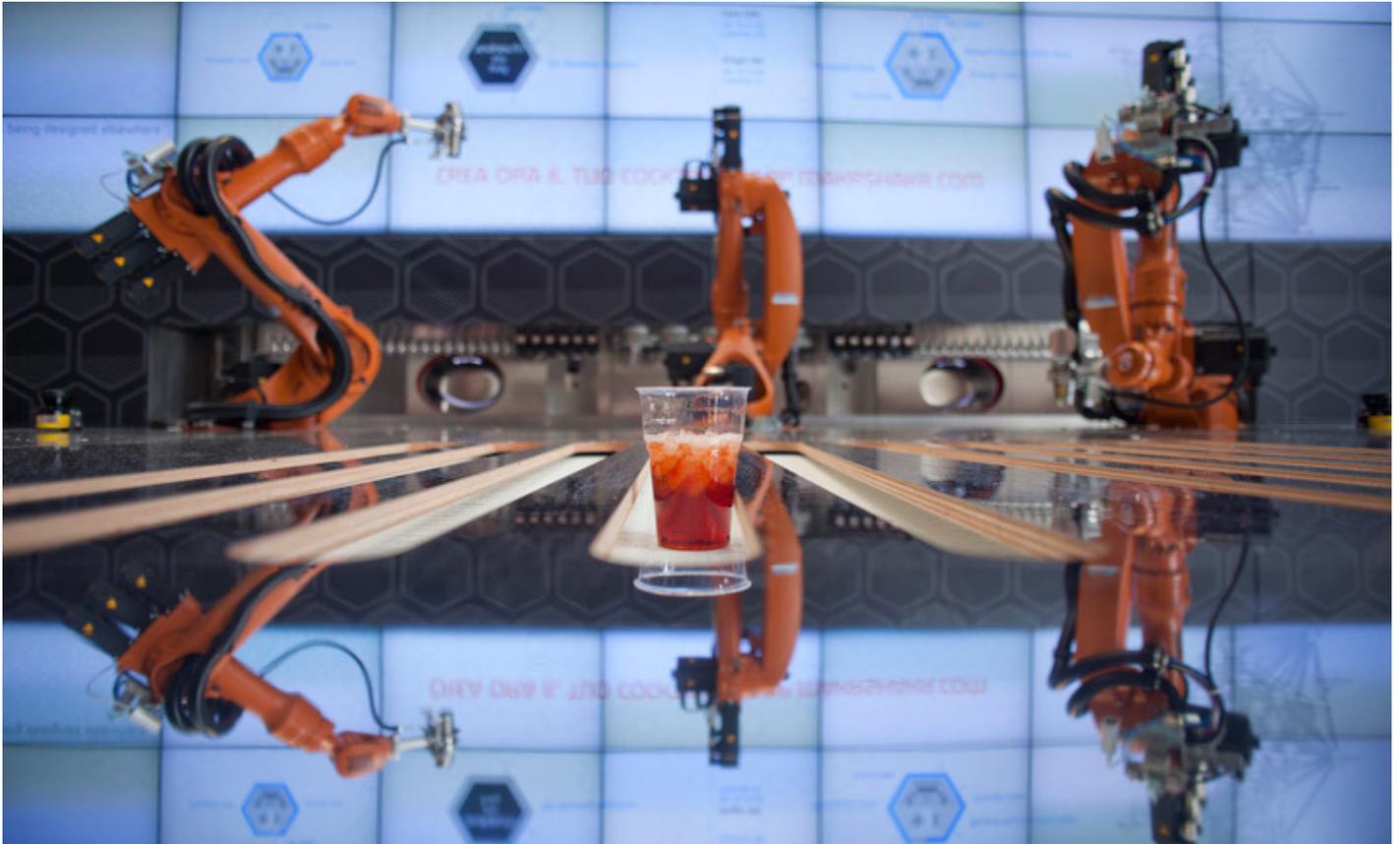


# Carlo Ratti: Homines Ludentes

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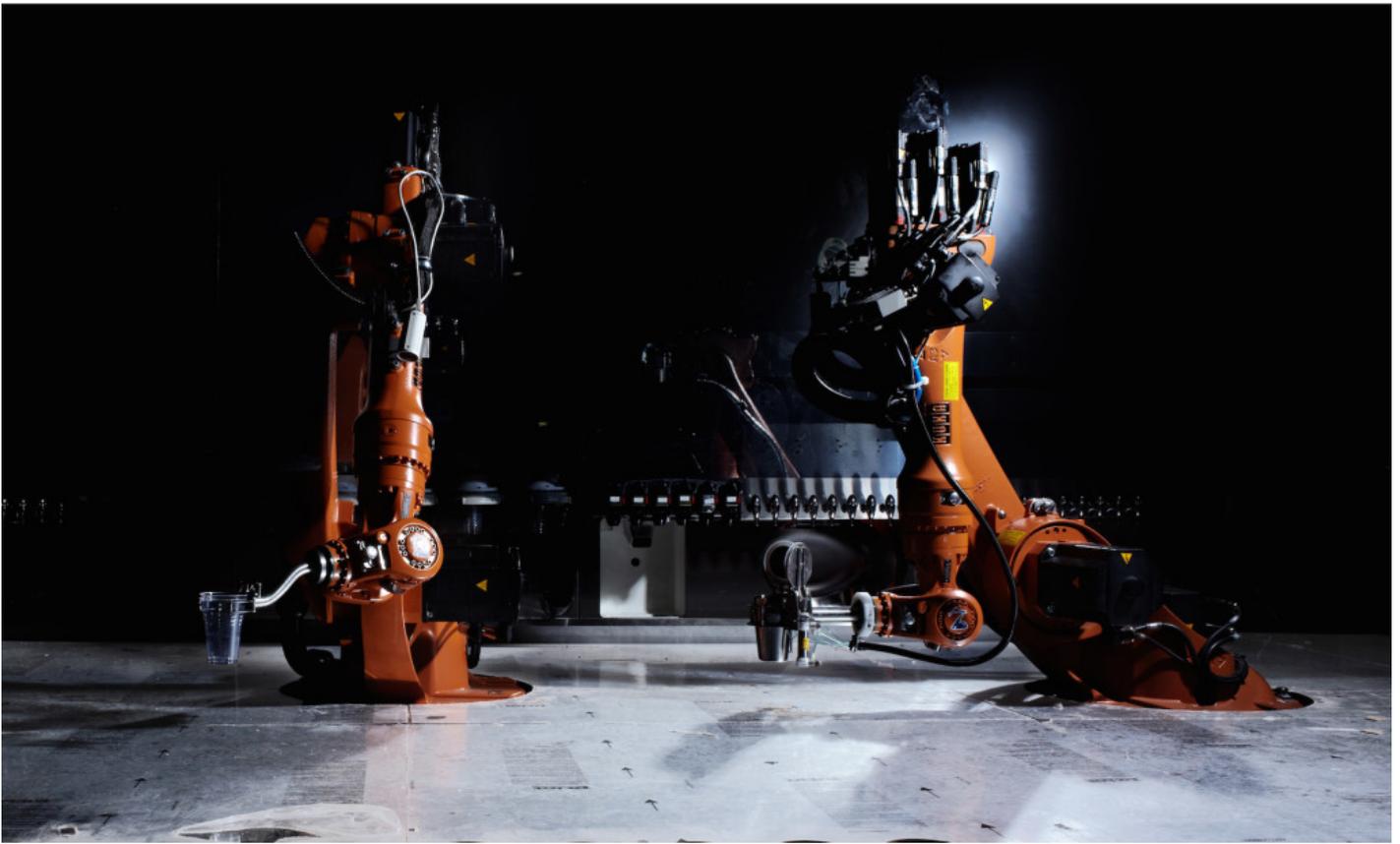
DECEMBER 18, 2014

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*One of the main purposes of this column is to ask object-makers to write about the objects they create, in order to explore their relationships towards them and investigate reasons, drives and motivations behind the need to produce, circulate and collect new things today. For the second issue of Carnet de miart, we've asked a contribution to a designer who thinks and looks at objects as devices of change: Carlo Ratti. Hailed as one of the "25 People Who Will Change the World of Design" according to Blueprint Magazine and one of the "50 people who will change the world" according to Wired, awarded the Renzo Piano Foundation prize for "New Talents in Architecture" in 2011 and named member of the National Design Council by the Italian Minister of Culture, Mr. Ratti has full right to imagine what the future of object-making should look like. Here are his ideas:*



## Homines Ludentes, by Carlo Ratti and Carlotta Sillano

A recent study by the Oxford Martin School reveals that in a few years 45% of professions, business, and work done in the United States could be computerized and automated. As a matter of fact, they'll disappear. The French anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan in his essay *Le geste e la parole* underlines how it is possible to draw a curve of human civilization simply looking at the way tools are used across history. From the Neolithic to the twentieth century, from the first utensils made of rocks to the development of digital technologies, from stone-axes that extended the capabilities of the hand to “outsourcing” to computers our mental processes, progress has always been profoundly marked by the gradual subcontracting of our functions. The development of new technologies always had the same goal—that is, to increase our chances and possibilities. The possibility to act, the possibility to create.

Therefore, we must not think of this new wave of mechanization as a loss; it could correspond, instead, to a new opportunity. We [at Carlo Ratti Associati] have explored this condition during Google I/O 2013, the annual fair organized by Google developers in San Francisco. The invitation was a reflection on the changes introduced by the progressive “robotization” of our society. We then imagined some tangible applications and—almost for fun—we gave shape to an experimental project called “Makr Shkr”: a bartender robot that was able to communicate with people through a dedicated app. Here’s how it works: through their own devices, users select a cocktail or create their own by choosing the ingredients to be mixed; then, a mechanical arm controlled digitally prepares the drink, calculating doses and mixing ingredients with measured movements (that are calibrated

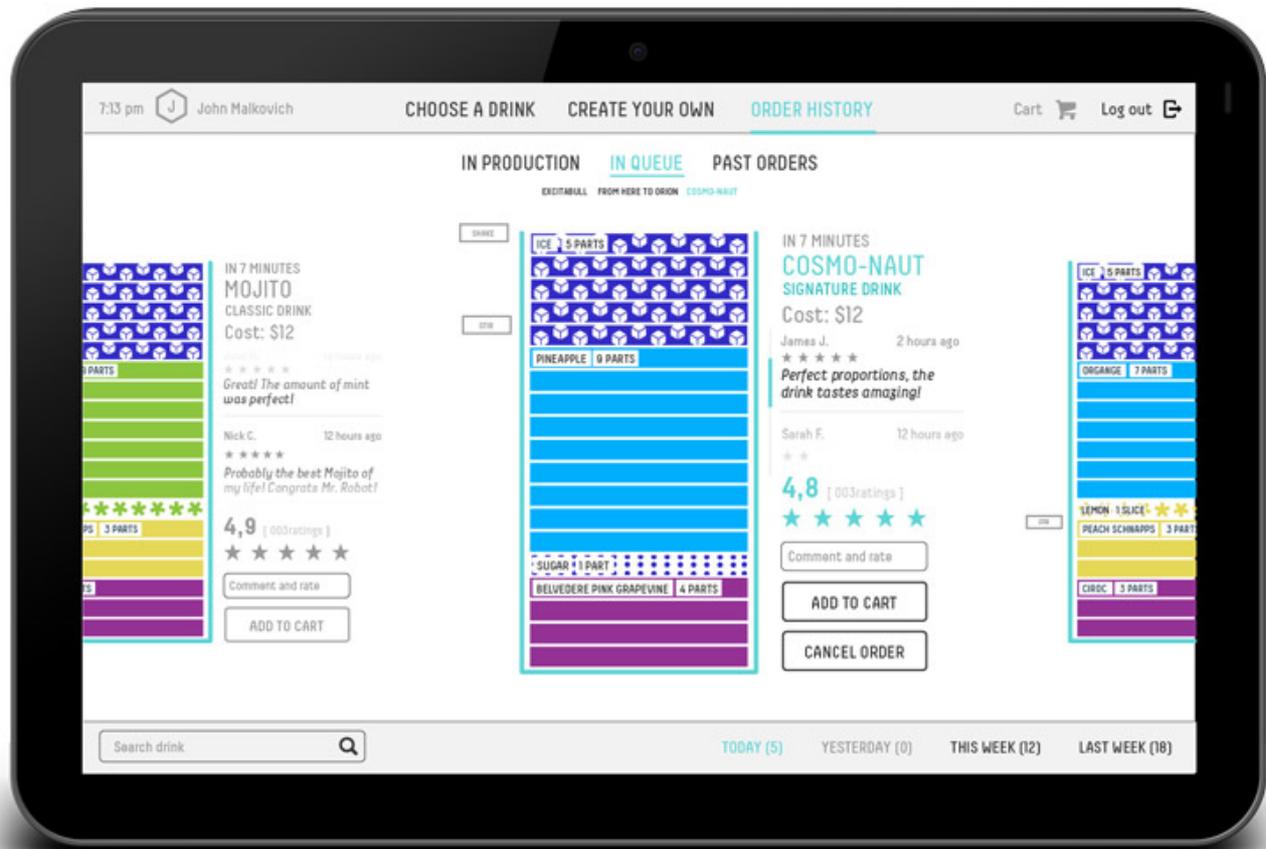
according to those of Marco Pelle, choreographer of the New York Theatre Ballet). Users can even name their own cocktails, consult their previous creations, broadcast their best mixes, and evaluate those shared by others.



Within the limits of the context, the project was mainly aimed at experimenting how new digital technologies can change patterns of interaction between user and product, in view of a new creative/participatory paradigm; an investigation on and around new forms of production and distribution made possible by new tools. From the original idea, after several requests, a start-up was founded—and a first round of prototypes has already been produced. One of these is now visible in the Bionic Bar of the Quantum of the Seas, the new flagship boat of the Royal Caribbean. At this stage, we are talking about entertainment, of course; but what is interesting to us is to note how robotics, if made available to the people, really becomes a tool for creativity and fosters the creation of both actual products and knowledge-based communities. We believe this experiment is paradigmatic of a new wave in the production of objects and of knowledge that is radically changing the global socio-economic fabric. It is no coincidence that people talk about a “third industrial revolution”.

Digitally controlled machines, 3d printers, open source software and new sharing devices will allow everyone to draw and give shape to their own product, to their own ideas. This robotic revolution could easily be the consequence and logical evolution of the Situationist utopia of the Fifties and Sixties. According to Constant, the future “Homo Ludens” (man at play)—an heir of the one imagined by Johan Huizinga —could live without Art because he/she would have the ability to apply his/her own creativity to everyday life. “Homo Ludens himself will seek to transform, to recreate,

those surroundings, that world, according to his new needs. The exploration and creation of the environment will then happen to coincide because, in creating his domain to explore, Homo Ludens will apply himself to exploring his own creation.” However, today, the production takes place more often than not in the universe of co-creation and sharing. Perhaps, what was missing at the time of Constant was precisely the social dimension introduced by the ever-growing importance of networks. Could it be that, together, we’ll soon become a collaborative Homo Ludens – i.e. Homines Ludentes, able to invent and learn together mainly thanks to those same new tools that we’ll build ourselves?



*Carlo Ratti is an architect and engineer by training that practices in Italy and teaches at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he directs the Senseable City Lab. He graduated from the Politecnico di Torino and the École Nationale des Ponts et Chaussées in Paris, and later earned his MPhil and PhD at the University of Cambridge, UK. Ratti holds several patents and has co-authored over 250 publications. As well as being a regular contributor to the architecture magazine Domus and the Italian newspaper Il Sole 24 Ore, he has written for the BBC, La Stampa, Scientific American and The New York Times. His work has been exhibited worldwide at venues such as the Venice Biennale, the Design Museum Barcelona, the Science Museum in London, GAFTA in San Francisco, MoMA in New York and MAXXI in Rome.*

Cover image: Makr Shkr. Courtesy MyBossWas

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