

Chapter 8

Populism in Robots

Emma Yann Zhang
Imagineering Institute, Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Populism has rarely been discussed in the context of robotics. This chapter will explore how intimate relationships, such as love and sex, between human and robots, will bring populism to the populist masses. Intimacy between humans and robots was first raised and discussed by David Levy in his book titled Love and Sex with Robotics published in 2007. As a result, the subject of human-robot romantic and intimate relationships rapidly developed into an academic research discipline in its own right. Since then, researchers have come up with many implementations of robot companions like sex robots, emotional robots, humanoid robots, and artificial intelligent systems that can simulate human emotions. This chapter presents a summary of significant activity in this field during the recent years, predicts how the field is likely to develop, and its ethical and legal background. They also discuss their research in physical devices for human-robot love and sex communication.

INTRODUCTION

Human-Robot intimate relationships are no longer pure science fiction but have entered the hallowed halls of serious academic research. In the academic world, there has already been sufficient coverage of the topic to demonstrate rather convincingly that it is of interest not only for mainstream media. Conferences on robotics, AI and other Computer Science related subjects began to accept and even invite papers on the subject, and there have thus far been two conferences devoted specifically to Human-Robot Personal Relationships. In 2014 the First International Congress of Love and Sex with Robots was held in Madeira. The academic journals that have

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since chosen to publish papers on the topic have included: Accountability in Research, AI & Society, Artificial Intelligence, Current Sociology, Ethics and Information Technology, Futures, Industrial Robot, International Journal of Advanced Robotic Systems, International Journal of Social Development, International Journal of Social Robotics, International Journal of Technoethics, New Media and Society, Phenomenonology and the Cognitive Sciences, Philosophy Technology, Social Robotics, Technological Forecasting and Social Change, and various publications from the IEEE, Springer and other highly respected technology stables. One paper, from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, achieved a high profile in the general media when it appeared in 2012 for its entertaining depiction of a future scenario in the red-light district of Amsterdam – a life, in 2050, revolving around android prostitutes “who are clean of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), not smuggled in from Eastern Europe and forced into slavery, the city council will have direct control over.”

Since the initial burst of media interest late in 2007 there have also been TV documentaries and feature movies in which sex with robots, virtual characters, or life-sized sex dolls was the dominant theme: *Lars and the Real Girl*, *Meaning of Robots* (which had its premiere at the 2012 Sundance Festival), *My Sex Robot*, *Her* (2013), *Ex Machina* (2015) and the BBC TV documentary *Guys and Dolls* as well as the 2004 remake of *The Stepford Wives*. For all this, it is the sexual nature of the subject matter which is responsible. Sex Sells.

Following the storm of publicity by the launch of the David Levy’s book in 2007 (Levy, 2007a), the subject of human-robot romantic and intimate relationships rapidly developed into an academic research discipline in its own right. The subject was named “Lovotics”, and first mentioned in a literature in 2009 (Nomura et al. 2009).

The interest in this field from the academic community resulted, in 2013, in the founding of a journal and e-journal devoted entirely to the subject. The “Lovotics” journal defines its domain as “Academic Studies of Love and Friendship with Robots” (Omicsonline.com, 2015).

The relationship between Lovotics and populism can be explained as follows. Human intelligence has two main aspects – the logical aspect and the emotional aspect. Most of the research done so far focuses mostly on the logical aspect of the relationship between human and robots. As robotics, software and hardware technologies progress, we are also interested in the emotional aspect. Sexual and romantic relationship with robots as its extension should be considered and discussed. As for human social behaviour, only the logical aspect has been given the most emphasis, and the emotional aspect has been neglected. However, as the society becomes more advanced, the emotional aspect of human social behaviour is becoming more and more important. Populism is becoming popular for this very reason.

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