

Robots and relationships

While waiting to disentangle how robots might be driving in our streets, much research has been put forward to use them in more and more intimate part of our lives, allowing robots to enter our homes with augmented centrality and freedom. This is the case of care robots -robots programmed to help a number of people in society that can finally rely on constant helper by their side when needed. Groups include people with different forms of physical impairments and disabilities (be them temporary or permanent), as well as segments of the population that structurally needs more attention -for now it is the elderly, but it is not that unthinkable to imagine a kindergarten "robotteacher" in the near future.

Though probably moved by good intentions the results of this trend in dealing with human relationships poses a number of questions that are everything but banal. We will get back to those in a second, but first it should be pointed out that a threat that often goes with technology has perhaps gone overlooked in the case of robots: they can be hacked (<https://www.ft.com/content/1552b080-fe1c-11e6-8d8e-a5e3738f9ae4?mhq5j=e3>) like any other technological gadget -posing serious concern on how this option could be used by criminals.

For example, it would be sufficient to connect to the robot inside the house for a few moments to allow robbers into the house and empty (hopefully without the owner home). The increase in dependence from these new "collaborators" opens new potential worries that should not be underestimated for the sake of preserving the hype for innovation and "technology at all costs" we currently live in.

An even more specific ramification of robotics is represented by what are commonly referred to as sexbots (robots programmed to satisfy our sexual needs). Also here -if not perhaps more- there is room for the possibility for this technology to help some people in particular situations (for example replacing sex worker in addressing this specific need for people unable to engage in "normal" relationships due to a particularly dramatic accident or physical impairment.

Still, despite the social value that those robots could represent, there is concern on how this revolution in our sexual sphere could end up affecting society, and considerations on the impact of these intimate entertainments should abound.

To begin with, the availability of passive, programmable sexual partners could create a number of societal dysfunctions: starting from our unidirectional way of interacting with a "partner" in an intimate and very relevant part of our lives, we could soon develop similar attitudes outside this relationship and behave accordingly when interacting with other human beings -within the sexual sphere, but more broadly still.

This repercussion could easily fuel an already problematic gradual detachment from "the other", rendering our civilization poorer in terms of solidarity, empathy and other key values for a well-functioning society.