



"Always Interesting" AI in the news

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A Growing Web of Watchers Builds a Surveillance Society. David Shenk. *The New York Times*. January 25, 2006 (www.nytimes.com). "If the American public seems a bit confused about the raging debate of security versus civil liberties—Bush/Cheney versus the A.C.L.U.—it may be because the debate itself has been outpaced by technology. In our post-9/11, protowireless world, democracies and free markets are increasingly saturated with prying eyes from governments, corporations and neighbors. For better and worse, free societies are fast entering the world of total surveillance. ... Allowing a computer to read your e-mail may not sound threatening, but with advanced pattern-recognition software, scanning many messages over time could produce a powerful consumer profile. As these machines get smarter and smarter, it may soon be far more worrisome to let a machine 'read' your information than to have a human reading it. ... These are today's tools. What about tomorrow's? The hallmarks of the new digital tool-building age are machines that are increasingly smart, small, cheap and communicative. We are, without question, headed into a world where—mostly by our choice—the minute details of our bodies, lives and homes will be routinely tracked and shared, with potential for more convenience and safety but also abuse."

Better Robots Could Help Save Disaster Victims. Kurt Kleiner. *New Scientist News Service*. January 5, 2006 (www.newscientist.com). "In the wake of the tragic accident that killed 12 trapped miners in West Virginia, US, roboticists are saying that a new generation of search and rescue robots could help save lives in future disasters. ... Although they tried to use a robot to move ahead and test conditions, the robot, a commercial model usually used for bomb disposal, was not specifically designed for mine work and became bogged down after moving just 21 metres into the tunnel. 'They're slow [robots]. They won't cause an explosion, but they don't do much,' says Robin Murphy, director of the Center for Robot Assisted Search and Rescue at the University of South Florida, US. But new robots, designed to squirm through rubble, or crawl through boreholes, or clamber over obstacles on legs, could someday go into mines quickly ahead of rescuers. ... Howie Choset, a roboticist at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, US, is working on a robot that can squirm snakelike

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—Jon Glick, Webmaster, AI TOPICS

through small spaces that might be left after a mine or building collapses."

Science Project—After 175 years, the Museum of Science is embarking on a mighty mission: to get schoolchildren excited about engineering and technology, help the US compete in the global economy, and, oh yes, make field trips more fun. John Hanc. *The Boston Globe*. December 11, 2005 (www.boston.com). "[O]ne of New England's most popular attractions is attempting a dramatic shift that is being watched closely by science museums around the country. As the museum transforms its emphasis, programs, and role in the city and beyond, the place that the parents of these children visited during their long-ago field trips may become as extinct as the Tyrannosaurus Rex, whose skeleton still stands in the Blue Wing. A hint of what's to come peeks out of a corner near the entrance. Yellow letters spell a question: 'Why Technological Literacy?' ... 'We have gone from being a society that makes things to a society that talks about things,' [museum president and director, Ioannis Miaoulis] says. 'That's because engineering doesn't get the respect it deserves.' ... [T]he face of the museum's future may not be the intense mien of Miaoulis but the plastic snout of AIBO—the robot dog manufactured by Sony that has been adapted for educational use at the museum. AIBO demonstrates the possibilities of artificial intelligence in an exhibit area on the first floor, where it has become one of the most popular attractions at the museum."

Rest in Peace, Sony Aibo. Therese Poletti. *Mercury News*. January 27, 2006

(www.mercurynews.com). "The Aibo lived seven years—or 49 if you count robotic dog years. On Thursday, Sony pulled the plug on Aibo, its peppy robotic dog with a software-controlled personality and abilities that has entertained thousands of faithful owners. ... 'It really is sad,' said David Calkins, a professor of robotics at San Francisco State University. Calkins uses several Aibos to teach students about robotics by playing robo-soccer. Many other universities with robotics programs also use Aibos as a teaching tool. ... Another Aibo owner, Joe Barnhart, a software engineer in Santa Clara, has six of the robotic dogs, in part because he travels a lot and can't take care of a 'biological' pet. ... Sony said it plans to shift its research and development in artificial intelligence into future consumer electronics products, but offered no further details."

A Healthy Little Robot. Josh Fischman. *U.S. News & World Report*. December 12, 2005 (www.usnews.com). "Sure, pets are cute and seem to improve human health. But there are some places where they can't live, like nursing homes. So can a robot pet provoke the same reactions? Yes, according to a few preliminary studies—but not to the same degree. 'I thought it was kind of silly when we started looking into it,' says Alan Beck, director of the Center for the Human-Animal Bond at Purdue University's veterinary school. 'But there's something going on there.' ... Beck sent AIBO to elderly residents in independent living facilities for six weeks and subsequently found they were less depressed and lonely. Some reported they got out of their chairs more often to play with the robot, increasing their exercise."

What to Watch this Weekend. Robert Bianco's Critic's Corner. *USA Today*. November 3, 2005 (www.usatoday.com). "Fox's *The Simpsons* [airdate 11/6/05] takes on reality TV and *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, among other topics, in the 16th edition of its *Treehouse of Horror* trilogy."

According to the Official Synopsis of Episode 1704 (www.thesimpsons.com):

"Bart ends up in a coma after attempting to jump from the roof to the swimming pool at Spinster Arms Apartments. In an effort to cope with the loss of their boy, the family takes in a robotic boy who quickly proves to be a better son."