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AI: When the coffee machine is lovesick

Machines with distinct personalities can make our world a richer place. But what effect might they have on our children's coffee habits?

I don't know about you, but I've been thinking a lot about the future recently. It might be because everyone is arguing about climate change, or perhaps because I recently became a father again. But it could also be a subconscious fear that I will soon be replaced by a machine that can write better columns than me. Because the time has come for artificial intelligence to make its way out of science fiction and into reality!

AI in Blockbusters

Just think: we already have fully automated laser machines that can load and cut metal sheets and eject the parts all by themselves, or check the quality of weld seams and remove bad parts from the line. As they work, they learn how to be more and more efficient, and soon they will be transferring that knowledge to other machines. OK, I admit it's not quite Hollywood material. In the major blockbusters, AI isn't generally engaged in removing sheet metal parts, but rather doing things like sending terminators into the past to, well, terminate the leader of the resistance in a war between humans and machines.

Intelligent machines can also love

The logical conclusion of all this is intelligent machines with distinct personalities, machines that can get bored and afraid, depressed and annoyed, and even crack jokes. Take Wall-E, for example, a robot garbage collector left alone on Earth who appeared in the computer-animated film of the same name. Or Bender, the lazy, egotistical cigar-smoking metal robot from the animated TV show Futurama. Hollywood has even given us machines that are capable of love. Like Samantha, for example, an operating system in the science fiction film Her, who falls in love with the human protagonist Theodore (it's reciprocated!)□–□with dramatic consequences.

That got me thinking about some perfectly realistic scenarios that might lie ahead. In one of them, I picture my granddaughter heading to work sometime in the future and cursing the bending machine (shout out to Bender!) because the coffee machine is lovesick again and only able to pump out some undrinkable gloop instead of a proper espresso. When that happens, I hope she'll remember that it all started right here and now with the automated removal of cut metal parts from a machine…

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