

ROBOTS

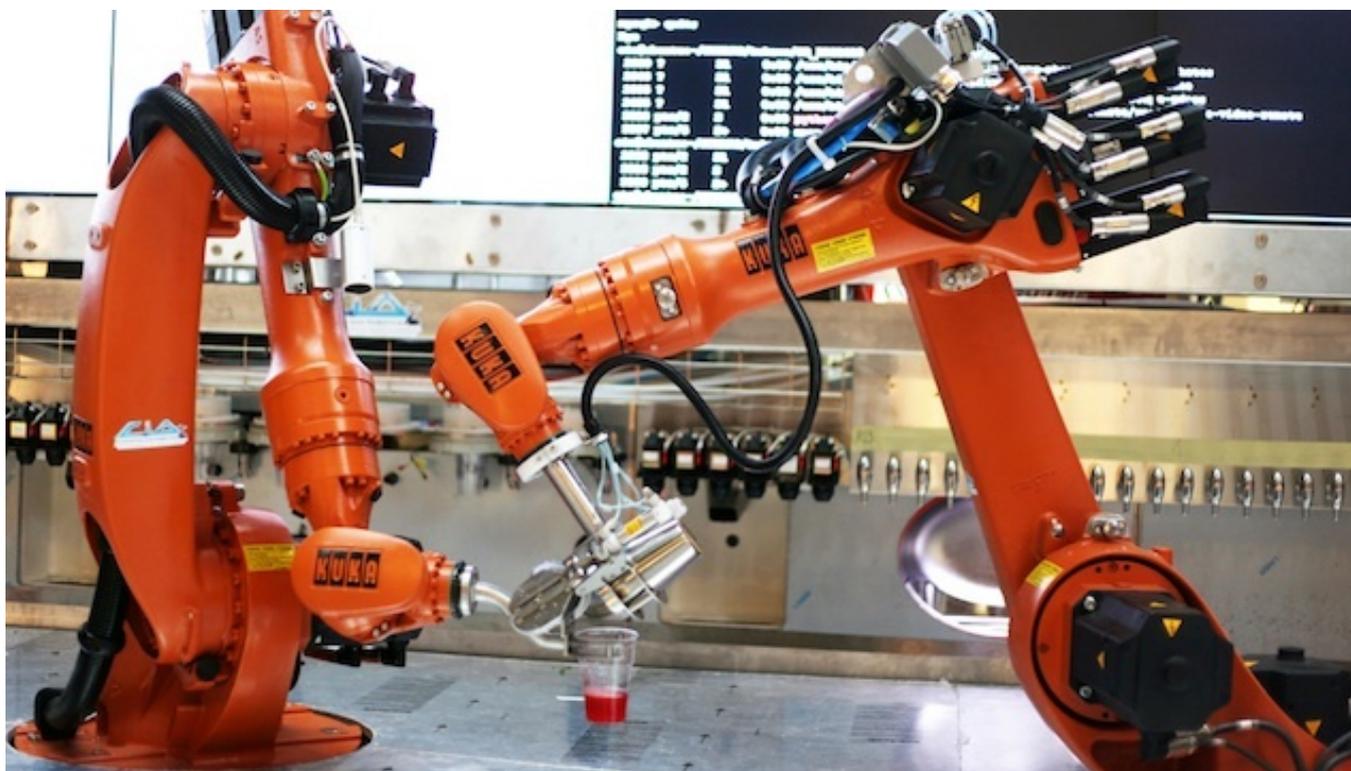
Let's All Now Form an Orderly Line and Order a Perfect Drink from the Robot Bartender

By The Creator's Project

Via the Creators Project— Lucas Werthein and Shahar Zaks of tech design firm [SuperUber](#), along with robotics experts from [MIT Senseable Lab](#) and design gurus from [Pentagram](#), collaborated to create something truly amazing -- a robotic bar tending system. [Makr Shkr](#) truly lives up to the title of "mixologist," and better yet, is probably the first bartender that'll actually listen to its customers no matter how packed the bar is (though it doesn't necessarily mix drinks any faster).

Party goers can order and customize their drinks via a mobile app, or order pre-existing cocktails in the system. The robot also measures and tracks the popularity of certain drinks, which is displayed on a screen above the bar, along with wait time and other data. The best part is, Makr Shkr also has the capability to cut people off when they've gotten a little too shwilly--the system can monitor its patrons' booze consumption and approximate blood alcohol content.

We got in touch with director of SuperUber, Lucas Werthein, to find out more about what kind of work went into the creation of Makr Shkr.



The Creators Project: Is this your first time working with robotics? Seems like a bit of a departure from the types of projects we've seen from SuperUber in the past.

Lucas Werthein: We have done a lot of work with motors, servos, sensors and other physical computing elements. However, we have never worked with actual industrial robots. It's the first time we have worked on something like this, but we were not responsible for programming the actual robots. The interesting part about this project is that it was a huge collaboration and in that sense it's really not that different from other projects we work on, where the main objective is to make all of the elements fit together regardless of the tech.

Our main contribution was developing the data visualization and interfacing between design, code and hardware. It's definitely different from any project we have worked on, but I think that's the best part of it. The most amazing projects are the ones that you don't really know what the outcome is going to be, since they are the ones that make you innovate and come up with unexpected solutions.

In the end I think that the most interesting part of this project is not the robots or the artificial intelligence. This is a crazy social experiment that defies the laws and traditions that have been established in bars and parties. It brings this environment into a total state of order and organized behavior. No more crazy lines, people fighting over who was there first, no more great-looking girls that get to drink for free or get the bartender's attention first, no more priority. I'm not saying that this is positive or negative, but it will definitely be interesting to see what type of new social norms and dynamics are created out of this experiment. How will people behave and adapt when robots serve us?



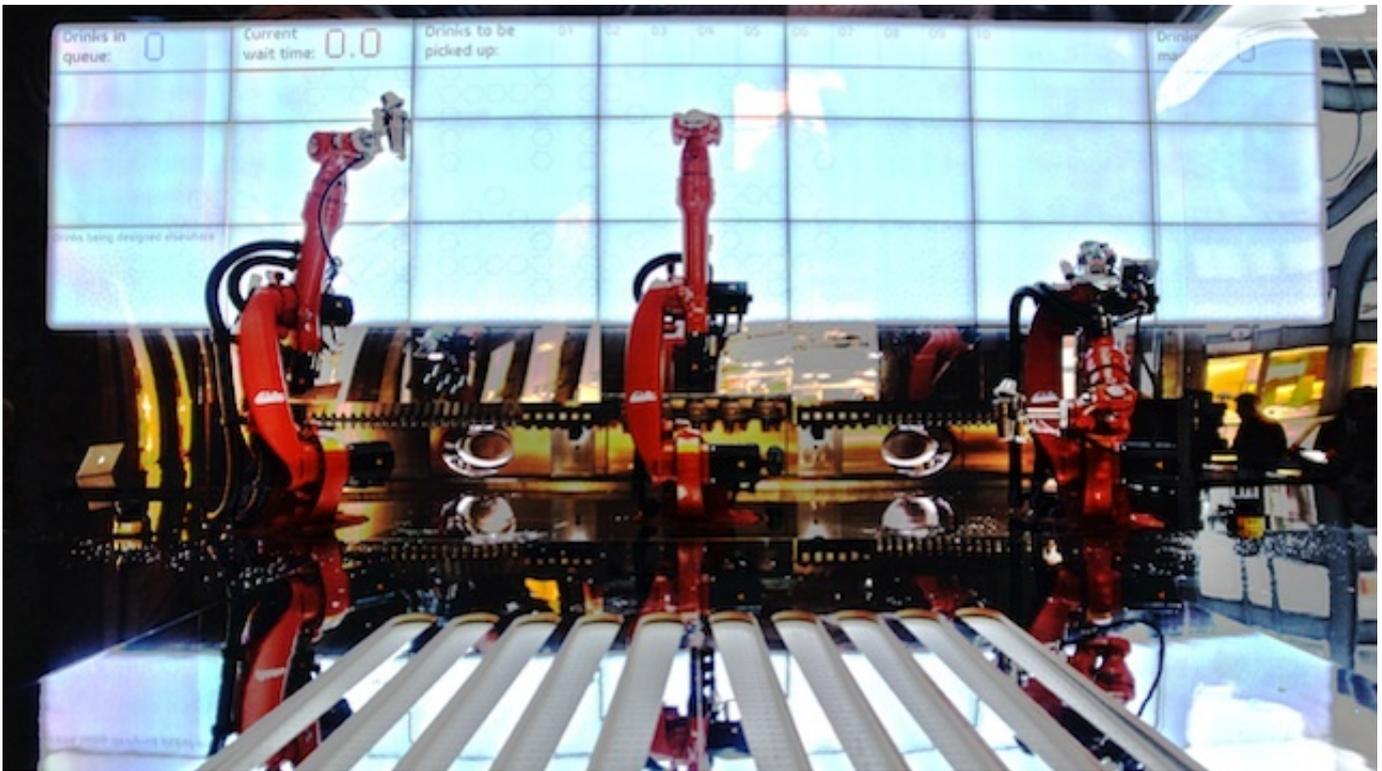
What sort of new challenges did this project present?

The main challenge in this project was the communication between so many elements and with so many people spread out throughout the world. There were people in New York, Rio, Boston, Milan, and Turin. We had [Pentagram](#) making the web app and feeding us design elements; CIA was working with the robots and we needed to create a fluid way to send information to the robots; the drinks needed to be made in synch with the visualization, which was displayed behind the robots.



The art direction of your visualization is very distinctive. What were some of the sources of inspiration that influenced its aesthetic?

Pentagram was responsible for the design and Shahar was responsible for the back and forth that made this project look how it looked. Pentagram gave the general look and feel and we worked together making the most out of the motion design and the interaction design. In practical terms, Pentagram would come to us with visual elements and we would go back and forth to decide which was the best way to proceed. There were a lot of limitations regarding resolution, interaction and movement that made the design look the way it did. Our job was focused on motion design and making the graphical assets come to life. The main inspiration is based on machine design and trying to integrate the animal-like behavior of robots into the viz' language.



Do drinks made by robots inherently taste better?

I'm not sure if they taste better, but they are standardized. You will always get the same exact amount, combination, and end mix. This may be better for some people, but for other it may be worse because it takes away the surprise element. Imagine if every time you went to a bar your margarita always tasted the same. No surprise element created by the bartender? At the same time, since this machine, which can create infinite combinations, is preparing your drink, really interesting things could happen with crowd sourcing and social collaboration. Actual people could be responsible for this surprise element from now on. In a sense, everyone becomes a bartender and the best drinks become the most popular and can be shared through social media and other instances.



If you were building your own robot, what sort of tasks would you have it perform?

A lot of jokes have been made about what a robot would do, but I think it's a really pertinent question, specially during a time with all of the DRONE discussions. I would design a robot that takes care of thin don't like to do. Robots are here to take over some human functions, but I don't believe this is something we should be afraid of. Humans have always resisted technological progress because of fear, but in the end we have managed to reinvent ourselves and become more innovative throughout history.

This interview originally appeared at our sister site the Creator's Project.