



Robots: friend or foe?

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Interview conducted by Guy Vallancien

1. Fears and Hopes

Robots create fear among some and hope among others. The uprising of robots has been a recurring theme in public opinion, as humans project their own feelings on the machine to try to understand it. The other great fear is about losing your job to robots.

2. Are robots killing jobs?

In the manufacturing sector, automation did not really have an impact on employment. On the contrary, automation contributed to increase productivity in many companies that gained market shares, hired workers and relocated production. Germany and Japan have respectively 2 times and 3 times more robots than France and they have a rate of unemployment that is much lower. Obviously, in these two countries robots were not job killers.

3. What can robots do better than man?

According to a preconceived idea, robots are assigned simple tasks and are good for low value added jobs. This is a misconception of the robot and what is a complex task for it. A robot can't iron a rectangular linen - not to speak of a shirt - in less than 20 minutes. Robots, have a very hard time unbuttoning a shirt and learning dexterity. Conversely, with its sensors and analysis capabilities, a robot can easily beat the table tennis world champion. For a man, it would be much more difficult...

4. The psychological relation between Man and machine: are humanoids a figment of our imagination?

Many people believe in humanoid robots and foresee the advent of automated humans. Men can perform a wide range of simple tasks. Single machines are very far from performing that many tasks. If they could, it's likely that it would not be money well spent. Humans need more time before defining what they expect from the robots.