



## Tech Talk

### Robots©

by John McCarthy

Hi and welcome to Tech Talk. The subject of today's programme is human-robot interaction; well, robots in general, which has been the subject of science fiction speculation for many decades, especially on TV and the silver screen. My earliest recollections of a robot are the alliterative exchanges between the infamous Doctor Smith and the rather rudimentary Robot B-9 in the highly successful 1960s TV series 'Lost in Space'. Of course, mankind's fascination with artificial intelligence is reflected by the enormous success of Hollywood feature films on the subject, which include such classics as 'The Day the Earth Stood Still', the unforgettable 'Aliens' series, 'Star Wars', 'The Terminator' quadrilogy – or is that pentilogy now? I've lost count – the very moving 'Bicentennial Man' with the late Robin Williams in the lead part, and of course the legendary and highly disturbing 'Blade Runner', based on the novel with the evocative title 'Do Androids dream of Electric Sheep' by Philip K. Dick, filmed in 1982 but which has maintained its timeless significance and is just as relevant now, and indeed a whole host of similarly successful box-office hits.

Recently, while browsing the tabloids, but of course carefully avoiding the page 3 content, I came across an article whose headline at first I found intriguing, and while reading the main content was flummoxed, and eventually left absolutely dumbfounded. It was on the subject of carnal intimacy between humans and robots, a phenomenon of which I'd been hitherto completely oblivious, and apparently this has already sparked a heated debate between moralists, religious authorities and the robotics industry. In layman's terms, we're referring to sex with robots.

It may or may not surprise you that robots for the purposes of hanky-panky are rapidly becoming a reality, and companies are tripping over each other to get them to a potentially lucrative and expectant market. New Jersey-based True Companion, for instance, has been busy designing and developing a state-of-the-art sex Robot, with the thoroughly unoriginal name of Roxxy. Some claim that all this raunchy, lubricious cyborg paraphernalia is innocent fun. Many futurologists are predicting that robots for 'personal pleasure' will be appearing in ordinary homes in the next decade.

Whatever you think about the subject, and however you may feel, we do need to examine and discuss in an intelligent way what robot companions mean and how they'll fit into our human condition in the near future. As you'll see, human-android rumpy-pumpy is, quite frankly, the least of our worries...

Recent studies by the Bank of England have ascertained that 15 million jobs in the UK are at risk of being taken over by robots in the next couple of decades, and the Bank of America predicts that artificial intelligence will transform the world beyond recognition by 2025, with 45% of worldwide employment in manufacturing going to cyborgs and their ilk. If this is true, it will undoubtedly blow our current business and economic models to smithereens and create unprecedented disruption on the job market. So much for the prevailing economic philosophy: the more the merrier.

Among the professions deemed by the experts to be consigned to automation – a mind-boggling 70% - are sales and customer service workers. Skilled trades people are also at serious risk, as indeed are teachers and professors, as internet provides relatively cheap educational tools for a fraction of the traditional face-to-face cost, while those who appear relatively safe are the traditional professional occupations such as managers, and alas traditional officials and politicians ... One wonders why.

The Bank of America report stressed that the demand for automation is skyrocketing as the world's population ages, with the number of people over 60 expected to rise to a staggering 2 billion by the end of the century. Pressure to increase wages continues, while the costs of robots, commercial drones and artificial intelligence have dropped by more or less 27% over the last decade. I must remember this next time I engage in pay-rise negotiations with my boss.

We have many challenges for the immediate future: jobs, quality of life, the environment, pollution, climate change... the list is endless. But the elephant in the room could simply be human overpopulation of our planet. Sooner or later, this will have to be addressed.

That's it for now. Thank you for listening to Tech Talk – it's always a great pleasure to rely on you, our listeners here on EnglishWaves. Do write to us at [contact@englishwaves.fr](mailto:contact@englishwaves.fr) if you have any comments or suggestions. Look forward to hearing from you and see you next time on Tech Talk.