

EXCERPT FROM THE ARTICLE
TALKING, WALKING OBJECTS
BY CARLA DIANA

[...] Simon is a humanoid robot being developed at the Georgia Institute of Technology for the purpose of exploring intuitive ways for people and machines to live and work alongside one another. I had designed the robot's shell – its outward appearance – so I knew exactly what to expect,
 5 but interacting with it as a programmed and somewhat sentient creature surprised me in ways I hadn't expected.

Simon understood spoken sentences and used social skills to respond appropriately. If it didn't understand a certain request, it raised his arms in an apparent plea for forgiveness or tilted its head to express confusion.
 10 Its ears lit up when it recognized a color, and it spoke back to me when I was finished talking.

Simon, a research effort and not meant to be sold, is part of a growing collection of social robots that can essentially see, hear, feel and react through humanlike sound and movement. Our future may not match our
 15 sci-fi fantasies of androids with limbs, torsos and expressive faces meandering around our rooms to pick up clothes and mix cocktails, but robots are entering our homes in subtle ways, through countertop appliances, handheld tools and wearable gadgets that display specialized and isolated robotic behaviors.

20 [...] Through their personalities, these objects will offer us emotional value along with other features. Siri, the iPhone speech recognition search engine, has already won the hearts of many by displaying a consistent, witty personality with which people can converse. Autom, a new
 25 countertop weight-loss product, was created by researchers who learned that a robotic coach with expressive eyes and face was more effective at keeping dieters eating better and exercising more because the emotional bond was created. [...]

While the idea of charming entities all around us, guiding us through
 30 everyday tasks and reminding us to do things throughout the day may seem benign, some experts raise concerns about the implications of robots in our daily lives. Once designers can perfect the art of manipulation, manufacturers can use this power to entice people to adopt behaviors that may not be in their best interest. There could be, for instance, a robot that
 35 tempts you to buy more unhealthy food or buy a lottery ticket.

In addition, there are many security concerns around robotic objects, especially they are mobile and in the intimate space of the home. For example, what happens when your products get hacked in a nefarious scheme to allow a criminal to see inside your house or, worse, when they
 40 are hacked to manipulate a person to behave in a way that he otherwise wouldn't have?

Despite the potential risks, the future will be rich with sensor-based, animated objects using expressive sound, light, motion and screens to praise, encourage, advice and comfort us. We'll have fun with TVs and
 45 music players that reposition themselves in response to our dance moves, we'll be relieved of chores by robots that pick up our crumbs and scrub the floors, and we'll stay fit with robotic parasites that curl around our wrists to take health stats and exhort us to get off the couch.

With this throng of sentient objects in our lives, we'll have to negotiate a
 50 whole new set of relationships. Will we adore our new products as if they were pets, doting on them and anticipating their greetings? Or will all this lively communication create an annoying cacophony of gadgets? My hope is for the former, but it will depend on the designers' ability to devise interactions that consider emotional value as important as any other
 55 product attribute. If designed well, these mechanical creatures, like my robotic pal Simon, can tug at our heartstrings in a new way.

Carla Diana is a product designer and creative consultant focused on bringing objects to life electronically.

Source:

Diana, Carla. "Talking, Walking Objects." *The New York Times*. 27 January 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/27/opinion/sunday/our-talking-walking-objects.html?=todaysheadlines&emc=edit_th_20130127&_r=0>. [18 April 2013]

Annotations:

- l. 5 sentient – *formal, technical*: able to see or feel through senses
- l. 17 countertop – *here*: flat surface in kitchen for preparing food on
- l. 29 entity – *formal*: being
- l. 31 benign – harmless, positive
- l. 38 nefarious – *formal*: evil or criminal, immoral
- l. 48 stats – *informal*: statistics
- l. 49 throng – crowd
- l. 52 cacophony – loud unpleasant mixture of sounds
- l. 56 to tug at sb's heartstrings – to make sb. feel sympathy for sb. or sth.