

Robots will never win as long as we still have the stairs

3,000 years of human history has failed to crack the challenge of artificial intelligence, and **DICK LUMSDEN** thinks that's a good thing

Throughout my lifetime, every few years, someone confidently predicts the rise of the robots, when machines that can think will take over the world as we know it.

Well, I've seen men walk on the Moon, and I've watched in awe as computer technology has developed at warp speed to allow me to use a tiny hand-held device to spend money on holidays, buy groceries, cinema tickets or even personalised birthday cards without leaving my seat.

Doctors have operated on me using lasers and microscopic cameras, I work with colleagues in different time zones, sharing computer screens, and have almost daily video conferences with people in up to six or seven countries at a time... but I've yet to see a clever robot.

Since the modern-day human race first threw away the animal skins and left the caves, we have been besotted by the idea

1,000 years BC, there are tales of early Chinese attempts to make a human shaped automaton. Throughout the centuries clever people have tried and failed. Leonardo da Vinci designed a mechanical knight in armour which could sit up, move its arms and head – but clearly even he couldn't give it a brain.

But it wasn't until the 1920s that the term robot was coined – from the Czech word *robota* meaning servant. Clearly at that time they thought robots were going to be good... but then Hollywood took over and made them bad. If we couldn't crack the technology to make them think good thoughts, then let's create evil machines to make us quake in our boots.

But still the inventors keep on trying.

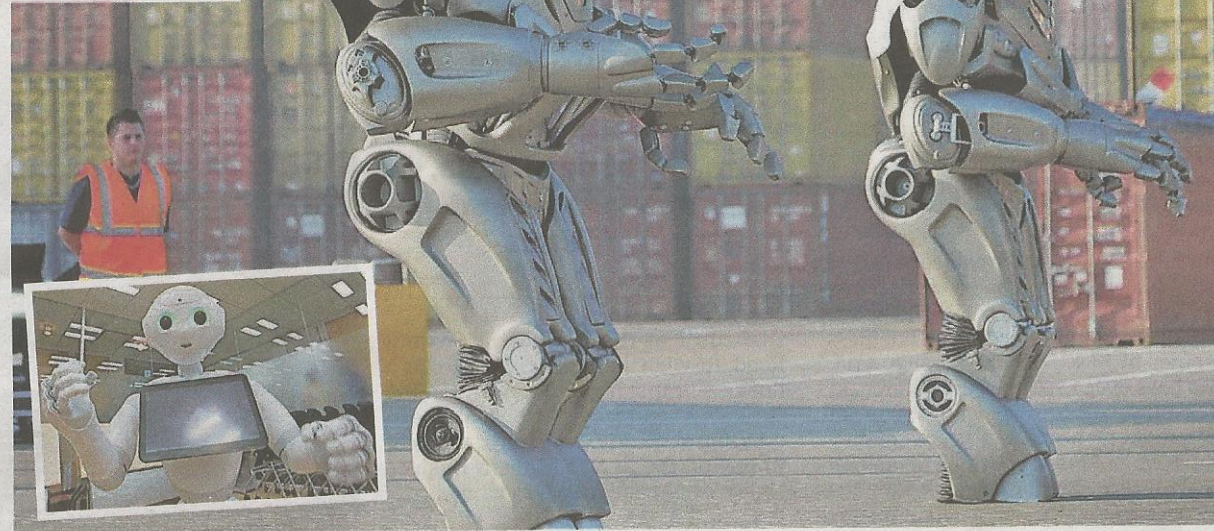
I read an interesting statistic this week.

Apparently there are now 1.4 million robots being used worldwide, and by 2018

that number is set to double as we finally start to make

Robots come in all shapes and sizes but artificial intelligence will never be as good as the real thing.

Photos: SARAH LUCY BROWN/ SHIZUO KAMBAYASHI/PA



breakthroughs. But they still can't think and they still can't climb stairs.

The car industry of course is one area where robots are widely used and have proved to be more than useful – but only after humans have programmed them into lifting, drilling, welding and assembling. When the human flicks the switch they return to being big yellow lumps of metal.

The military have also found a use for robots with remote bomb disposal or drones for aerial surveillance. But funnily enough they haven't done much in the hospitality industry. Robot chefs wouldn't have much of a sense of taste, and I dread to think of the mess they'd make of trying to change the sheets on a king size hotel bed.

Talking of beds though, there is currently an experiment going on in Florence where residents of an old folks home are being "assisted" by a humanoid robot with a head, eyes and retractable arms. There's no real data on what the robots are doing other than acting as larger than life Zimmer frames. But I can't see them administering drugs, taking blood

the aid of some humans – and I bet they only work on the ground floor.

Interestingly, there is another piece of research just published on SARs (socially assistive robots) which claims that in studies among older people, helpful robots which looked more like humans were much preferred to ones which just looked like Hoovers.

Although the artificial intelligence conundrum has not yet been solved, and therefore a robot can never really be "good" or "evil", the criminal fraternity have found a way of turning the technology to their own use.

Apparently the online advertising industry lost out on around £4 billion in 2015 because of very sophisticated computer robots which mimic human behaviour when looking at websites; pausing, watching videos and clicking on links, creating fake "traffic" which advertisers are tricked into paying for.

But, like all the rest of them, these bots are only as good (or bad) as the humans which programme them and assemble them. And they'll only work as long as they have batteries or long

Humans have been trying for 3,000 years to replicate their own brain-power in contraptions made from sticky backed tape and scrap metal, and as far as I can see, they can keep on trying for another 3,000 years and still have no success.

The human brain, even mine, is a complex piece of kit. Although we may all look as if we are going about our daily business without too much effort, our brains are constantly evaluating, calculating, planning and executing actions which even the best robot can never match.

We may be galloping towards a world of driverless cars, driverless trains, and pilotless aircraft. But as long as there is one human left out there doing it their own way all that will ever bring us is chaos.

Like artificial turf, artificial flowers and artificial cream, artificial intelligence will never be as good as the real thing. The robots will never win.

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