

EDITORIAL

Dear Reader,

Until quite recently, emotions were considered nearly too impenetrable as a topic for scientific research, as they were deemed too subjective and not precisely quantifiable. However, it is possible to measure them on the basis of the physical reactions they produce. Among people suffering from arachnophobia, for example, the fear of spiders makes their hearts beat faster and causes them to adopt avoidance behaviors. They don't even need to be confronted with a real, live spider. Using virtual reality and a range of different sensors, researchers are now able to monitor the feelings that arise when the individual in question sees a spider, and to develop better treatment methods.

Showing emotions in public was long considered taboo. Just a few years ago, it would have been unimaginable for Angela Merkel, the head of a government, to express her joy for everyone to see at the Soccer World Cup in Brazil in 2014 – not to mention Donald Trump's eruptive outbursts. While the ideal of the calm, level-headed monarch still dominated at the end of the 18th century, as time went on, those in power increasingly tended towards making their feelings publicly known in order to secure affection and goodwill among the populace.

Meanwhile, others have yet to learn a sense of feeling: in order for robots to someday help us look after people in need of care, they will have to be able to sense how they touch a person. Unlike language and image recognition, however, the development of a sense of touch in artificial systems is still in its infancy. To make sure that being hugged by a robot engenders positive feelings, researchers are now developing new types of tactile sensors.

Our sense of touch plays a key role in determining our actions. It is a powerful tool that can help or harm us, and it conveys a feeling of closeness. On that note, we hope you have pleasant feelings while reading this edition of the magazine!

Your editorial team