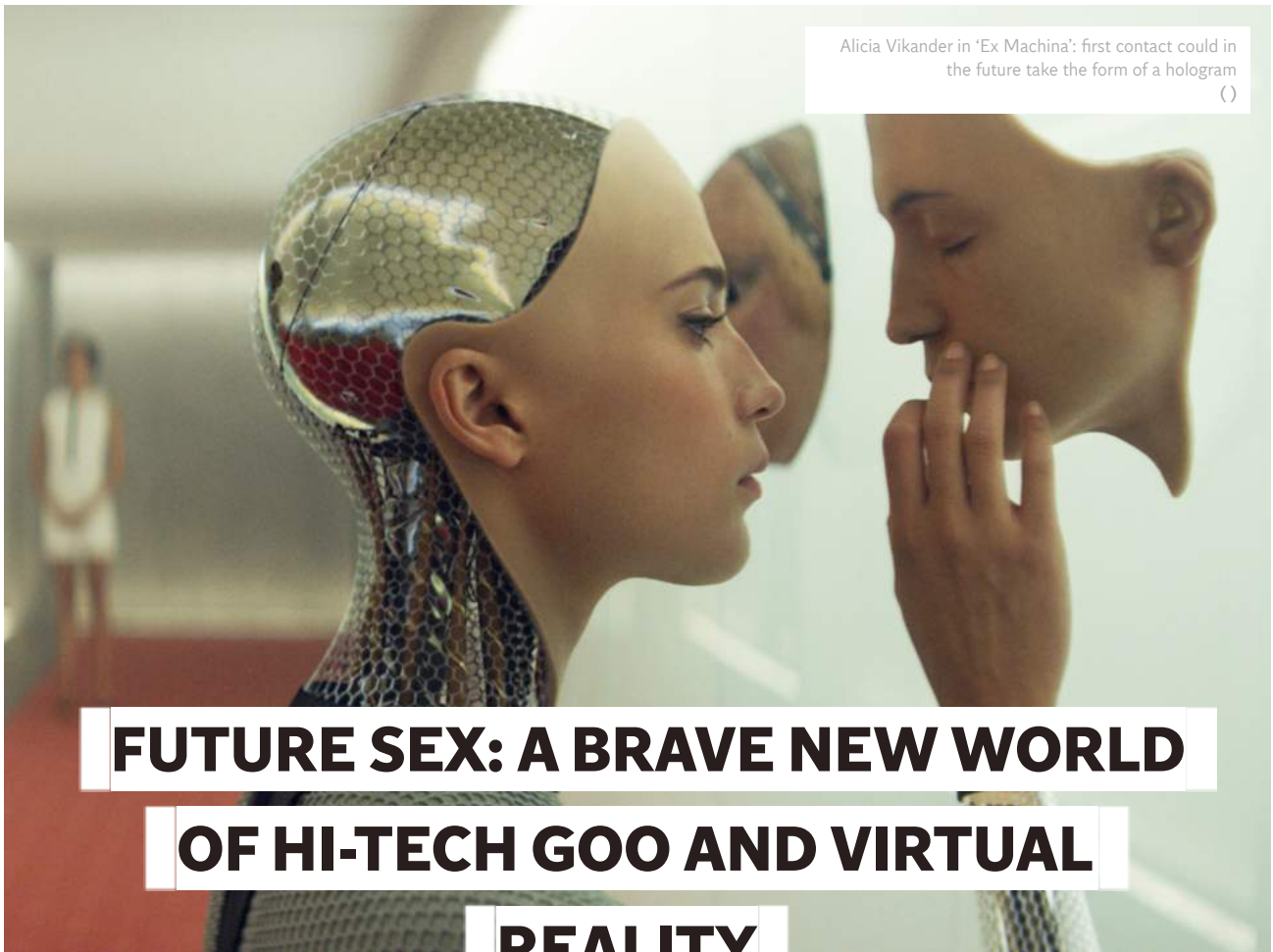


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FUTURE SEX: A BRAVE NEW WORLD OF HI-TECH GOO AND VIRTUAL REALITY

The annual FutureFest event will this year explore the booming area of scientific innovation in relationships

Cahal Milmo Chief Reporter | [@cahalmilmo](#) |
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For the travelling executive in need of intimacy or the long-distance couple seeking to let off steam, relief will be found in hi-tech goo. With a few judicious squirts of a bio-gel containing billions of nanobots and a wi-fi connection, mutual orgasm is reached via a layer of shape-shifting ectoplasm.

Of course, the partners at each end of the gel-based romp will only be with each other as the result of a DNA analysis which helpfully narrowed down their choice of a compatible mate to a dozen-strong shortlist. The lucky winner was then selected with the help of a holographic date and a virtual reality snog.

It might sound like the product of an over-excited Silicon Valley brainstorm, or the terrifyingly unerotic plot of the latest Hollywood dystopia, but this is how human love may well look by the middle of the century, according to organisers of a blue skies technology festival to take place in London later this year.

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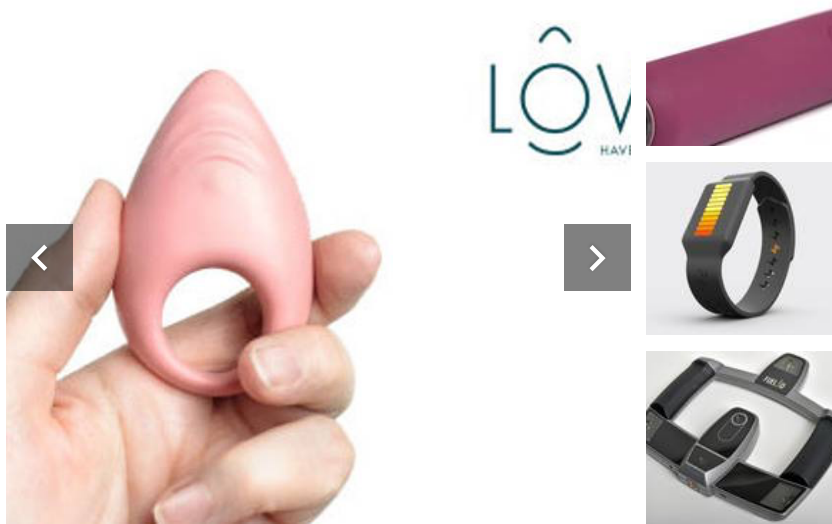
The FutureFest, an annual event designed to explore how technology will impact society over the next ten to 30 years, is to look at the booming area of scientific innovation in sex and relationships.

The growth of the global sex toy market to \$15bn (£10bn) has been held up as evidence of an increasingly relaxed attitude to bringing technology into the bedroom. But experts claim

this is just the beginning of its transformative effect on love lives.

Where tech meets sex

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From matchmaking which could harness DNA to triage dates according to physical compatibility to all manner of gizmos that allow people to stimulate each other without the inconvenience of needing to be in the same room, the hope is that the new products will cement happier relationships and achieve more meaningful encounters. Others, however, may look at such progress as an attempt to replace human connection with the ultimate act of reliance on machines.

Ghislaine Boddington, curator of the "future of love" section of the FutureFest to be held in September, said: "The aim is to look at things that aren't around the corner but up to 30 years away and broaden horizons.

LOVE IN THE FUTURE

DNA dating

Rather than eyes meeting across crowded rooms or even apps, future lovebirds may be able to leave the task of finding their one true love to a DNA test and an algorithm to produce the most viable match in terms of appearance, health and intelligence. Who said romance was dead?

My boyfriend is a hologram

The (very expensive) technology already exists to beam a holographic version of your paramour into your sitting room. Within a decade or so it may be sufficiently cheap to have a drink or dinner with your suitor even though he or she might be inconveniently in New York.

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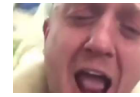


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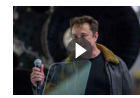
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The internet of genitals

If fridges and boilers are to be plugged into the web, why not your sex life? Technologists anticipate implants or wearable technology that will allow lovers to send erotic pulses to each other at any time of day, redefining "office romance".

Virtual Reality

Already being offered in the adult entertainment industry, VR is considered to have multiple possibilities. For example, polyamorous couples could don headsets together to meet others in virtual environments.



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“The way we first meet or interact with people may very well involve a date with a hologram or a virtual window into your boyfriend’s bedroom. And the way we give pleasure to each other will transform - if we can email each other why can’t we vibrate each other? There is a lot of talk of an internet of genitals - devices that link up our bodies from within.

“In Britain we’ve already become less uptight and embarrassed about things like adult toys. I would like to think the direction we’ll move in is to use technology in a way that enhances and extends our understanding and use of sex.”


Quite what this means in practical terms would seem in the first instance to revolve around innovations that restore intimacy to those who cannot be together.


Products that relay a partner’s heartbeat to a small speaker under the pillow or sex aids remotely controlled via a smart phone app already exist but developers are also looking at implants that could activate when one partner thinks of another.


Robots which tap into your feelings on show at Beijing's World Robot Exhibition


Eventually sex toys may come in liquid rather than solid form with the development of gels containing microscopic robots which each partner would apply to their erogenous zones and use to stimulate one another as the nanobots respond to instructions sent over the internet. Ms Boddington said: "You could respond to each other through the gel - you would feel each other's orgasm and enhance it. It's a way off but there is some pioneering work being done out there."


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With virtual reality - the use of headsets to create a 3D virtual world - already in use by some in the porn industry, organisers think VR will become far more widespread, perhaps with the addition of stimulating bodysuits.

Ms Boddington added: "Think about the benefits in situations where people have to be away from their families for long periods of time to work. The ability to still be intimate would strengthen or preserve relationships. It could also help people to access groups, for example gay or transexual

communities, in places where there is repression or it is simply difficult to meet others."

But for all the desire to embrace a brave new world of technologically tooled-up love and sex, researchers warn it must be underpinned by debate about ethics and morality.


Critics have voiced concern that as the technology becomes more attuned to human needs - robot prostitutes have been predicted by 2050 - people will be increasingly tempted to forego the trouble of forming relationships.

A more pressing concern, however, is the transfer of criminal or potentially criminal practices - paedophilia, stalking or rape role plays - into areas such as VR.

Ms Boddington said: "The reality is that 99 per cent of people will want to engage in a positive, sexy sex life. But society has to put down rules about how people behave in virtual worlds. The dark side of sexuality will remain and we need in-depth discussion about ethics and how to police behaviour."

The Independent's Millennial Love group is the best place to discuss to the highs and lows of modern dating and relationships. Join the conversation here.

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