Guy came up with the line "This is the saddest movie I've even seen" and I realised that we had something. The robots had emotions, and identified with HAL.

I did this first with Guy at No Shame. With us both being adult males, we could have been coal miners together living in a dorm. We could have just been two males forced by circumstances to be together, having a beer after work.

The next time was in a house at Mame's Film group rehearsals. Then it was Molly and Cathy. I like Cathy a lot, but she's dour and watching her wasn't fun. Even though Molly and Cathy are friends, it wasn't obvious that they liked each other any more than Guy and I liked each other. There were no sparks between them. I got from this that the two robots should like each other. Shooting it in

a home made the scene a lot more human. I realised that the two robots had to be a married couple, who liked each other a lot.

I did it with Karen at Anoo's intensive and I felt great about it, as I like Karen.

THE END