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Review Article

Design Consideration of Autonomous Robots Based on Embodied Intelligence

Dongchan Lee

AI & DX Center, Institute for Advanced Engineering, Yongin-si 11780, Republic of Korea.

***Corresponding Author:** Dongchan Lee, AI & DX Center, Institute for Advanced Engineering, Yongin-si 11780, Republic of Korea

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Abstract:

Embodied Intelligence (EI) has emerged as a revolutionary paradigm in robotics, emphasizing the dynamic interplay between a robot's body, sensors, and its environment to enable adaptive and autonomous behavior. Unlike traditional robots, which rely on rigid structures and pre-programmed actions, EI-based systems allow robots to learn, adapt, and respond to changing conditions through continuous interaction with their surroundings.

This concept is particularly impactful in the field of soft robotics, where flexible materials provide inherent advantages in safety, adaptability, and environmental interaction. Soft robots, which mimic the physical properties of natural organisms, are especially well-suited for tasks in unstructured or unpredictable environments such as healthcare, disaster response, and industrial automation. By combining advanced sensing technologies, AI algorithms, and innovative actuation methods, these robots can perform complex tasks with precision and efficiency.

Despite significant progress, several challenges remain—particularly in the areas of material durability, sensor integration, AI-based control, and ethical considerations. This paper explores the fundamental principles of EI, its integration with soft robotics, and the transformative potential of autonomous soft robots across a wide range of industries. Additionally, it addresses current technical hurdles and proposes future research directions, offering a roadmap for overcoming existing barriers and advancing this groundbreaking technology.

Keywords: embodied intelligence (ei); soft robotics; autonomous robots; adaptive behavior; artificial intelligence (ai); sensor integration; reinforcement learning; human-robot interaction

1.Introduction

Embodied Intelligence (EI) posits that cognition is not solely the product of centralized computation but emerges from the continuous interaction between an agent's body and its environment [1]. The concept of EI emphasizes that the physical structure and capabilities of a robot are integral to its problem-solving ability and adaptability. Unlike traditional robotic systems that rely heavily on pre-programmed instructions and rigid structures, EI-based systems dynamically adapt to environmental changes.

Soft robotics, which employs flexible and compliant materials, serves as an ideal platform for implementing EI. By mimicking the physical properties of natural organisms, soft robots can achieve higher levels of safety, flexibility, and environmental interaction. For example, a soft robotic gripper equipped with EI can learn to handle fragile objects with precision—a task that would be challenging for a rigid counterpart [2]. These advancements make soft robots uniquely suited for applications in unstructured or dynamic environments.

The idea of integrating soft robotics with EI stems from biological inspirations, wherein organisms exhibit intelligent behaviors through body-environment interaction. This integration offers a promising pathway for developing robots capable of performing complex tasks in real-world settings with minimal human intervention [3,4].

Traditional rigid robots often struggle in environments that are unpredictable, unstructured, or require delicate interactions. For instance, a rigid robot designed for industrial automation may excel at repetitive tasks but fail when encountering objects with irregular shapes or varying fragility. Such limitations highlight the need for more adaptable and intelligent robotic systems [5,6].

The motivation behind the development of autonomous soft robots lies in addressing these limitations. Soft robots with embodied intelligence bring several key advantages:

- **Safety in Human-Robot Interaction**: The compliant nature of soft materials reduces the risk of injury, making these robots ideal for tasks that involve direct interaction with humans, such as caregiving or medical procedures [3].
- **Adaptability to Dynamic Environments**: By leveraging EI, soft robots can learn and adapt to new scenarios, such as

navigating debris in disaster zones or autonomously sorting objects in logistics operations. [4-6]

- **Cost-Effectiveness**: Soft robots often use lightweight and inexpensive materials, reducing production and maintenance costs compared to traditional robots. [3-6]

Moreover, the integration of AI algorithms, such as reinforcement learning and neural networks, allows these robots to continuously improve their performance through experience. This capability makes them suitable for a wide range of applications, including healthcare, manufacturing, and environmental monitoring. For example, in the medical field, EI-based soft robots could assist in minimally invasive surgeries by adapting their shape and movement to the patient's anatomy [2].

The rapid advancements in material science, AI, and sensor technologies have further accelerated the development of EI-based soft robotics. Collaborative efforts among researchers, industry leaders, and policymakers are essential to unlock the full potential of this transformative technology. By addressing current challenges and leveraging the unique benefits of soft materials and EI, autonomous soft robots are poised to revolutionize industries and improve the quality of life for countless individuals.

Looking ahead, the future of EI-based soft robotics hinges on overcoming several technical and systemic challenges. One major hurdle is the development of robust and scalable actuation mechanisms. While traditional motors and rigid actuators offer high precision, they are often incompatible with the deformable nature of soft robots. Emerging technologies such as shape memory alloys, fluidic elastomer actuators, and electroactive polymers offer promising alternatives, but issues like limited force output, slow response times, and energy inefficiency remain areas of active research. Furthermore, the design and fabrication of soft robots demand interdisciplinary expertise spanning materials science, mechanical engineering, and computer science. Achieving seamless integration between soft bodies, embedded sensors, and control algorithms is a complex task that requires innovative design approaches and manufacturing techniques.

Another critical aspect is sensing and perception. Unlike rigid robots that rely on discrete, fixed sensors, soft robots often require distributed, deformable sensor arrays capable of conforming to the robot's shape. Recent advances in soft sensing technologies—such as stretchable strain gauges, capacitive touch sensors, and optical fiber-based tactile sensors—enable real-time feedback necessary for intelligent decision-making. These sensors play a crucial role in enabling proprioception and exteroception, allowing the robot to understand both its internal configuration and its external environment.

In addition to technological challenges, there are ethical and societal implications to consider. As soft robots become more autonomous and prevalent in human-centered environments, questions of safety, privacy, and accountability will become increasingly important. For example, in healthcare or eldercare settings, ensuring the reliability and transparency of robot decision-making processes is vital. Moreover, regulatory frameworks must evolve to address the deployment of these systems in sensitive applications. Ensuring inclusivity, preventing misuse, and fostering public trust through transparent communication and participatory design will be essential for widespread adoption.

Finally, the convergence of embodied intelligence, soft robotics, and AI opens exciting possibilities for co-evolutionary systems where robots not only adapt to their environment but also evolve their morphology and behavior over time. These bioinspired, adaptive systems may one day exhibit a form of "physical learning" where the body itself becomes a medium for cognition and adaptation. As this field continues to mature, it holds the potential to redefine the boundaries of what robots can achieve—not merely as tools, but as dynamic, intelligent agents capable of collaborating with humans in complex, real-world settings.

2. Key Features of Embodied Intelligence in Soft Robotics

2.1 Autonomy

Autonomy is a defining characteristic of EI-based soft robots. These robots are designed to perceive, learn, and act in their environments without relying on constant human guidance. This capability is achieved through the integration of advanced sensing, decision-making, and control mechanisms. [3] For example, soft robots equipped with vision and tactile sensors can process real-time environmental data to adapt their behavior dynamically, as shown in Figure 1.

The autonomy of these robots is further enhanced by reinforcement learning algorithms, which allow them to improve their performance through trial-and-error interactions with their surroundings. This learning process enables soft robots to handle complex tasks such as object manipulation, path planning in unstructured environments, and adapting to unforeseen challenges. [2-7]

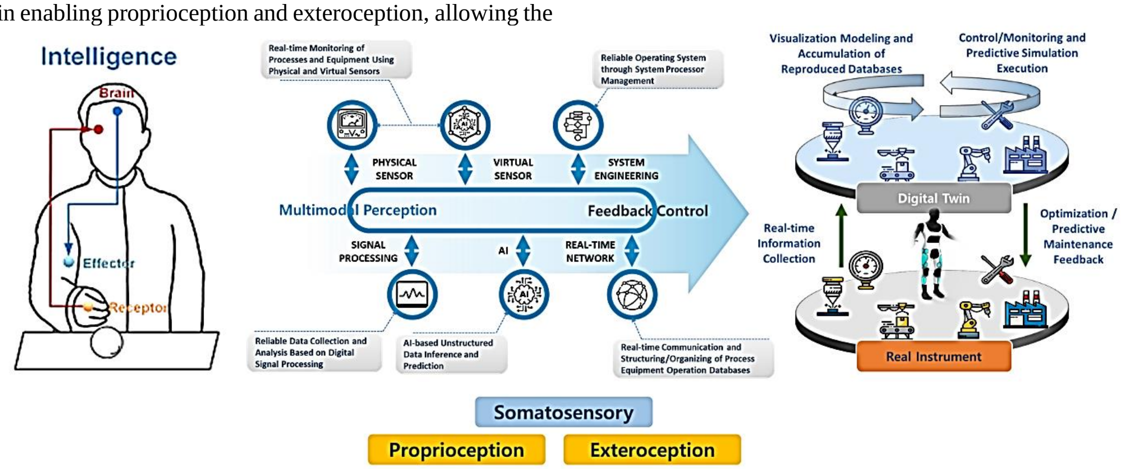

Figure 1: Flow of Embodied Intelligence for Human-Robot (Machine) Interaction (Proposed)

Figure 1 illustrates a conceptual framework that integrates somatosensory-inspired intelligence with multimodal perception, feedback control, and digital twin technology for intelligent system operation and optimization. Drawing from the structure of the human nervous system, the diagram maps biological principles—such as the interaction between receptors, effectors, and the brain—onto a cyber-physical system architecture that supports real-time monitoring, control, and predictive maintenance.

Biological Inspiration and Somatosensory Model

On the left, the human model symbolizes the core principle of **Embodied Intelligence (EI)**, where cognition arises from the interaction between sensory input (receptors), processing centers (brain), and motor output (effectors). This biological analogy serves as the foundation for developing artificial systems with **somatosensory capabilities**, divided into *proprioception* (internal body sensing) and *exteroception* (external environment sensing).

Multimodal Perception and Feedback Control

At the center of the diagram, a layered system architecture is depicted under the banner of **Multimodal Perception**. This layer comprises both **physical sensors** and **virtual sensors** to collect diverse types of data from the real-world environment. These inputs undergo **signal processing** and are further analyzed through **AI-based unstructured data inference and prediction**, enabling high-level situational awareness and decision-making.

The perception module feeds into a **real-time network**, facilitating responsive **feedback control** mechanisms. This control loop ensures that sensor data is continuously integrated, interpreted, and utilized to adjust system behaviors dynamically. Supporting modules such as **system engineering** and **digital signal processing** enhance reliability and robustness across the entire pipeline.

Digital Twin Integration for Optimization

The right-hand side of the diagram represents the **Digital Twin architecture**, which operates in parallel with the physical system (Real Instrument). Real-time data collected from the sensors are used to update the digital twin, enabling **visualization modeling**, **database accumulation**, and **predictive simulation execution**. Insights gained from the digital twin are fed back into the real system for **optimization** and **predictive maintenance**.

This bidirectional interaction between the digital and physical realms allows for continuous refinement of operations, minimized downtime, and improved safety and adaptability. Applications range from industrial automation to healthcare robotics, where real-time responsiveness and intelligent control are crucial.

2.2 Material and Structural Advantages

The use of soft, flexible materials offers unique advantages that set these robots apart from their rigid counterparts. Key benefits include: [2-8]

- **Enhanced Safety**: The compliant nature of soft materials minimizes the risk of injury during human-robot interaction. This feature is particularly important in healthcare and service robotics.
- **Adaptability**: Soft robots can deform and conform to their environment, allowing them to navigate tight spaces or handle irregularly shaped objects with ease.
- **Durability in Dynamic Tasks**: Soft materials absorb and dissipate forces, reducing wear and tear in dynamic or repetitive applications.

An example of this advantage is seen in soft robotic grippers, which can safely and effectively manipulate fragile objects such as fruits or medical instruments. These grippers leverage their material properties to achieve precise control without damaging the items they handle.

2.3 Integration with AI

Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays a critical role in the operation of EI-based soft robots. Advanced AI algorithms enable these robots to:

- **Process Sensory Data**: Through computer vision and tactile feedback, robots can perceive and interpret their environment with high accuracy.
- **Learn Efficient Behaviors**: Reinforcement learning allows robots to optimize their actions based on feedback from their environment, improving performance over time [3].
- **Mimic Biological Systems**: Biologically inspired control systems replicate natural behaviors, making soft robots more efficient and adaptable.

For instance, a soft robot designed for disaster response may use AI to identify safe paths through rubble and determine the best way to extract survivors. This level of intelligence allows the robot to operate effectively in scenarios that are too dangerous or complex for humans.

2.4 Sensors and Actuators

The functionality of EI-based soft robots is heavily reliant on their sensors and actuators. Soft, stretchable sensors are embedded into the robot's body to provide high-resolution data on pressure, strain, and environmental conditions. These sensors enable:

- **Real-Time Feedback**: Critical for adaptive control and precise task execution.
- **Environmental Awareness**: Allowing robots to navigate and interact with their surroundings effectively.
- **Energy Efficiency**: By optimizing power usage, these systems extend the operational lifespan of mobile robots. [3]

Actuators, on the other hand, serve as the muscles of soft robots, enabling movement and interaction. Soft actuators are designed to mimic natural muscle movements, offering high flexibility and responsiveness. Together, sensors and actuators form the backbone of EI-based soft robotics, enabling them to perform complex tasks with remarkable efficiency and adaptability. [4-7]

3. Applications of EI-Based Soft Robots

3.1 Healthcare and Medicine

Soft robots with EI have shown immense potential in the healthcare sector, offering solutions for tasks that require precision, adaptability, and safety. Applications include: [4,5]

- **Minimally Invasive Surgery**: Soft robots can navigate complex anatomical structures with minimal disruption to surrounding tissues. Their flexibility and real-time adaptability make them ideal for delicate surgical procedures.
- **Rehabilitation and Assistive Devices**: EI-based soft robots are used in devices such as exoskeletons and prosthetics to provide personalized assistance to patients. These devices can adapt to the user’s unique movements and needs, enhancing their quality of life.
- **Drug Delivery Systems**: Soft robots capable of navigating within the human body are being developed for targeted drug delivery. These systems minimize side effects and increase the efficacy of treatments by delivering drugs directly to affected areas.

3.2 Disaster Response

In disaster scenarios, soft robots equipped with EI are invaluable for search and rescue operations. Their adaptability allows them to navigate through rubble, confined spaces, and uneven terrain. Applications include: [6]

- **Locating Survivors**: Soft robots with embedded sensors can detect human presence through sound, heat, or motion, enabling quick identification of survivors.
- **Transporting Supplies**: Autonomous soft robots can carry medical supplies, food, or communication devices to trapped individuals.

- **Hazard Assessment**: These robots can monitor dangerous conditions, such as gas leaks or unstable structures, reducing risks to human responders.

3.3 Industrial Automation

In manufacturing and logistics, EI-based soft robots excel in handling delicate and irregularly shaped objects. Applications include: [7-8]

- **Assembly Lines**: Soft robotic arms can assemble products with precision and care, reducing the likelihood of damage.
- **Sorting and Packaging**: Autonomous soft robots can sort items based on size, shape, or material, increasing efficiency in logistics operations.
- **Maintenance and Inspection**: Soft robots can access hard-to-reach areas, such as inside machinery or pipelines, for routine maintenance and inspections.

3.4 Environmental Monitoring

Soft robots with EI are increasingly used in environmental monitoring due to their ability to operate in challenging conditions. Applications include: [8-10]

- **Marine Exploration**: Soft robots designed to mimic aquatic organisms can explore fragile ecosystems, such as coral reefs, without causing damage.
- **Pollution Detection**: These robots can collect samples and monitor pollutants in air, water, or soil, aiding in environmental conservation efforts.
- **Wildlife Observation**: Soft robots are employed to study animal behavior without disturbing natural habitats.

4. Challenges in Autonomous Soft Robotics with Embodied Intelligence

4.1 Technological Challenges

4.1.1 Material Limitations

Soft robotics rely on flexible, compliant materials that offer unique advantages in terms of safety and adaptability. However, these materials often face durability issues, especially with repeated deformations that could lead to wear and failure. Moreover, finding materials that balance compliance with sufficient strength and stiffness remains a significant challenge. Innovations like self-healing materials or composite structures could help overcome these limitations and improve long-term performance.

4.1.2 Sensor Integration and Precision

Soft robots require highly flexible and stretchable sensors that provide accurate feedback in real-time. Integrating these sensors without compromising flexibility is complex, as soft sensors often lag in responsiveness and precision compared to rigid counterparts. Moreover, soft sensors must be capable of handling dynamic environments where rapid environmental changes require immediate adaptive responses. The development of advanced sensor technologies, such as stretchable electronics or pressure-sensitive materials, is crucial for improving performance in precision-demanding tasks.

4.1.3 Actuation Challenges

Soft actuators enable flexibility but often lack the force output and speed required for high-performance tasks. These actuators, like pneumatic muscles, are generally slower and energy-inefficient compared to rigid actuators. Additionally, coordinating actuators to work together seamlessly in complex, unstructured environments is a challenge. Efficient actuators with higher responsiveness and fine-tuned control mechanisms are essential to maximize the capabilities of soft robots.

4.1.4 AI and Control Systems

AI plays a critical role in enabling autonomous soft robots to learn from their environments. However, real-time adaptation in unpredictable environments is complex, and AI algorithms, particularly reinforcement learning, require large amounts of data to optimize robot behavior. Soft robots face additional challenges as they undergo continuous physical deformation, which requires AI systems that can dynamically adjust control strategies in real-time. Developing stable and efficient AI frameworks for soft robots remains a major hurdle.

4.2 Ethical and Regulatory Challenges

4.2.1 Safety Concerns

Despite their compliant nature, soft robots still need rigorous safety protocols, especially in human-robot interaction scenarios, such as healthcare or caregiving. Ensuring the robot can adapt to human movements, avoid injuries, and deliver reliable performance in unpredictable environments is crucial. This calls for the establishment of clear safety standards that address both robotic design and operational behavior.

4.2.2 Privacy and Data Security

The integration of sensors, such as cameras and microphones, in soft robots can lead to privacy concerns, especially in sensitive environments like medical settings. Protecting the collected data and ensuring transparent handling and storage is vital. Strict data security measures and privacy policies must be in place, with clear informed consent procedures for users.

4.2.3 Regulatory Frameworks

There is currently a lack of regulatory guidelines specific to autonomous soft robots. Developing comprehensive frameworks that define safety standards, ethical use, and performance metrics is critical. Collaboration among policymakers, researchers, and industry leaders will be essential to address these gaps and ensure the safe, responsible use of soft robots in various applications.

4.3 Overcoming the Challenges

Addressing these challenges requires multidisciplinary collaboration across material science, AI, robotics, and regulatory bodies. By improving material durability, refining AI algorithms, and advancing sensor and actuator technologies, these obstacles can be overcome. Additionally, creating clear safety standards and regulatory frameworks will ensure the responsible deployment of autonomous soft robots in diverse industries. With continued research and innovation, soft robots based on embodied intelligence are poised to revolutionize various fields, from healthcare to disaster response.

5. Future Directions in Autonomous Soft Robotics with Embodied Intelligence

The future of autonomous soft robotics based on Embodied Intelligence (EI) holds great promise, with potential applications across various industries, from healthcare to manufacturing and environmental monitoring. As technology continues to evolve, several key advancements will shape the trajectory of soft robotics and push the boundaries of their capabilities.

5.1 Advances in Materials and Manufacturing Techniques

The development of advanced materials is critical for enhancing the performance and durability of soft robots. Future research will focus on materials that are not only flexible but also self-healing, adaptive, and capable of withstanding repetitive deformations. Innovations in smart materials—such as electroactive polymers and bio-inspired composites—will enable soft robots to perform a wider range of tasks while maintaining high durability.

Additionally, advancements in manufacturing techniques, including 3D printing and soft lithography, will allow for more precise and cost-effective production of soft robots. These methods will facilitate the creation of intricate, lightweight structures that are highly customized for specific applications, thereby enhancing the versatility of soft robots across various industries.

5.2 AI Integration and Learning Algorithms

As AI continues to evolve, the integration of more advanced learning algorithms, particularly reinforcement learning and deep learning, will enable soft robots to become more autonomous and adaptive. Future soft robots will be capable of continuously learning and improving through experience, making them increasingly proficient in complex, unstructured environments.

Incorporating multimodal learning systems will allow robots to simultaneously process multiple types of sensory inputs—such as tactile, visual, and auditory data—allowing for more robust environmental understanding and decision-making. This AI integration will also improve real-time adaptation, enabling robots to perform tasks that require precise coordination and decision-making.

5.3 Collaborative Soft Robotics and Multi-Robot Systems

In the future, soft robots are expected to work in collaboration with other robots or humans, forming multi-robot systems that can accomplish complex, large-scale tasks. Through shared learning and communication, these systems will be able to tackle challenges that individual robots cannot solve alone. For example, in disaster response or search-and-rescue operations, multiple soft robots could coordinate their actions to navigate difficult terrain, locate survivors, and transport supplies.

The development of decentralized control and communication protocols will be essential for the successful deployment of these collaborative systems. By enabling robots to share information and learn from one another, these systems will exhibit higher levels of adaptability and efficiency.

5.4 Enhanced Human-Robot Interaction

As autonomous soft robots become more integrated into human environments, enhancing their ability to interact with humans will be crucial. Future research will focus on improving human-robot interaction (HRI) through more intuitive, user-friendly interfaces. Soft robots will be designed to recognize human gestures, emotions, and intentions, allowing for more seamless and effective collaboration.

Additionally, soft robots will increasingly be deployed in assistive technologies for people with disabilities, elderly care, and rehabilitation. By adapting to the physical and emotional needs of individuals, these robots will provide personalized support and improve the quality of life for users.

5.5 Environmental and Ethical Considerations

As the capabilities of soft robots expand, addressing the environmental impact and ethical concerns associated with their use will become increasingly important. Sustainable manufacturing processes, the recyclability of materials, and the minimization of waste will be key factors in the widespread adoption of soft robotics. Furthermore, ethical guidelines must be established to govern the deployment of soft robots—particularly in sensitive domains such as healthcare, where privacy, safety, and accountability are paramount.

Developing robust regulatory frameworks to ensure the safe and ethical use of soft robots will be crucial for their successful integration into society. Research in ethical AI and autonomous systems will play a vital role in ensuring that soft robots are used in ways that benefit society while minimizing potential risks.

The future of autonomous soft robots based on Embodied Intelligence is promising, with transformative applications on the horizon. Advances in materials, AI, collaborative systems, and human-robot interaction will continue to push the boundaries of what these robots can achieve. However, the successful integration of soft robots into everyday life will require sustained research, innovation, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to address technological, ethical, and regulatory challenges. As these robots evolve, they are poised to reshape industries and enhance the quality of life for people around the world.

6. Conclusion

The emergence of autonomous soft robots based on Embodied Intelligence represents a revolutionary advancement in robotics. These robots embody a harmonious integration of adaptability, intelligence, and environmental interaction, making them uniquely suited for applications where traditional robots fall short. With their potential to operate autonomously in unstructured environments, soft robots address critical challenges across a wide range of industries, from healthcare to disaster response.

In healthcare, for instance, EI-based soft robots have demonstrated the ability to perform complex surgical procedures, provide rehabilitation support, and deliver targeted drug therapies. In disaster scenarios, their capability to navigate hazardous environments and assist in search-and-rescue missions underscores their life-saving potential. Furthermore, their applications in industrial automation and environmental monitoring highlight their adaptability and versatility across various sectors.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. Continued advancements in material science, actuator and sensor technology, and artificial intelligence are essential for further enhancing the capabilities of EI-based soft robots. Collaborative efforts among researchers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders will be crucial in addressing these challenges. Investment in interdisciplinary research and the development of robust regulatory frameworks will ensure the safe and ethical deployment of these technologies.

As the field continues to evolve, the transformative potential of autonomous soft robots becomes increasingly evident. These systems promise to redefine the way humans interact with machines and the environment, driving innovation and sustainability across diverse domains. By leveraging the principles of Embodied Intelligence, these robots are not merely tools, but dynamic systems capable of reshaping the future of robotics and improving the quality of life on a global scale.

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