

Read the text *Robot Romance*. Does the writer think it is possible for a human and a robot to have a romantic relationship?

### Robot Romance

Could a human have a romantic relationship with a robot? Perhaps the question is not as ludicrous as it first sounds.

You probably think that silicon and circuits don't do it for you, but they are already part of us. Scientists can use computer chips to repair broken connections in the brain or to allow a man who was paralysed after an accident to play Guitar Hero with his thoughts. In fact, intelligent machines play an increasingly personal role in our daily lives. We extend a sense of self into our smartphones, and we develop a feeling of attachment for the object. Soon, neural implants will offer the chance to improve our memories, thinking and sensory experiences. This will have consequences in what people feel, even in shaping the personality of the user. Gradually, and without realising it, we are experiencing not just a merging of body and bionics, but also of mind and machine.

In June 2014 a 'super-smart computer' convinced human judges that it was a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy called Eugene Goostman. It was said to be the first artificial intelligence to pass the Turing test, which determines if a computer can deceive a human into believing they are interacting with another human. It was a historic moment. However, many scientists accused Eugene's makers of cheating the system by making him a young teenager and a non-native speaker of English. These characteristics were invented to excuse the limitations of the program, they said. While some celebrated Eugene's success, others called for a new, more challenging version of the Turing test.

So, what better way to test a computer than to see if it can cause a human to fall in love with it? Surely, as technology is advancing at a dizzying rate, that would be the ultimate Turing test. Spike Jonze's 2013 science-fiction film, *Her*, tells the story of a man who falls deeply in love with his operating system. Samantha, as she calls herself, is designed to learn and develop according to Theodore's needs and preferences. Her voice is incredibly human and empathetic. She is constantly available, supportive and interested. Theodore is amazed by Samantha's ability to learn and grow, emotionally and psychologically. In such circumstances, the question is not how could someone fall in love with a computer, but how could they *not*?

It may be possible for a human to fall in love with a robot, but how will we ever know if our feelings are reciprocated? How will we know if the AI has the true inner experience of consciousness or if it is simply programmed to create that illusion? In fact, what is consciousness and do we ever know if other people are experiencing it in the same way as we are? This question is known as the hard problem of consciousness and is still one of the great mysteries of human experience. In the future, blurred lines between intelligent machines and human beings will make these difficult questions more relevant than ever.

Psychologists say that in order to fall in love it is necessary to get to know someone. This means you also need to allow yourself to be known by sharing things about yourself. And who knows you better than your internet profile? Spotify knows your music taste better than your family members and Facebook gets your sense of humour perfectly. Who knows, the next time you do a Google search, you may be taking one of a million small steps towards finding your future partner, and the perfect robot romance. The only catch - you might never know if they truly love you back.