

**MAURIZIO BALISTRERI, *Sex robot. L'amore al tempo delle macchine*,
Roma, Fandango Libri, 282 pp.**

The question *what is wrong with having sex with a robot?* Takes front and center in Maurizio Balistreri's, a bioethicist and moral philosopher, newest volume *Sex robot: l'amore al tempo delle macchine* (Sex Robots: Love in the Age of Machines). As a philosopher of technology that is interested in the applied ethics of emerging technologies, the question regarding the development and impact of sex robots is undoubtedly timely. It is because of this volume that I have taken up a greater interest in a topic that would have otherwise been ancillary to my more general research area. Coupled with my bilingualism, I saw the value of presenting this volume, now currently available only in Italian, as an English translation. In taking on such a monumental project, I consequentially became familiar with the growing literature on the socioethical and legal issues that result from this nuanced discourse. Yet, it is within this spectrum of literature that Maurizio Balistreri's *Sex robot: l'amore al tempo delle macchine* seeks its own niche and offers its own contribution.

The volume is divided up into four chapters followed by a thorough bibliography: (1) Introduction, (2) what is wrong with having sex with a robot?, (3) Sex robots and violence against women, and (4) To love a robot?. Strangely enough, Balistreri's main text is accompanied by a contribution by his colleague and social psychologist Georgia Zara who contributes a separate chapter on sexbot psychology and the treatment of sex offenders. Albeit a detailed piece, the present review focuses exclusively on Balistreri's work.

In the Introduction, the history of robotics is described briefly as well as some of the issues arising from the robotics revolution on economic and labour markets to highlight their socioeconomic impacts. Likewise, many of the risk-related issues of the continued or 'inexorable' (as Balistreri notes) rise of these robots in society are also discussed such as the prognostics of the potential introduction of advanced forms of artificial intelligence such as the superintelligence systems that Nick Bostrom is renowned for discussing. Balistreri in general eschews these more speculative futures and more saliently threads current trends with more plausible futures. Still, his focus is primary on engaging with the pro-contra arguments of introducing sex robots in society. Here the book lays out some of the initial questions that are taken up in greater detail in the proceeding chapters, such as moral questions surrounding the rightness or wrongness of having sex with a robot, its effects on prostitution and its ability (or inability) to accurately allow us to judge the characters of individuals who choose to engage in sexual activity with robots.

In the following chapter, Balistreri tangles with the host of existent literature that make arguments both for the use of sex robots as well as against. Many of his arguments betray an obvious philosophical and political wisdom that resists the purely instrumental arguments that sexbots are nothing but autoerotic objects but also the psychological boons that may result from their use, both by individuals or groups of them. What is shown, right from the onset is Balistreri's capacity to clearly disentangle many of the overly techno-optimistic as well as techno-pessimistic arguments through a grounded and nuanced approach. This is a breath of fresh air given that the book is arguably written in a style and structure aimed at a general readership. This level of abstract thinking, presented in a clear and constructive way allows the non-specialist a basis on which they can insert themselves within the debate.

The third chapter, discussing the arguments surrounding sex robots and their implications for violence against women, and violence in general, is equally as rigorous. Here, Balistreri draws on a host of literature regarding many other technological analogs such as video games and the correlations that have been made between their users and violent actions. Arguments posited that violence against sex robots, encouraged by design or not, do not necessarily imply that such violence is carried out against real people, the arguably basis for which this criticism is made. Likewise, he hesitates to accept arguments that make value judgements on individuals' moral character in the actions taken against what is arguably an humanoid inanimate object. Arguments are proposed that, in many cases, the violence against sex robots may provide an outlet for violent behavior, ameliorating potential real-world enactments. Although empirical data on such is necessary, this provides a cogent counterfactual to those proponents.

The final chapter of the book 'To love a robot' is arguably to most beautiful and strangely the most haunting. Balistreri delves into the psychology of love and the love that humans are capable for non-human others. The implications here stretch far beyond the realms of sex robot debates, but can arguably be applied to in more ecological domains and nonhuman animal relations. Balistreri here, but throughout the book in general, forces the reader to take multiple perspectives and to fill the shoes of the agents in these arguments. I, as a reader, asked myself continually, 'would I?' throughout the book, wondering over and over again if it is possible for me to love a robot. Dismissing this question from the onset, it became more difficult to take any single position in absolute by the end of the book. This is a testament to his superb philosophical gymnastics.

Through and through, these are only some of the reasons why *Sex robot: l'amore al tempo delle macchine* is refreshing and relevant. From his experience as a moral philosopher, Balistreri makes an important point that we need to think about these arguments in a more comprehensive way, resisting absolutist arguments either for or against the design, development and deployment of these types of technologies. In line with this, the question central to this book *what is wrong with having sex with a robot?* appears to conclude in an ambiguous way with salient arguments for any given position. In my opinion, this question, cou-

pled with Balistreri's truly Socratic approach to engaging with these issues, manages to situate this volume as a cornerstone for reflection on sex robots across demographics. Within a expeditiously growing corpus of literature where authors develop this or that speculative future, this modest but hugely important reflection makes *Sex robot: l'amore al tempo delle macchine* an essential voice which should be taken earnestly.

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