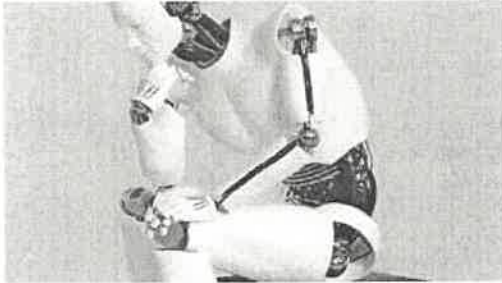


The "Robotic Moment"

[June 2018]

In the early 1980s I interviewed one of Marvin Minsky's young students, who told me that, as he saw it, his hero, Minsky, one of the founders of artificial intelligence (AI), was "trying to create a computer beautiful enough that a soul would want to live in it."



robot

Robot positioned like Auguste Rodin's statue *The Thinker*.

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In the AI world, things have gone from mythic to prosaic. Today, children grow up with robotic pets and digital dolls. They think it natural to chat with their phones. New appliances are released that offer information about movies and music but promise much more. We are at what I call a "robotic moment," not because we have built intelligent machines worthy of our company but because we declare ourselves ready for theirs. We are tempted by the prospect of artificial

intelligences as our companions. That taking care of us will be their jobs. That we will take comfort in their company and conversation. This is where we are, and this is where we are pointing.

[Don't worry about AI, says Garry Kasparov. Authoritarianism is the greatest threat to our future.]

This is a station on our voyage of forgetting. The forgetting begins long before we have an artificial companion in place. It begins now, as we consider putting it in place. Even before we make the robots, we remake ourselves as people ready to be their companions.

We change our expectations of what we commit to each other and what can be delegated.

But what do we forget when we talk to machines? We forget what is special about being human. We forget what it means to have authentic conversation. Machines are programmed to have conversations "as if" they understood what the conversations are about. So when we talk to them, we, too, are reduced and confined to the "as if."

[Toby Walsh has seen what the Kalashnikovs of the future are, and he's deeply concerned.]

That we seem to be going down this path is an issue for my *field* and an issue for all of us.

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