

Smart Home Ambient Intelligence: voice assistants

a new limit for our freedom?

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Presentation Outline

Smart Home Ambient Intelligence: voice assistants
a new limit for our freedom?

① Introduction

- Technological Mediation
- Definitions

② Case Study: Google Home - Google Assistant Actions

- Applied concepts of Technological Mediation limiting our freedom
- Ethical concerns arising from loss of freedom

③ Possible Remedies

Introduction

Technological Mediation

*While fulfilling their function, technologies do much more: they **give shape to what we do** and how we experience the world. And in doing so they **contribute actively** to the ways we live our lives (Verbeek 2011)*

- ▶ Technologies are not **neutral intermediaries**
- ▶ Technologies play an **actively mediating role**
- ▶ Artifacts are **bearers of morality** (Latour 1992)
- ▶ Morality is a matter of **human-technology associations**
- ▶ Two perspectives of mediation:
 - ▶ Perception
 - ▶ **Action**: I will focus on **human freedom**

Definitions I

Ambient Intelligence

***Ambient Intelligence** is an approach that combines two major technologies: Ubiquitous Computing and Intelligent User Interfaces (Brey 2005)*

Voice Assistant

*A **voice assistant** is a digital assistant that uses voice recognition, natural language processing and speech synthesis to provide aid to users through phones and voice recognition applications (WhatIs 2017)*

Definitions II

Freedom

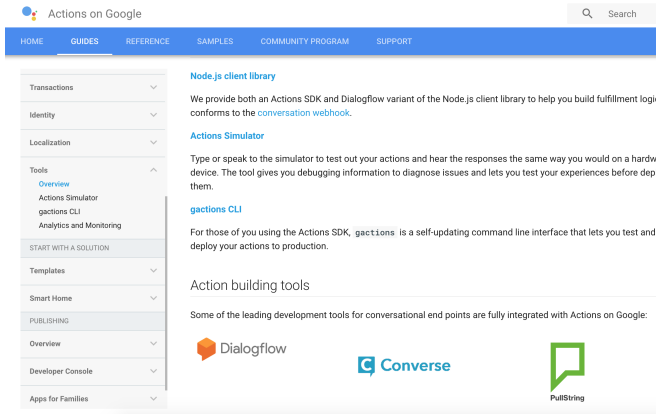
Two forms (Brey 2005, 2006):

- ▶ Negative Freedom:
 - ▶ act without obstruction or interference by others
 - ▶ absence of limits and external constraints
- ▶ **Positive Freedom (Human Autonomy)**: I will focus on this
 - ▶ mastery over your own life
 - ▶ think freely, make your own decisions and act based on those

Case Study: Google Home - Google Assistant Actions



Google Assistant Actions



The screenshot shows the 'Actions on Google' documentation page. The header includes the Google Assistant logo and a search bar. A blue navigation bar contains links for HOME, GUIDES, REFERENCE, SAMPLES, COMMUNITY PROGRAM, and SUPPORT. The left sidebar lists various categories: Transactions, Identity, Localization, Tools (with sub-links for Overview, Actions Simulator, gactions CLI, and Analytics and Monitoring), START WITH A SOLUTION, Templates, Smart Home, PUBLISHING, Overview, Developer Console, and Apps for Families. The main content area features sections for 'Node.js client library', 'Actions Simulator', 'gactions CLI', and 'Action building tools'. The 'Action building tools' section lists three integrated tools: Dialogflow, Converse, and PullString, each with its respective logo.

Actions on Google

HOME GUIDES REFERENCE SAMPLES COMMUNITY PROGRAM SUPPORT

Transactions

Identity

Localization

Tools

- Overview
- Actions Simulator
- gactions CLI
- Analytics and Monitoring

START WITH A SOLUTION

Templates

Smart Home

PUBLISHING

Overview

Developer Console

Apps for Families

[Node.js client library](#)

We provide both an Actions SDK and Dialogflow variant of the Node.js client library to help you build fulfillment logic conforms to the [conversation webhook](#).

[Actions Simulator](#)

Type or speak to the simulator to test out your actions and hear the responses the same way you would on a hardware device. The tool gives you debugging information to diagnose issues and lets you test your experiences before deploying them.

[gactions CLI](#)

For those of you using the Actions SDK, `gactions` is a self-updating command line interface that lets you test and deploy your actions to production.

Action building tools

Some of the leading development tools for conversational end points are fully integrated with Actions on Google:

Dialogflow

Converse

PullString

Starting from the Actions on Google documentation I will show you:

- ▶ Applied Technological Mediation's concepts limiting our freedom
- ▶ Ethical concerns arising from loss of freedom

Script

- 1) Developers design the whole conversational interaction.
Pre-defined templates.

Invitation/Inhibition structure

1) Developers define what actions are possible and what are not. The scripts of artifacts suggest specific actions and discourage others. Idea: the flow won't go on until the user has included in the answers the parameters

Behaviour Steering

- 1) suggestion chips
- 2) In future Google Assistant will propose in the conversation also ADS!!! And developers can see analytics to shape further the behaviour.
- 3) Idea: natural language “may hide” the behaviour steer but it is designed there! "Explicit vs implicit invocation".

Where is Technological Mediation?

1) Google Actions Policies and terms: designed towards privacy, content, branding, ... : what about technological mediation?

Technocracy

+ we may have the opposite problem: non technical people designing actions without having enough background!!!

Moral Laziness

commodification of morality

Moral responsibility of designers

What if in the future developers will shape morality???

Responsibility vacuum

Possible Remedies

Possible Remedies

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