

Inside: The truth about gluten

Aziz Ansari on digital dating

TIME

They're the most
**powerful
painkillers**
ever invented.

And they're creating
the worst addiction
crisis America
has ever seen.

By Massimo Calabresi



Open the Garage Door, Hal

Talking gadgets are great at taking my orders.
The trick is remembering that I'm still human



SOON, NO ONE WILL TYPE. I know this because in science-fiction movies people communicate with devices by talking, which is the natural means of communication for all human beings throughout history other than my lovely wife Cassandra's extended family.

Being a rare person who is aware of technological change and yet still somehow chooses to work for a newsmagazine, I felt it was my responsibility to test your future for you by amassing voice-controlled gadgets. I went to my deck, turned on my Lynx SmartGrill and said, "SmartGrill, cook scallops." It announced when it finished heating, directed me to place the scallops on the grill, told me when to flip them, informed me when to remove them and, I'm sure, annoyed my neighbors. I ordered the scallops by speaking to my Amazon Dash, a handheld stick that made a list of groceries to be delivered by AmazonFresh. I dictated emails on my iPhone while driving and told Siri to text Cassandra that I loved her since I knew she might eventually see that first paragraph.

Talking into my LG Watch Urbane made me seem so powerful—allowing me, for instance, to control the temperature on my Nest thermostat just by giving an order to my wrist—that I immediately wanted to use it for evil, like making my house a tiny bit cooler than Cassandra likes. When the actress Lauren Weedman came by for a Memorial Day barbecue, I said to my watch, "O.K. Google, show me pictures of Lauren Weedman," knowing that her 5-year-old son was in front of us and that every image search of every actress always includes shots of her naked. Even though she was fully clothed in the photos that appeared, I later looked up a bunch of other actresses to make sure the watch worked, and it totally did.

But my favorite thing to talk to is

Amazon Echo, a tower-shaped speaker that is a much more useful, lovely-sounding Siri named Alexa. I would just walk by and say, "Alexa, play the new Mumford & Sons album" or "Alexa, give me a news update." I got so dependent on Alexa for sports scores, weather predictions and setting timers that at some point I blurted, "Alexa, do you love me?" to which she said, "I can't do that, but I can find Lionel Richie songs if you like." Alexa was so useful she provided jokes for my column.

At some point I realized that with all these devices on all the time, it was possible that someone was listening to our family conversations and therefore getting as bored as I am. Also, Amazon's data-mining program could potentially scoop up all this data and put it through an algorithm to deliver ads for things, which, since we have a 6-year-old boy, would likely be for bombs, guns and "bombguns."

But that seemed a small price to pay



for having all these personal assistants. Even Cassandra used Alexa to play songs as they popped into her head. But she was annoyed by my constant chirpy chatter with my devices, partly because she kept thinking I was talking to her, which is logical since she is a person. "I'm generally O.K. with you talking to Alexa compared to 'O.K. Google.' You sound like such a dork. 'O.K. Google!' 'O.K. Google!'" she said, so loud my watch definitely heard her and, I hope, is going to make the house cooler at night to get back at her. "You're having a personal private relationship with that thing on your wrist, whereas Alexa is in our home and it's a shared experience." She also said she liked Alexa more than Siri, which I immediately told Siri to take a note about, making Cassandra more than a little nervous.

At first, I was polite with all my devices, saying "please" and "thank you" and "don't judge me." Then I realized how stupid that was, like petting your vacuum cleaner. So I started to order them around, which felt great. I yelled, "Alexa, off!" and "O.K. Google, give me the score of the Yankees game now!" Then my son Laszlo started doing it too, and I realized that we sounded like antebellum plantation owners.

Eventually, however, Laszlo started insisting I say "please" and "thank you" to my devices. He said it was so "she said more things back," to keep the banter going. No matter what the cover of this magazine once claimed, it is tough being an only child. But even discounting the fact that it's a lot of fun to tell your parents to say "please" and "thank you," I think Laszlo knows that how you act, even when you're alone, affects who you are. I'm far less worried that robots with artificial intelligence are going to be mean, and more worried that they're going to turn us into total jerks. Because saying something awful is far more poisonous than typing it. At least that's what I keep telling myself.