

Talk given at 9:30 am PT on February 29, 2024 at Google DeepMind in Mountain View, CA  
Revised slides released on March 4, 2024

Talk Title:

Human Factors not Humanoids: Why portability, community, and ease of use will determine the future of mobile manipulation

Abstract:

Whether using mobile manipulators to pursue AGI or nearer-term applications, deploying robots in real human environments is a critical challenge. Robotics offers the potential for artificial systems to physically interact with people and their surroundings, creating new opportunities for AI and positive societal impact. Yet, much of human experience is found within homes and workplaces, which have been difficult for robots to access. In this talk, I will present Stretch, a compact and lightweight mobile manipulator that shows robots do not need to be humanoids to perform a wide variety of compelling tasks. By prioritizing portability and ease of use, Stretch has encouraged a growing community of innovators to take their robots out into the world to collect diverse data, test under real-world conditions, and discover new ways for robots to benefit society. I will give an overview of the design of Stretch, highlight community achievements, and talk about the implications for AI and societal benefit. I will emphasize the risks of attempting to bring the world to robots instead of taking robots out into the world. I will discuss the benefits of involving people who are not experts in robotics or AI, including broadening notions of worthwhile tasks. I will also give a live demo of Stretch 3, which Hello Robot released earlier this month.

Bio:

Dr. Charlie Kemp is a cofounder and the chief technology officer (CTO) of Hello Robot Inc., which is working toward a future where mobile manipulators enhance life for everyone. Hello Robot sells Stretch, a compact, lightweight, and capable mobile manipulator that is empowering a growing community of innovators to create a better future. Prior to joining Hello Robot full time in September of 2023, Charlie was an associate professor with tenure at Georgia Tech where he founded the Healthcare Robotics Lab which focused on enabling intelligent mobile manipulators to assist older adults and people with disabilities. Charlie's lab developed the original prototype robot that Hello Robot subsequently commercialized and dramatically improved. He earned his B.S., M.Eng., and Ph.D. at MIT with Rod Brooks as his Ph.D. advisor. He and Dr. Aaron Edsinger (cofounder and CEO of Hello Robot) first collaborated in Rod's lab.

# Human Factors not Humanoids:

Why portability, community, and ease of use will determine the future of mobile manipulation



Charlie Kemp, PhD

<https://charliekemp.com>

Cofounder & Chief Technology Officer  
Hello Robot Inc.

hello robot<sup>®</sup>

# Professional Timeline

1997-2005 : Earned degrees at MIT



2006 : Joined Georgia Tech



2017 : Co-founded Hello Robot

2023 : Joined Hello Robot full-time



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*relinquished tenure & closed my lab*



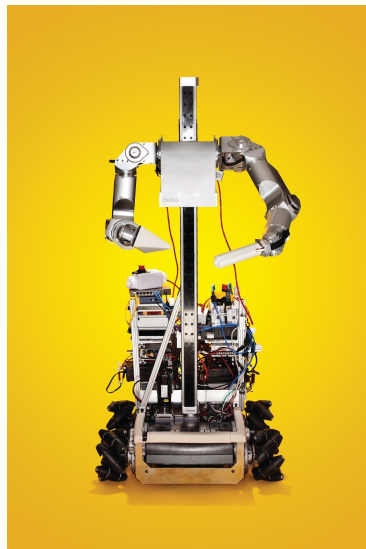
# Why give up tenure? To make this a reality



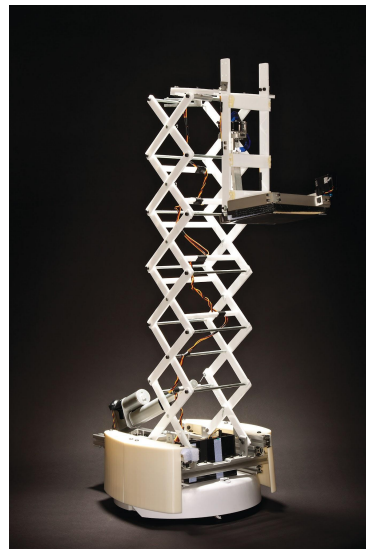
# I am the lead inventor of pioneering mobile manipulators



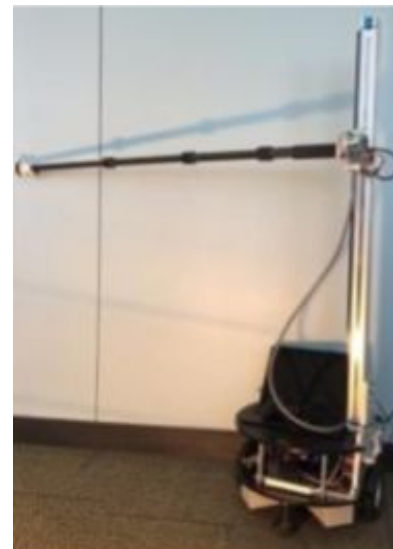
EL-E (2008)



Cody (2009)



Dusty (2010)



Early Prototype for  
Stretch (2016)  
Commercialized by Hello Robot

# Stretch 3<sup>®</sup>

The world's only lightweight,  
capable, developer-friendly  
mobile manipulator

Greater dexterity

Enhanced support for Embodied AI

Ready for researchers, educators, and explorers

Now with standard gripper camera,  
second head camera, and dexterous wrist!

AVAILABLE NOW  
FOR \$24,950



*The Washington Post*

"The robot was doing far more for (him) than taking care of his body. It was also feeding his soul."

*The Seattle Times*

"Astounding in its potential."

**IEEE Spectrum**

"Beautifully simple, clever robot design."

# Why am I here today?

To encourage you to join the open community working with Stretch





- Mass adoption determines the future
- Human factors promote adoption
- Open communities accelerate progress

hello robot®



# Mass Adoption of Home Robots Will Enable Embodied AI



**Large Robot  
Foundation Model**

# What matters for technology adoption?

**Perceived Usefulness**

**Perceived Ease of Use**



*Prof. Wendy Rogers introduced me to this model back in 2010 when we began collaborating on home robots.*

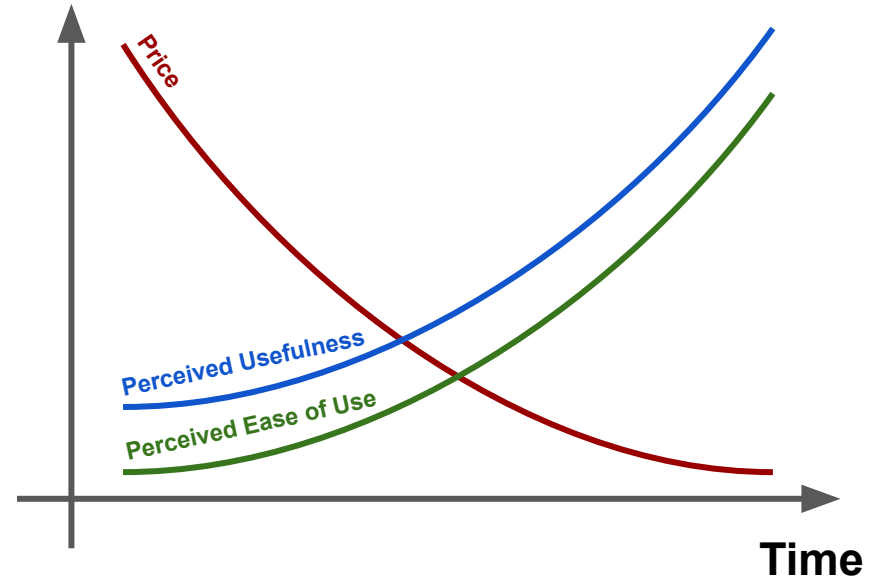
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology\\_acceptance\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_acceptance_model)

# A Simple Model of Technology Adoption

Perceived Usefulness

Perceived Ease of Use

Price

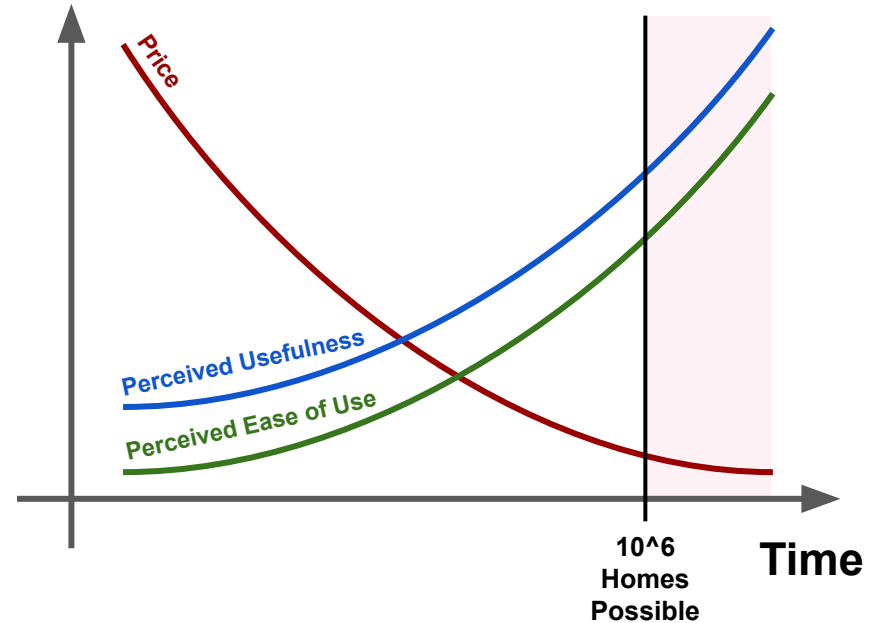


# A Simple Model of Technology Adoption

Perceived Usefulness

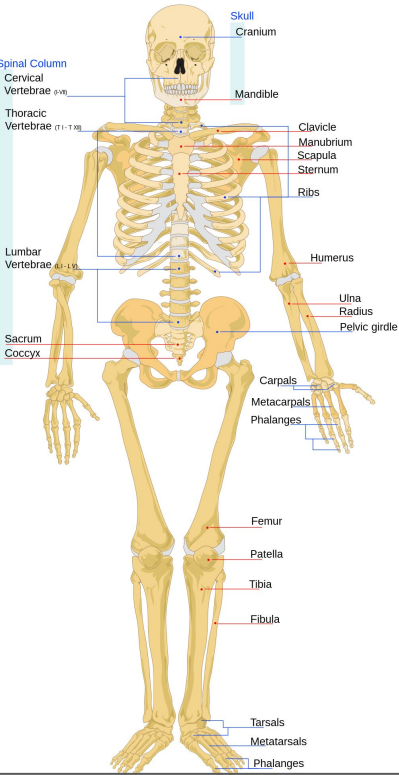
Perceived Ease of Use

Price



# Humanoids look useful and easy to work with!

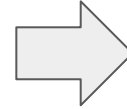
*but practical considerations limit adoption in homes*



More degrees of freedom

Higher center of mass

Not statically stable



Higher cost & more failure points

More energy when it falls

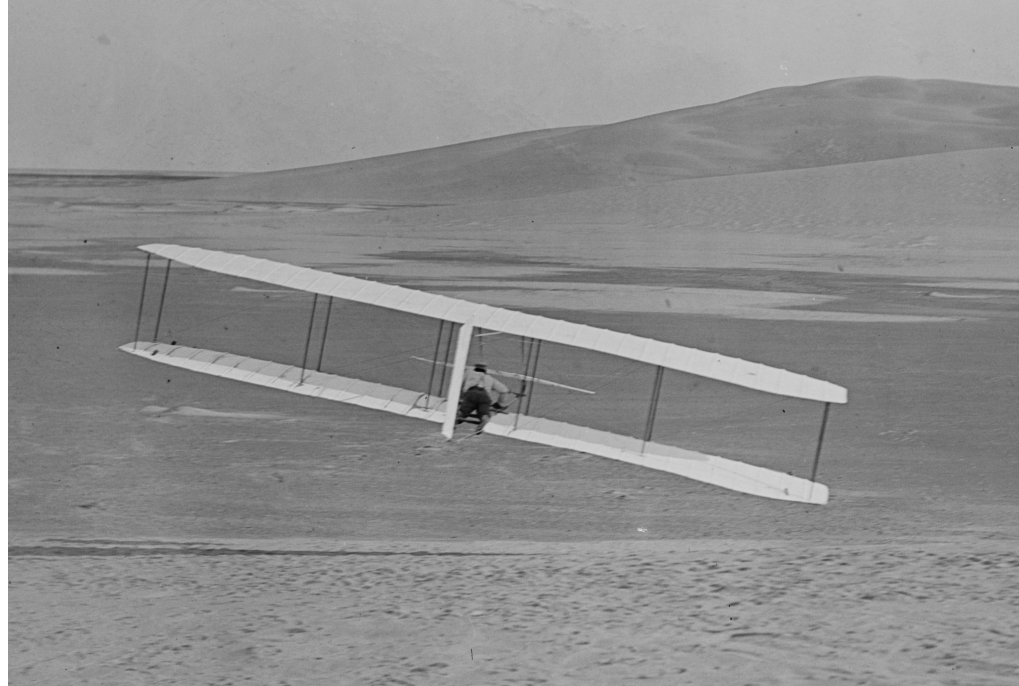
Greater fall risk & awkward when off

# Biological Inspiration Can Be Misleading



**Edward Purkis Frost's ornithopter from 1902**

*E. P. Frost appears to have been a respected member of the [Royal Aeronautical Society](#), since he was its president from 1908 to 1911.*



**Wright Glider from 1902**



Your PC ran into a problem and needs to restart. We're just collecting some error info, and then we'll restart for you.

20% complete



For more information about this issue and possible fixes, visit <https://www.windows.com/stopcode>

If you call a support person, give them this info:

Stop code: CRITICAL\_PROCESS\_DIED



# Have you ever?

Had a device run out of batteries unexpectedly (e.g., phone, laptop)?

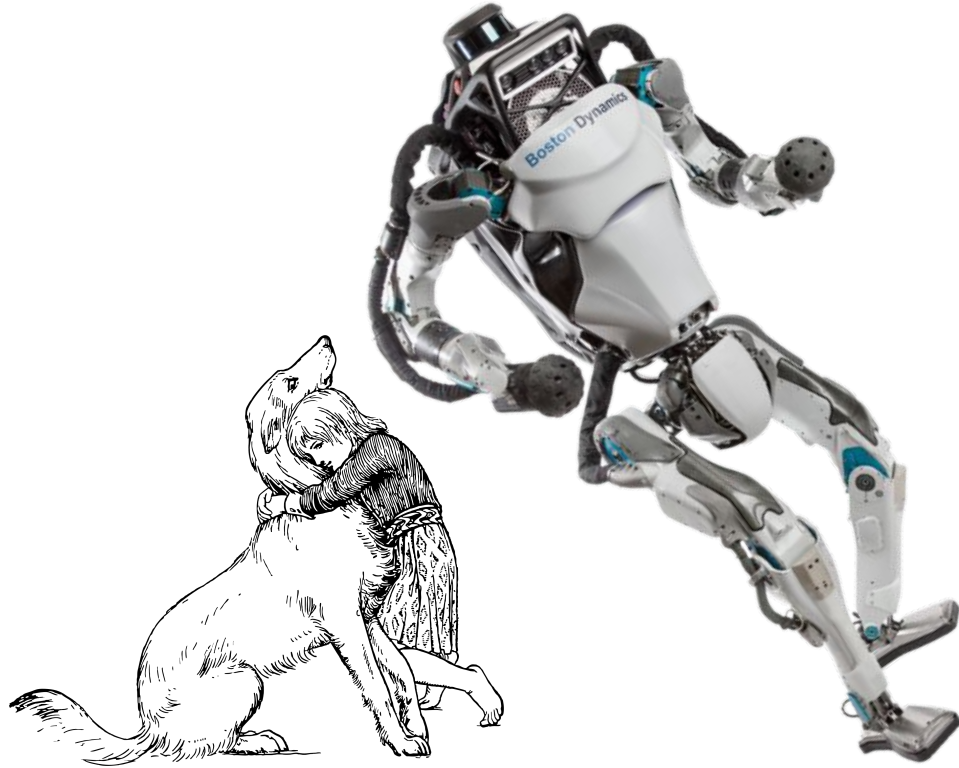
Had a computer fail unexpectedly (e.g., blue screen of death)?

Had a kid or pet do something unexpected around you?

Been careful around an older adult due to concerns about them falling?

**Stumbled in your own home?**

# It Just Takes One Fall



Can we do better than  
humanoids in homes?

# What matters for technology adoption?

**Perceived Usefulness**

**Perceived Ease of Use**



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[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology\\_acceptance\\_model](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technology_acceptance_model)

# I am Only Talking about Indoor Mobile Manipulation

- Designed & Built for People
  - Flat floors
  - Cartesian structure
  - Human scale [1]
- Diverse inhabitants
  - Children
  - Older adults
  - People with disabilities
  - Pets
- Examples in the United States
  - 127M Occupied housing units [2]
  - 6M Commercial buildings [3]



[1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_scale](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_scale)

[2] <https://data.census.gov/table?q=housing&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S2504>

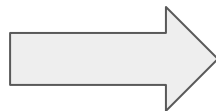
[3] <https://css.umich.edu/publications/factsheets/built-environment/commercial-buildings-factsheet>

# The Core Design Problem

**Smaller**

**Lighter Weight**

**Lower Cost**



**Shorter Reach**

**Lower Force**

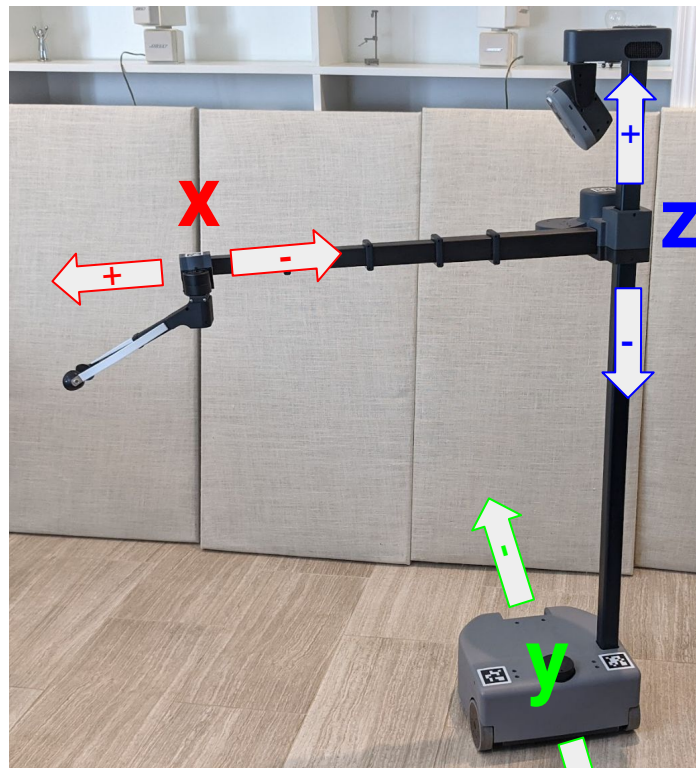
**Less Dexterity**



# The Design of Stretch

[The Design of Stretch: A Compact, Lightweight Mobile Manipulator for Indoor Human Environments](#), Charles C. Kemp, Aaron Edsinger, Henry M. Clever and Blaine Matulevich, IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA), 2022. [[4-min video presentation](#)]

# Manipulation Depends on the Mobile Base



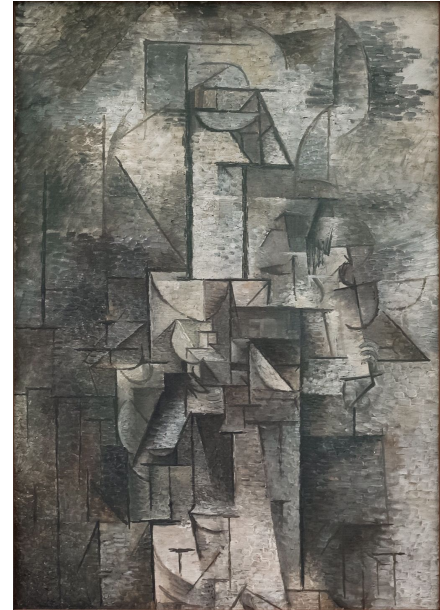
Cartesian Manipulation Mode



# Robotic Cubism

- Dimensions matched to human environments
- The human form deconstructed and reassembled

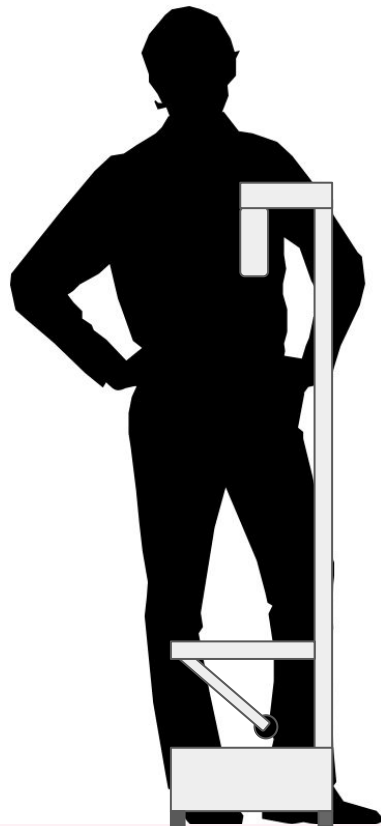
[La Femme au Violon - Pablo Picasso, 1911](#)



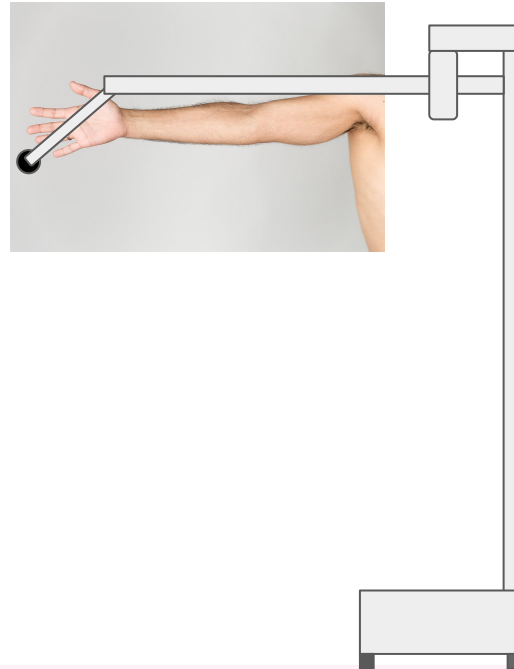
“In Cubist artwork, objects are analyzed, broken up and reassembled in an abstracted form”

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cubism>

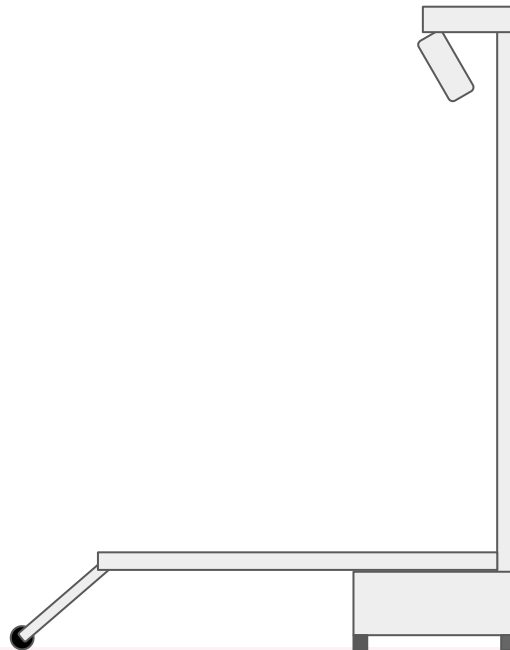
# < 50th Percentile Hip Width



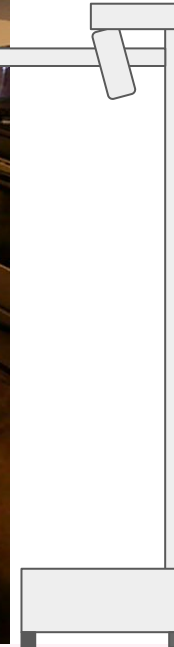
# 50th Percentile Arm Length



# Reaches the Floor

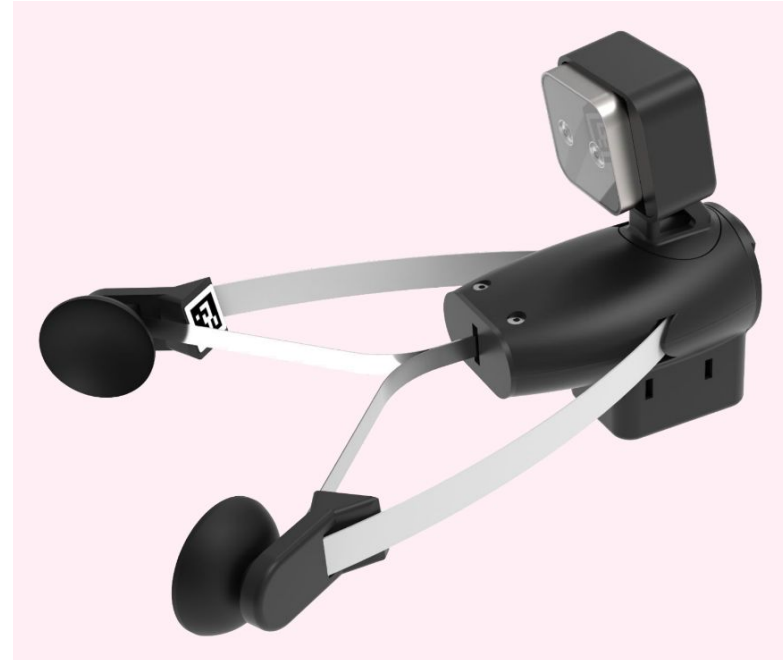


# Reaches 36" Countertops



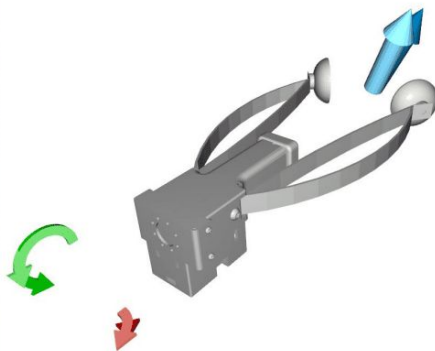
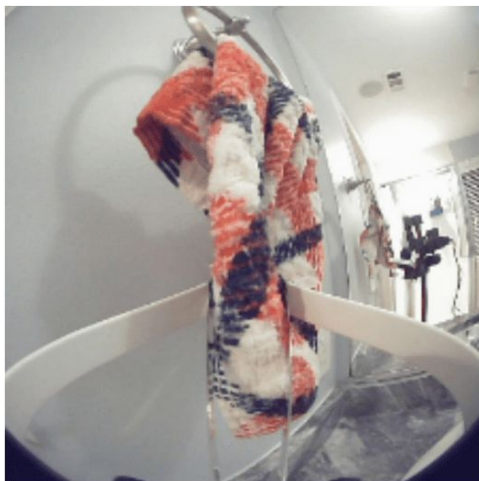
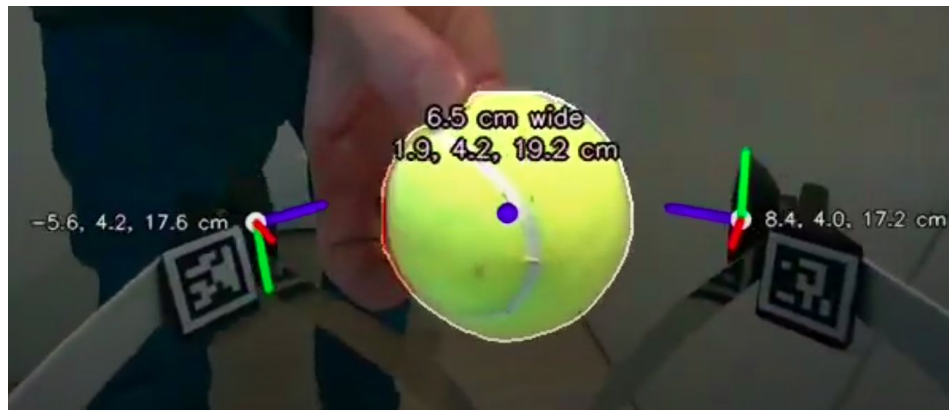
# Soft Gripper

- Core design tested in 1000s of homes
  - Initially selected based on Amazon reviews
  - Used by staff at Disney World!
- Reduces consequences of unintended contact



# Soft Gripper

- 6 DOF pose for each fingertip
- Compliance enables visual estimation of forces, torques, and contact pressure.



**Force/Torque Sensing for Soft Grippers using an External Camera**, Jeremy A. Collins, Patrick Grady, Charles C. Kemp, IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation (ICRA), 2023.



**Visual Contact Pressure Estimation for Grippers in the Wild**, Jeremy A. Collins, Cody Houff, Patrick Grady, Charles C. Kemp, Accepted to IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems (IROS), 2023.

# It's Now Easy To Try Another Gripper



Stretch 3 has

- Single-button exchange of tools
- USB port
- Dynamixel connector



[Prof. Veronica Santos](#) from UCLA  
with a humanoid hand on her Stretch RE1  
(It wasn't easy back then!)



**24.5 kg (54 lb)**



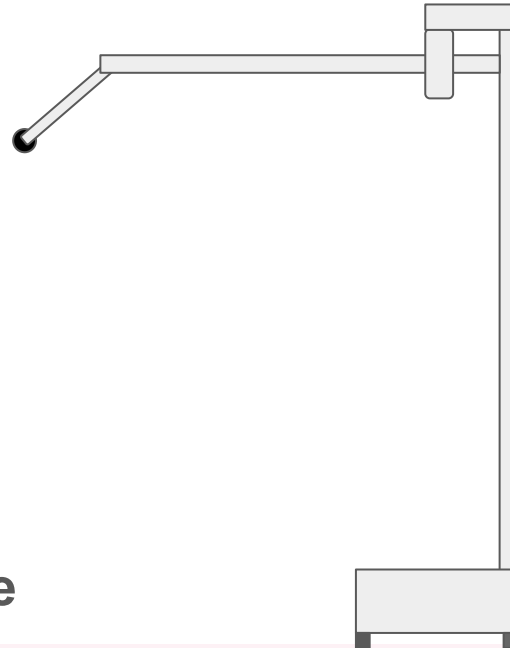
# Easy to Transport to Real Homes

three robots in a hatchback



# Low Center of Mass

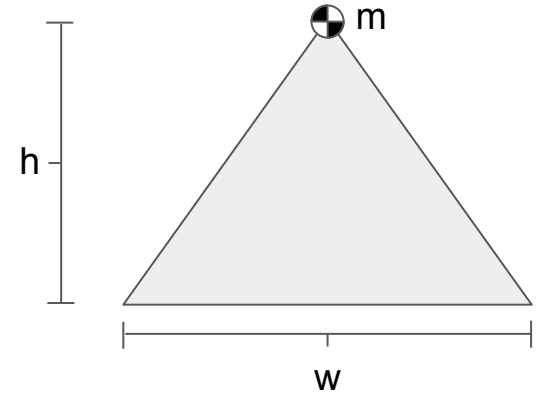
lightweight arm

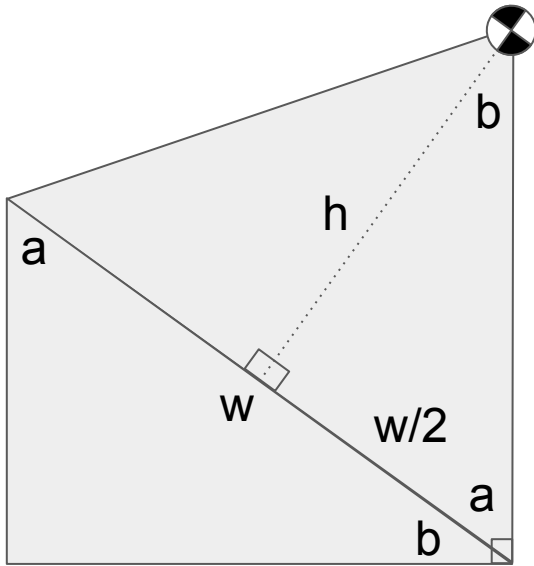


heavy mobile base

# Gravitational Potential Energy as a Measure of Ease of Use

- $U = mgh$ 
  - $U$  : gravitational potential energy
  - $m$  : mass of the robot
  - $g$  : gravitational acceleration ( $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ )
  - $h$  : height of the center of mass
  - SI unit : joule
- Fall risk
  - $mgh$  models the energy transferred when the robot falls
- Difficulty moving the robot manually
  - $m$  indicates how hard it would be to lift manually
- Robot's base width
  - $h$  is proportional to  $w$ , the width of the robot's base required for static stability on a sloped surface





$h$  is proportional to the minimum width,  $w$ , of the robot's base of support for static stability on a slope with angle  $b$

$$h \propto w$$

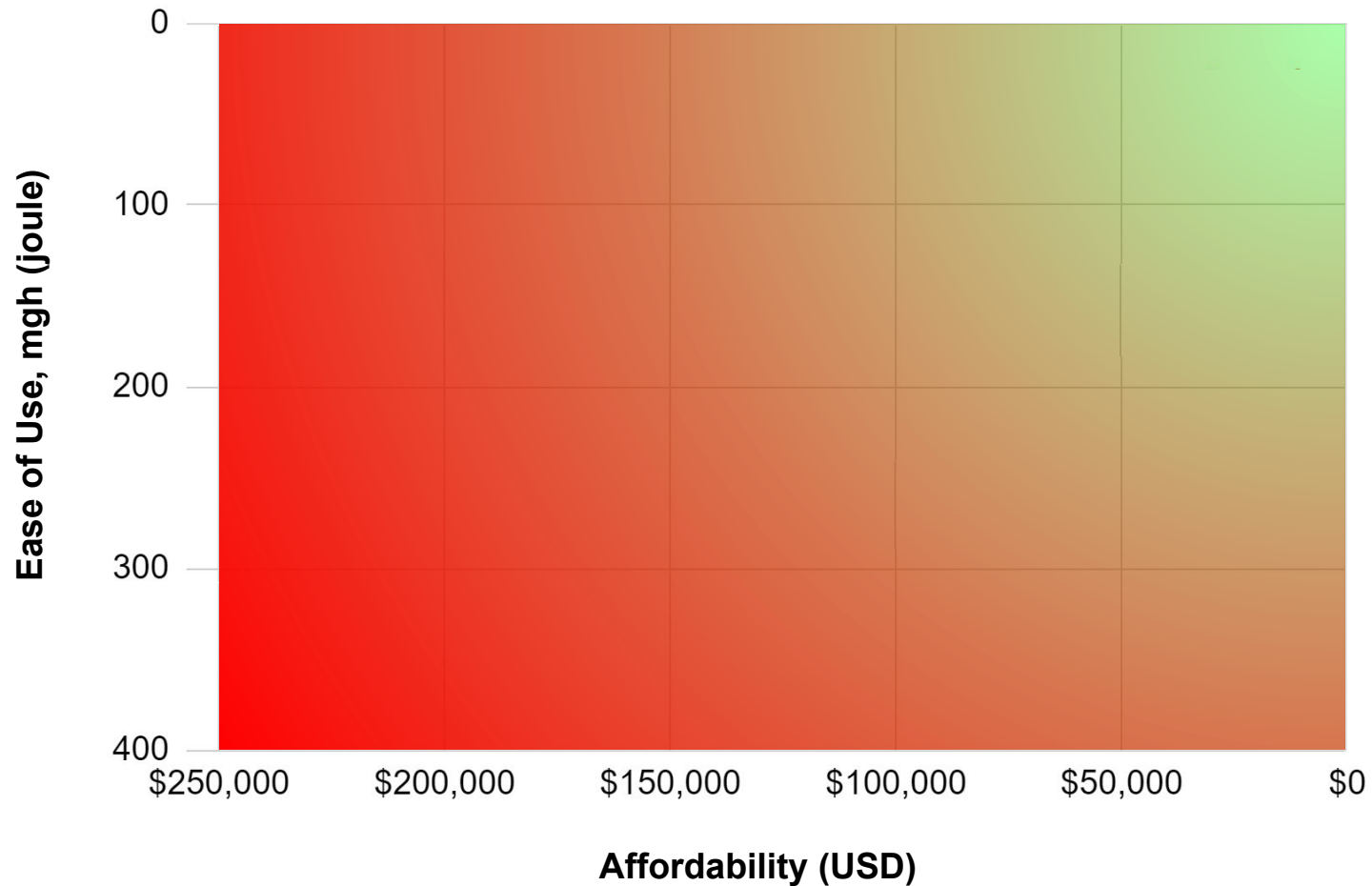
$$\frac{w}{2} = \tan(b)h$$

$$h = \frac{w}{2 \tan(b)}$$

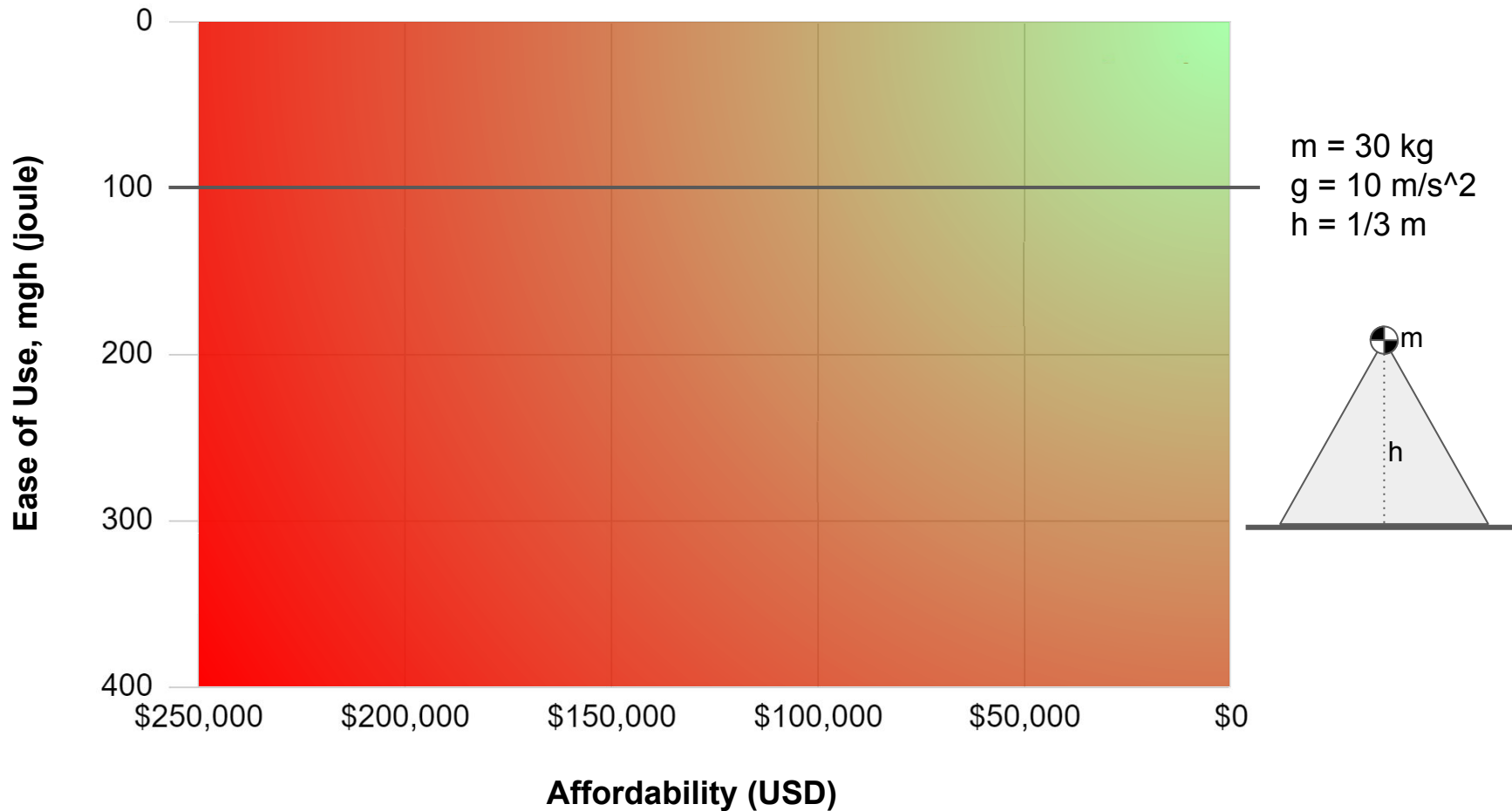
Where

$b$  : maximum slope before tipping  
 $w$  : minimum base width before tipping

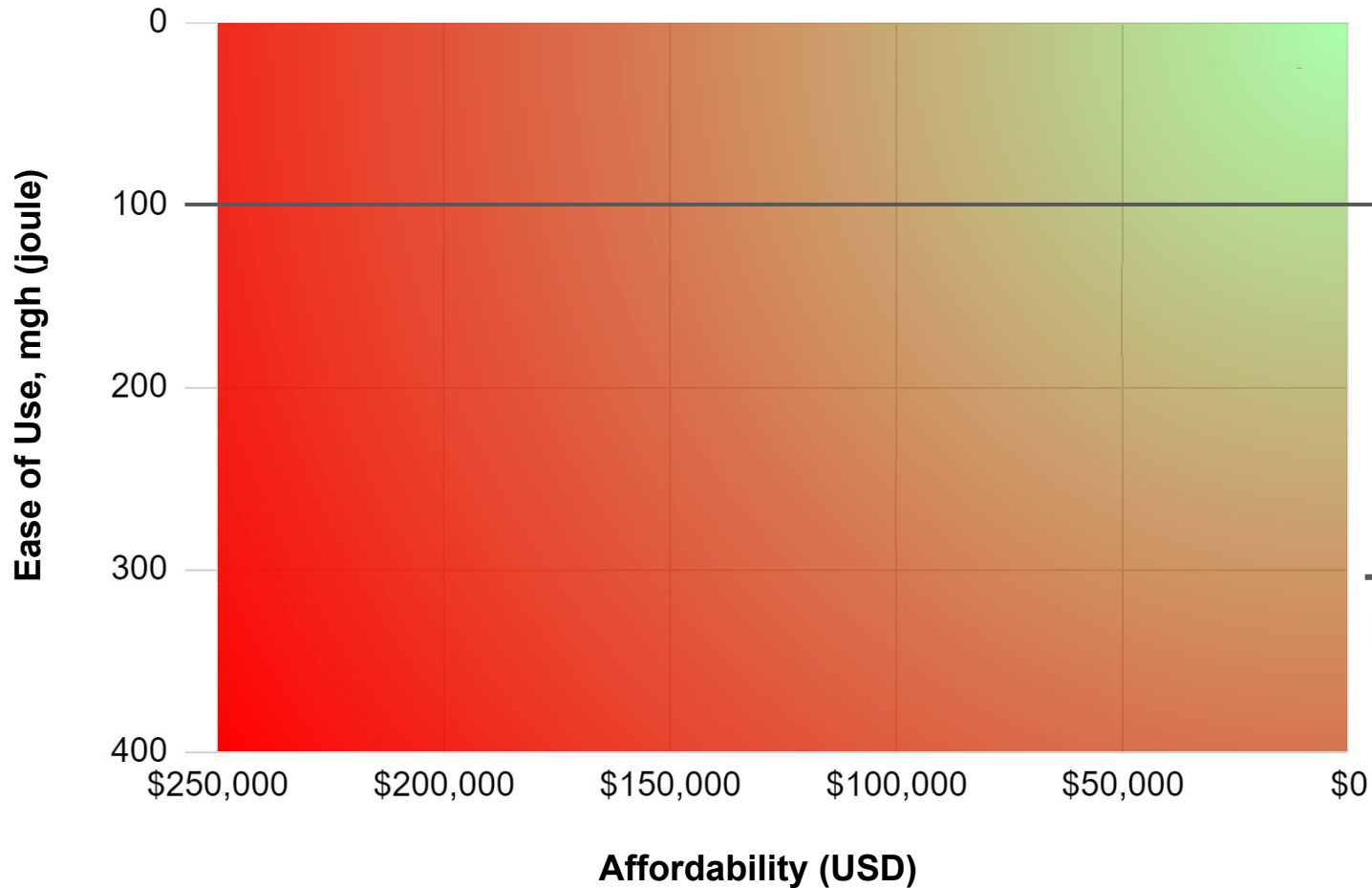
# Useful Human-scale Mobile Manipulators



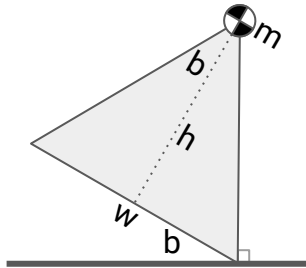
# Useful Human-scale Mobile Manipulators



# Useful Human-scale Mobile Manipulators

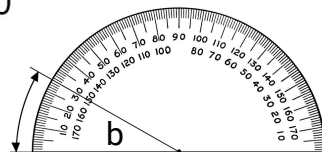


$m = 30 \text{ kg}$   
 $g = 10 \text{ m/s}^2$   
 $h = 1/3 \text{ m}$



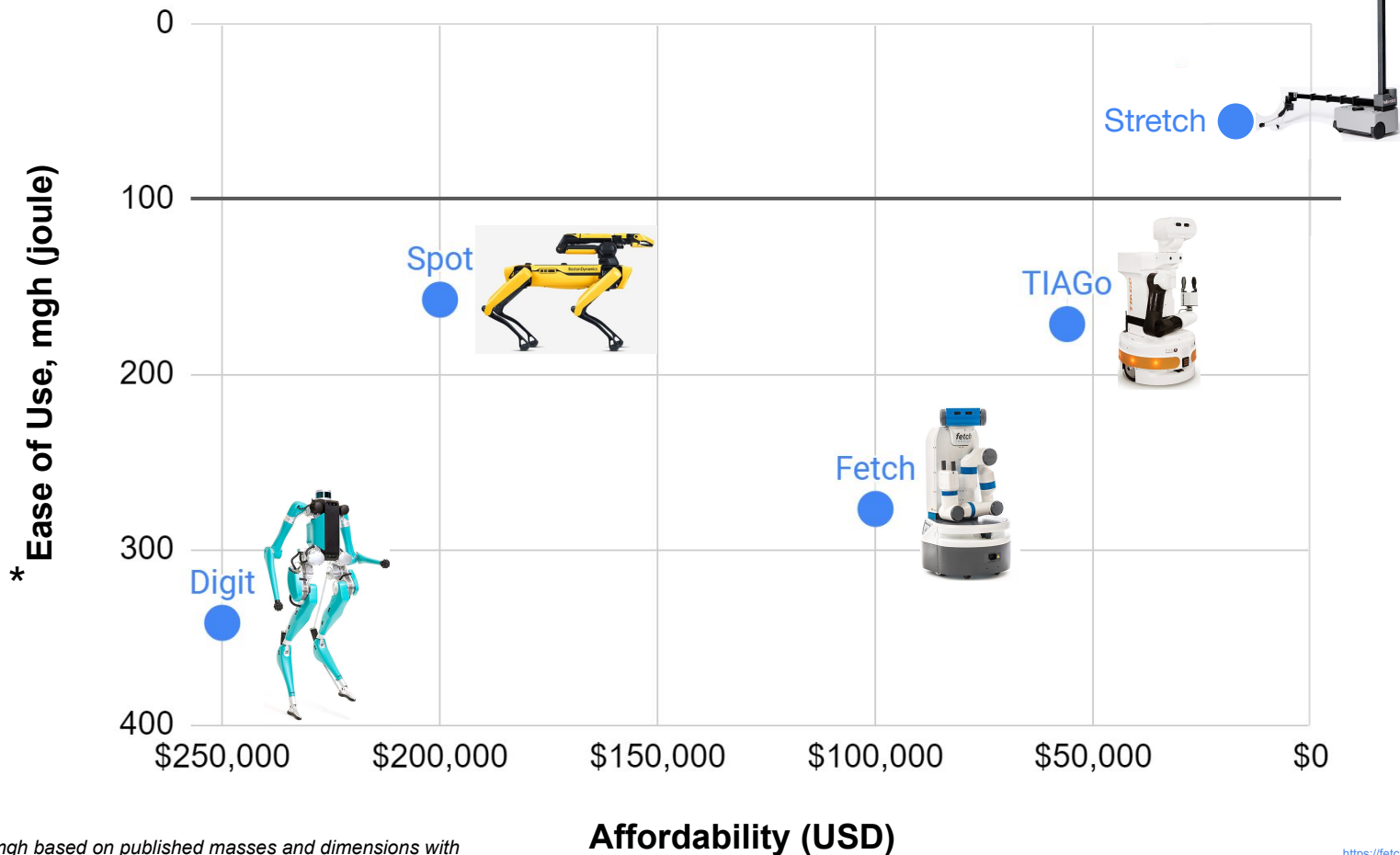
$$b = \arctan\left(\frac{w}{2h}\right)$$

$w = 0.4 \text{ m}$   
 $b = 31 \text{ deg}$





# Useful Human-scale Mobile Manipulators

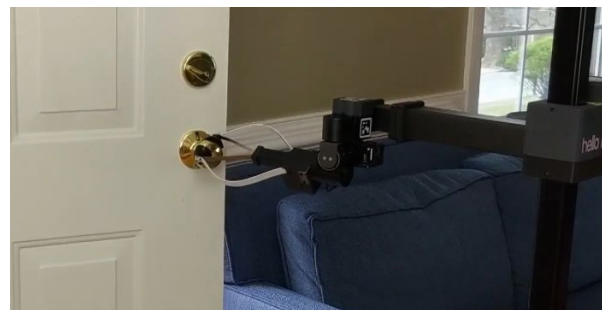
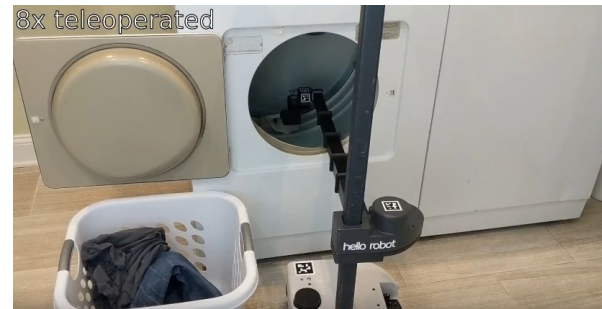


\* I estimated mgh based on published masses and dimensions with arms and lifts lowered. There could be significant errors.

Is Stretch capable?

# Early Teleoperated Examples

performed in 2020, except for door opening in 2021

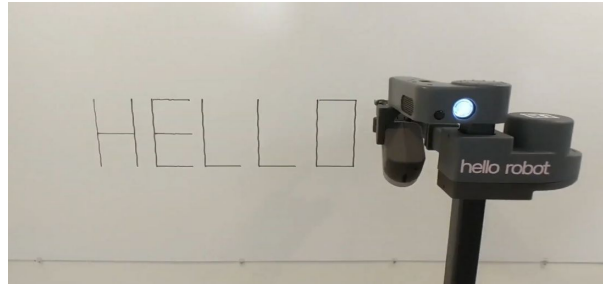


<https://www.youtube.com/c/HelloRobot/videos>  
<https://github.com/hello-robot>

hello robot™

# Early Autonomous Examples (2020)

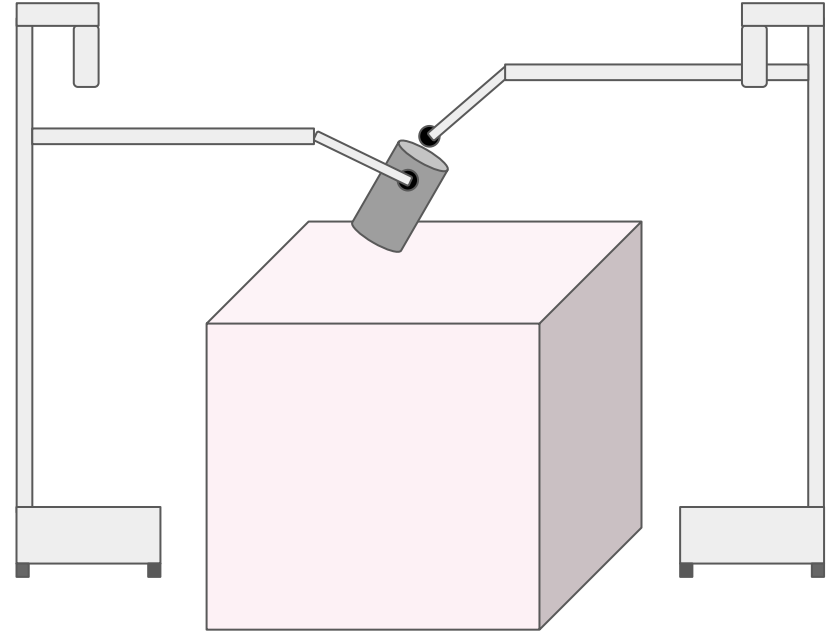
from June & July of 2020



What about bimanual manipulation?

# Two Stretch Robots Can Function as One

- Simplifies adoption
  - Start with one robot, which is very capable!
  - Monolithic two-armed robots are inherently bigger and more complex
- Simplifies deployment
  - Easier to move two small compact robots
- Increases versatility
  - Variable distance between the arms
  - Objects in between the arms





Teleoperated  
4x Speedup

Mass adoption of new technologies  
determines the future



# Technology Revolutions Build on One Another and Mass Adoption was Transformative

[Home computers](#)

[The Internet](#)

[The World Wide Web](#)

[Smartphones](#)

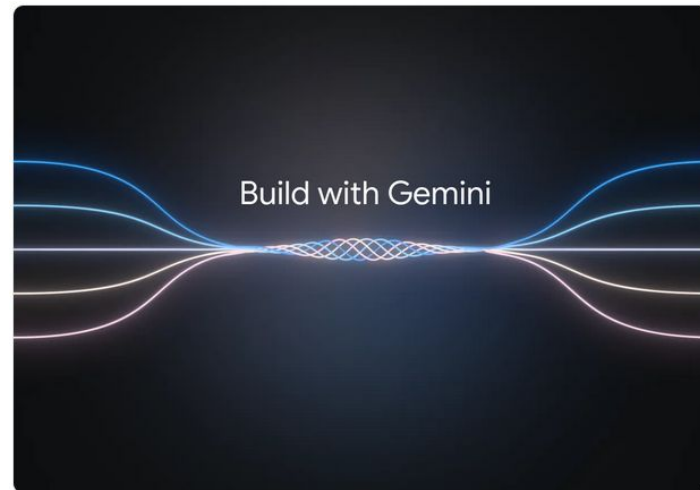
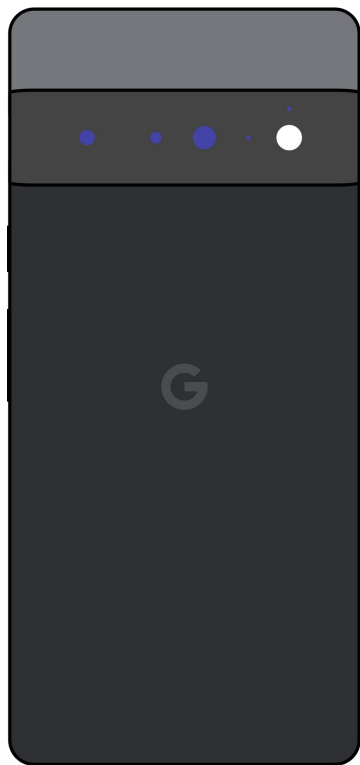
[Generative AI](#)

Home robots



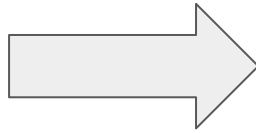
# Mass Adoption of Smartphones Enabled Generative AI

Captures the Language, Imagery and Sound of Human Experience



# Mass Adoption of Home Robots Will Enable Embodied AI

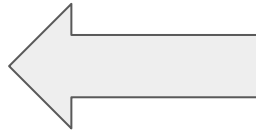
Captures Physical Human Experience



**Large Robot  
Foundation Model**

# Embodied AI Will Enable Mass Adoption of Home Robots

Emulating Physical Human Experience



**Large Robot  
Foundation Model**



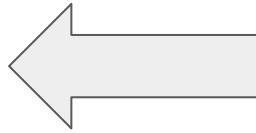
**Home  
Robots**

**Foundation  
Models**

Image from <https://gamerant.com/spider-man-pointing-meme-origins/>

# Embodied AI Will Enable Mass Adoption of Home Robots

Emulating Physical Human Experience



**Small Robot  
Foundation Model**

# A Chicken-or-Egg Problem

- It's not all-or-nothing & iteration is powerful
- Home robots benefit from
  - Models trained on existing Internet-scale data
  - Small robot foundation models
- Embodied AI benefits from robots that are
  - In real homes
  - Performing real tasks
  - Working with real people
- The properties that promote mass adoption help near-term embodied AI

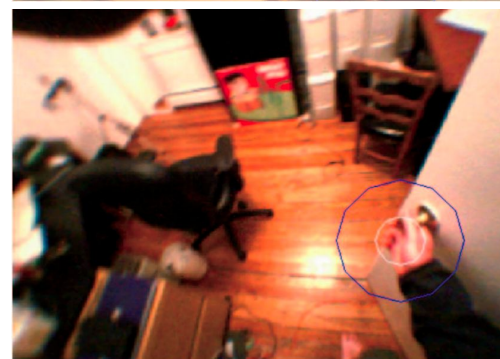
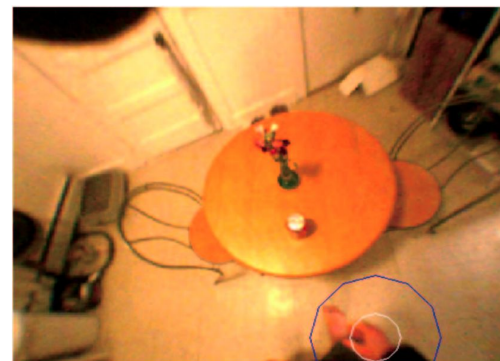
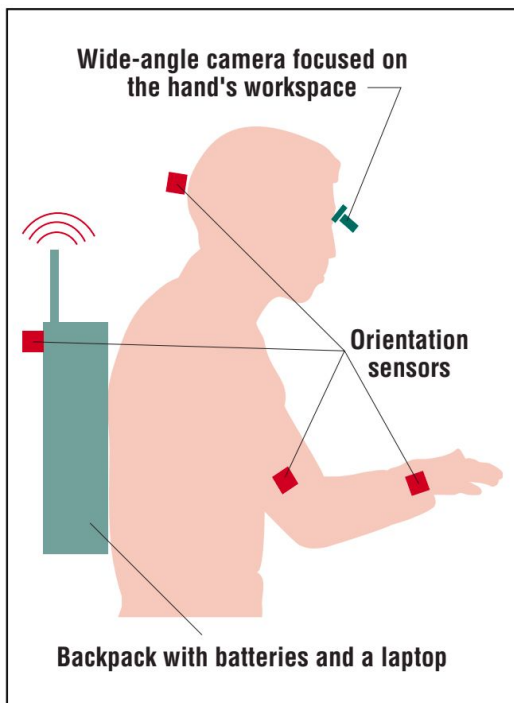


Are real robots required for embodied AI?



# I've tried to find shortcuts

data from two real homes



[Wearables and robots: A shared view](#). Charles C. Kemp, *IEEE Pervasive Computing* 5, no. 3 (2006): 16-20.

[Capturing Everyday Human Manipulation](#). Charles C. Kemp, Poster at the Workshop on Humanoid Manipulation, Robotics: Science & Systems. Cambridge, Massachusetts. June, 2005.

[A wearable system that learns a kinematic model and finds structure in everyday manipulation by using absolute orientation sensors and a camera](#). Charles C. Kemp, PhD thesis, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2005).

# I've tried to find shortcuts

data from six real homes



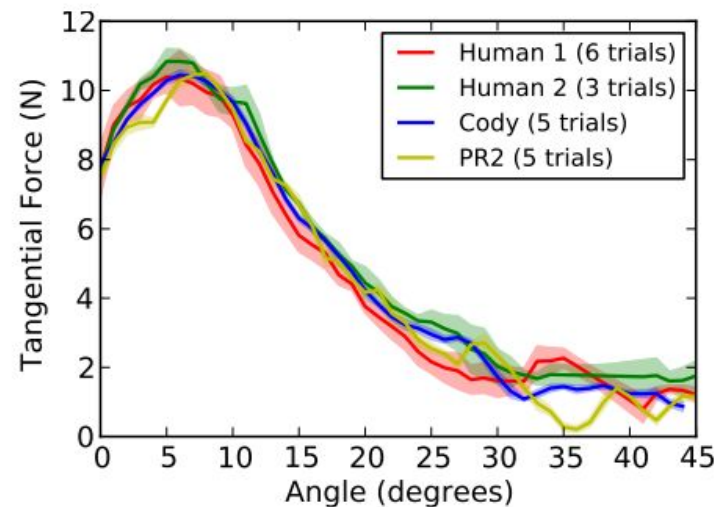
(a) Human



(b) Cody



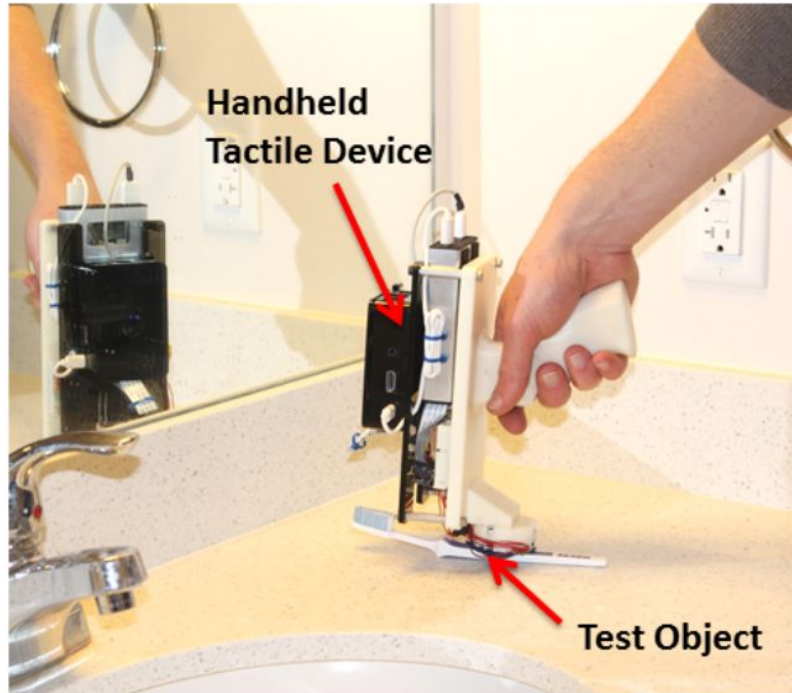
(c) PR2



(d) Measured tangential force

# I've tried to find shortcuts

data from ten real homes



Human Subject

[Data-Driven Thermal Recognition of Contact with People and Objects](#), Tapomayukh Bhattacharjee, Joshua Wade, Yash Chitalia, and Charles C. Kemp, IEEE Haptics Symposium, 2016

[A Handheld Device for the In Situ Acquisition of Multimodal Tactile Sensing Data](#), Joshua Wade, Tapomayukh Bhattacharjee, and Charles C. Kemp, IROS Workshop on See and Touch: 1st Workshop on multimodal sensor-based robot control for HRI and soft manipulation, 2015

# For Home Robots, Anything Other than a Real Robot in a Real Home is an Approximation

- Artificial environments amplify biases
  - Generalizing across real world variation is critical
  - Temptation to improve performance metrics
  - Often neglect inhabitants of homes (people and pets)
- Humans and robots have distinct capabilities
  - Success with a robot may require a nonhuman strategy
  - Complementary capabilities present opportunities
  - For example, robots can be tireless and precise
- Real robots can interact with the real world
  - Active learning via autonomous actions [1]
  - Tightly couple their actions with people & environments
  - **Actually help people**



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spherical\\_cow](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spherical_cow)

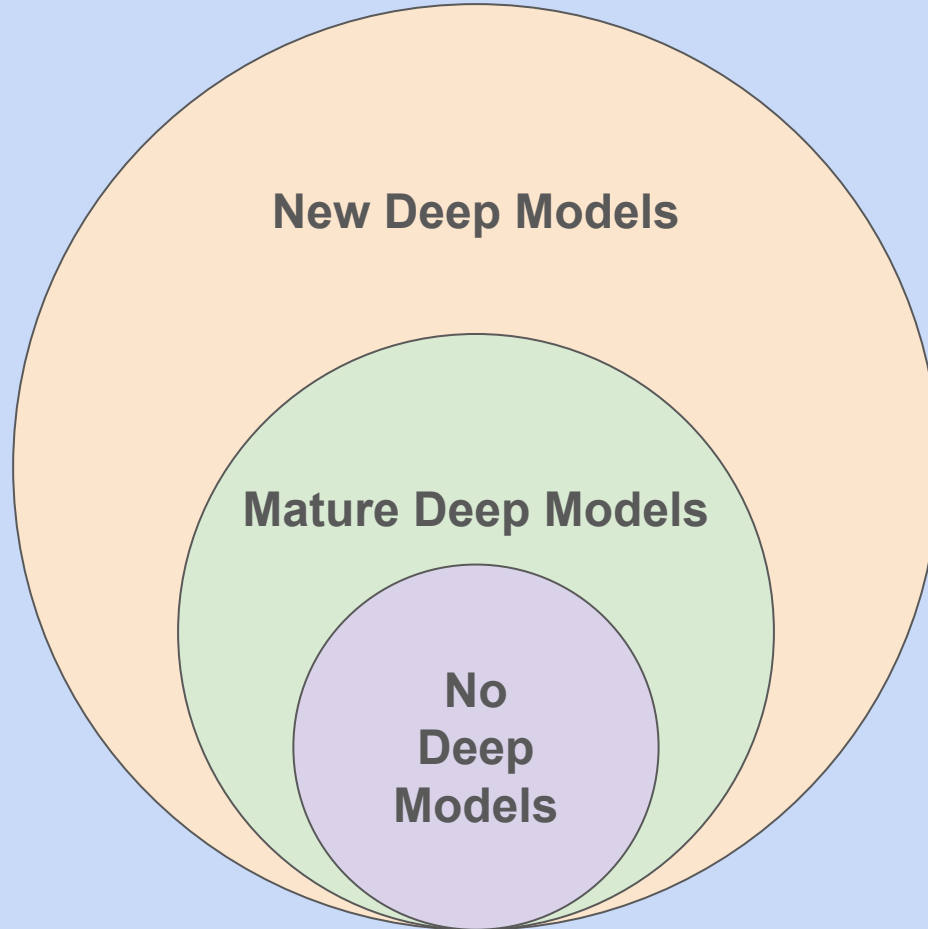
# Open Communities Accelerate Progress

Examples from the Open Community Using Stretch

<https://hello-robot.com/community>

# Home Robot Applications

**AGI**



# Questions to Consider for Each Example

- How can society benefit?
- What AI is currently used?
- How could a foundation model help?
- What could a foundation model learn?

# **Dobb-E from NYU**

<https://dobb-e.com/>

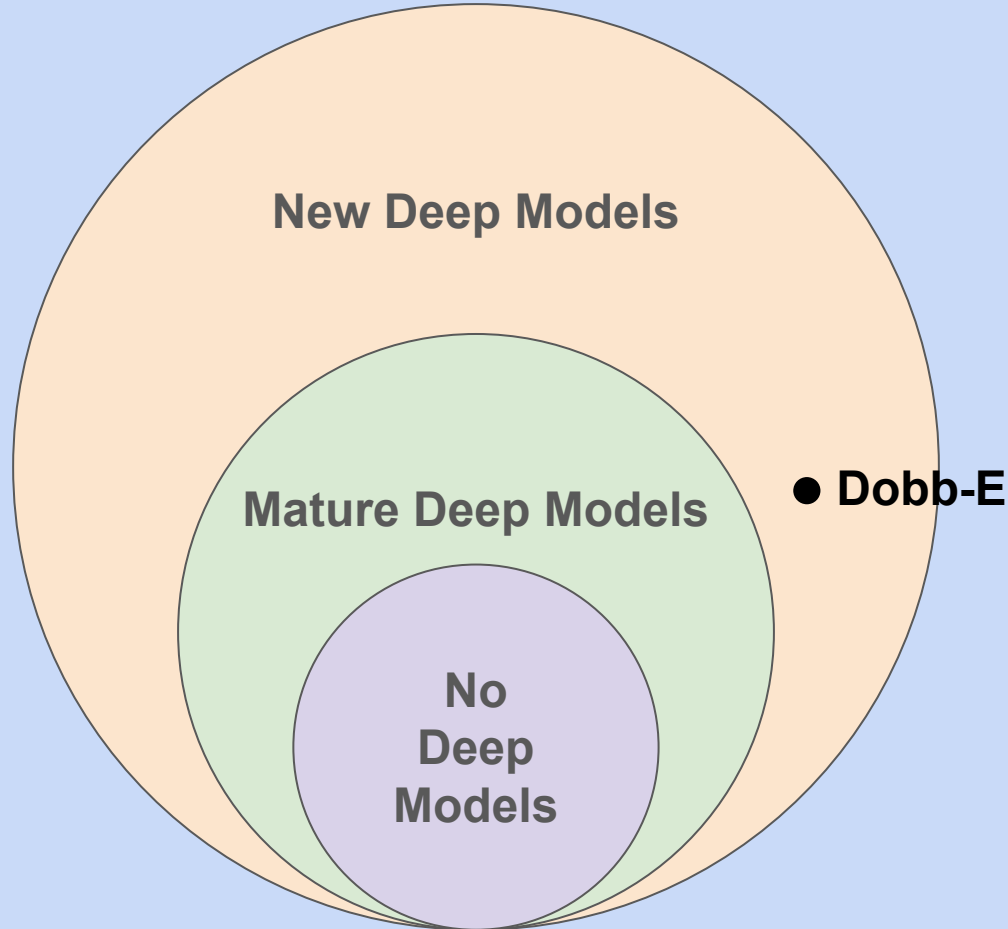
## **Value of Portability**

- Tested in real homes
- Analyzed the challenges



# Home Robot Applications

**AGI**



# Dobb-E

*An open-source, general framework for learning household robotic manipulation*

- 109 tasks
- 10 NYC homes
- 81% success rate
- 20 minutes to learn a new task

[Nur Muhammad "Mahi" Shafiullah\\*](#), [Anant Rai\\*](#), [Haritheja Etukuru](#), [Yiqian Liu](#), [Ishan Misra](#), [Soumith Chintala](#), [Lerrel Pinto](#)

- [Dobb-E in homes](#)
- [Read the paper](#)
- [GitHub repo](#)



# Hardware

*The Stick*

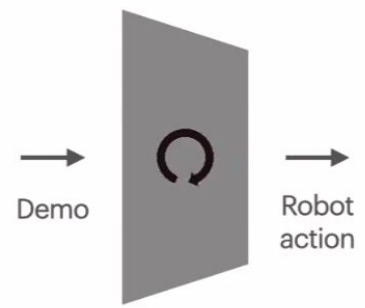


Expand abstract

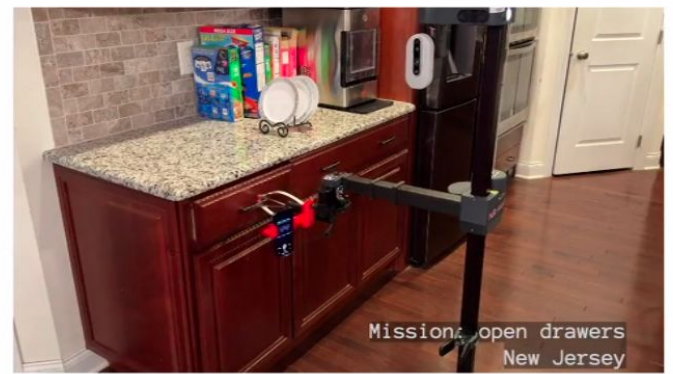
### Dobb-E, in a nutshell:



Collect 24 demos  
5 minutes



Fine-tune model  
15 minutes



Deploy!

# Questions to Consider for Each Example

- How can society benefit?
- What AI is currently used?
- How could a foundation model help?
- What could a foundation model learn?

# Dobb-E

- How can society benefit?
  - Automate tasks that people would prefer not to do themselves
- What AI is currently used?
  - It performs behavior cloning based on human demonstrations
- How could a foundation model help?
  - It fine tunes a foundation model trained on 5620 demonstrations in 22 New York homes with a human-operated approximation to Stretch's gripper
- What could a foundation model learn?
  - More tasks! Better performance!

# Stretch with Stretch from Emory, Georgia Tech and TRI

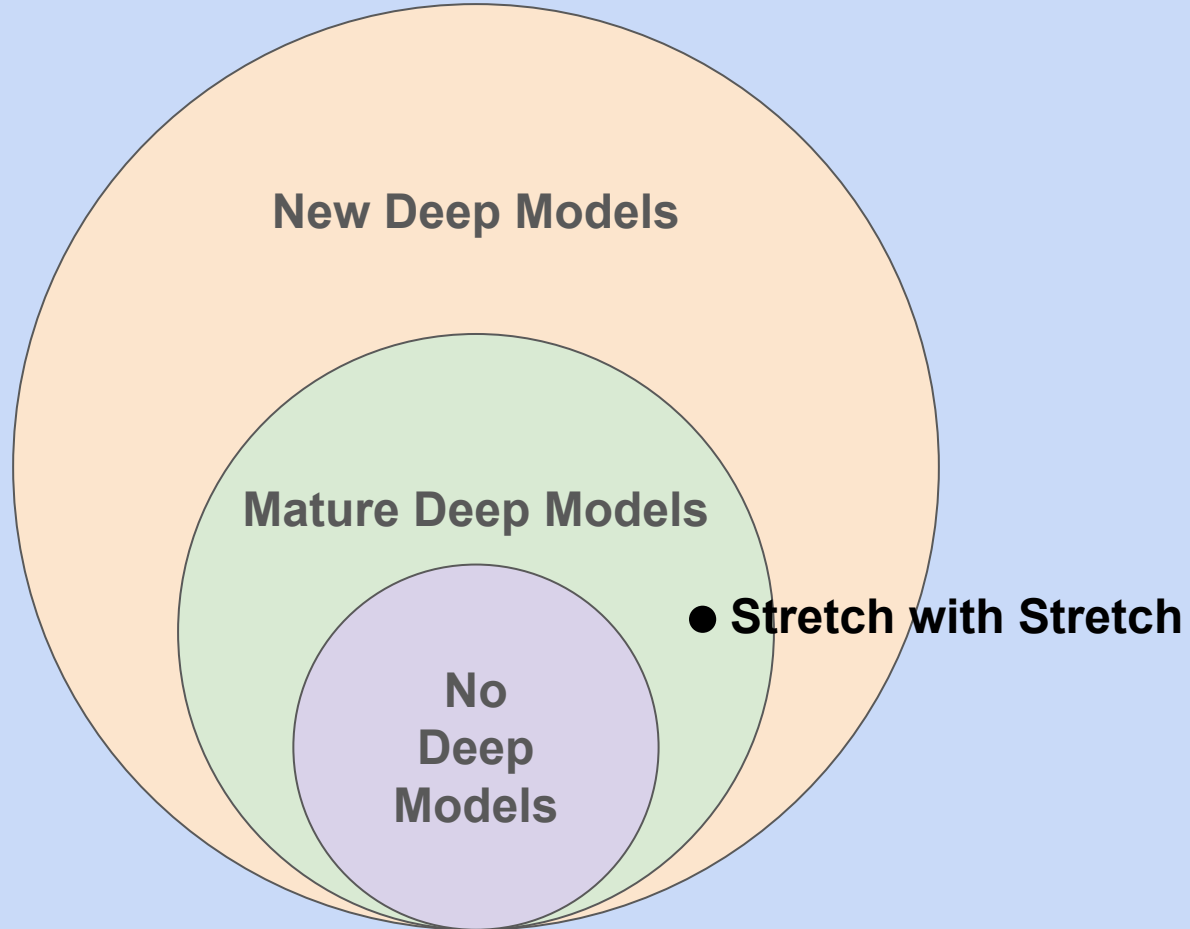
<https://healthcare-robotics.github.io/sws/>

## Value of Ease of Use

- Multidisciplinary team
- Discovered new tasks
- Evaluated with real users

# Home Robot Applications

**AGI**





# The Original Project Team

grad & undergrad students - robotics, CS, and BME



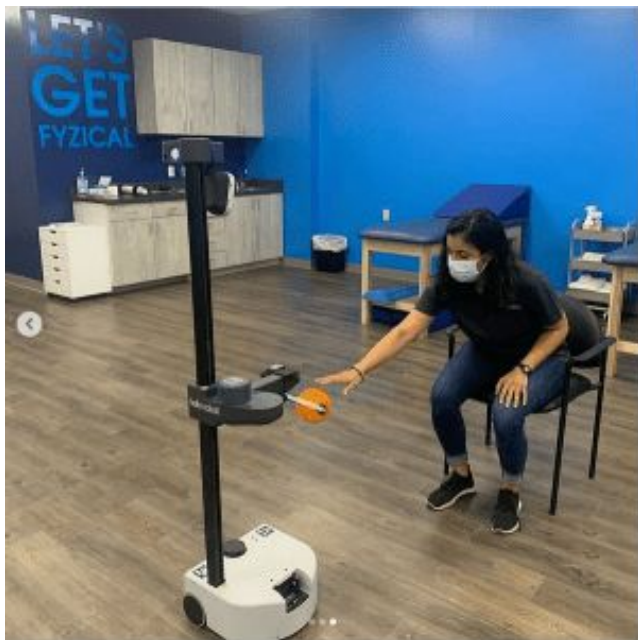
Zexuan Liu, Kendra Washington, Madeline Beatty, Arjun Majumdar, and Matt Lamsey  
<https://youtu.be/33iy9St0hBw>

# A Novel Exercise Game for People with Parkinson's Disease



<https://sites.gatech.edu/robotic-caregivers/2021-fall/>

# Discovered New Task by Taking Stretch Into the Real World



fyzical\_chastain Last week, we had the awesome opportunity to meet with a research group from @georgiatech and discuss the future of technology in physical therapy - and test out this cute little robot named "Stretch"! For people who have Parkinson's Disease (PD), physical therapy involves retraining the brain to correctly perceive the amplitude of the body's movements. External targets provide feedback - did you reach/ lean/ kick far enough or not? This team is working on optimizing a robot to generate an external target, measure outcomes, and provide consistent repetitions. We are looking forward to seeing their progress! Thanks guys!

\*  
\*  
\*

<https://sites.gatech.edu/robotic-caregivers/2021-fall/>

# The Team Grew After the Class



**Prof. Madeleine Hackney**

**Project Lead**

Neurokinesiology Lab  
Emory School of Medicine  
Department of Medicine  
Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology  
Atlanta VA



**Dr. Meredith Wells, PhD**

Post-doctoral Research Fellow  
Emory School of Medicine  
Division of Geriatrics and Gerontology



**Elizabeth Nguyen**

Biology / Biological Sciences  
Undergraduate  
Emory



**Arielle Wallenstein**

Neuroscience and Behavioral Biology  
Undergraduate  
Emory



*Until September 2023*  
**Prof. Charlie Kemp**

Georgia Institute of Technology  
Department of Biomedical Engineering



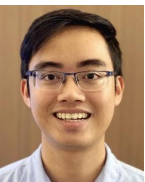
**Matt Lamsey**

**Technical Lead**  
Robotics PhD student  
Georgia Tech



**You Liang Tan**

Computer Science  
MS student  
Georgia Tech



**Louis Nguyen**

Computer Science and Engineering  
MS student  
Georgia Tech



**Jerry Feldman**

**Test Pilot & Domain Expert**  
Ambassador for the  
Parkinson's Foundation



**Dr. Naveen Kuppuswamy, PhD**

Senior Research Scientist  
**Toyota Research Institute**



**Team that developed the original concept**

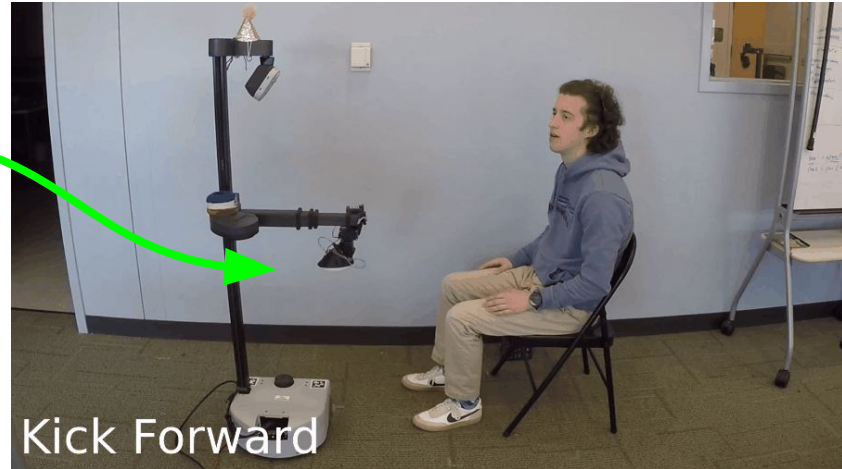
Class: [Robotic Caregivers, Fall 2021](#)

Team Members: Zexuan Liu, Kendra Washington,  
Madeline Beatty, Arjun Majumdar, and Matt Lamsey

# Opportunities for Robot-assisted Physical Therapy

[Soft-bubble end effector](#) from the Toyota Research Institute

A. Alspach, K. Hashimoto, N. Kuppuswamy and R. Tedrake, "[Soft-bubble: A highly compliant dense geometry tactile sensor for robot manipulation](#)," 2019 2nd IEEE International Conference on Soft Robotics (RoboSoft), Seoul, Korea (South), 2019, pp. 597-604



- Reduce caregiver burden in clinics and homes
- Increase frequency and quality of exercise [1]
- Quantitatively track progress and adherence
- Collect clinically-relevant functional measurements

[1] Mak, M. *et. al.* "[Long-term effects of exercise and physical therapy in people with Parkinson's Disease](#)." *Nature Reviews Neurology* 13, 689-703 (2017).

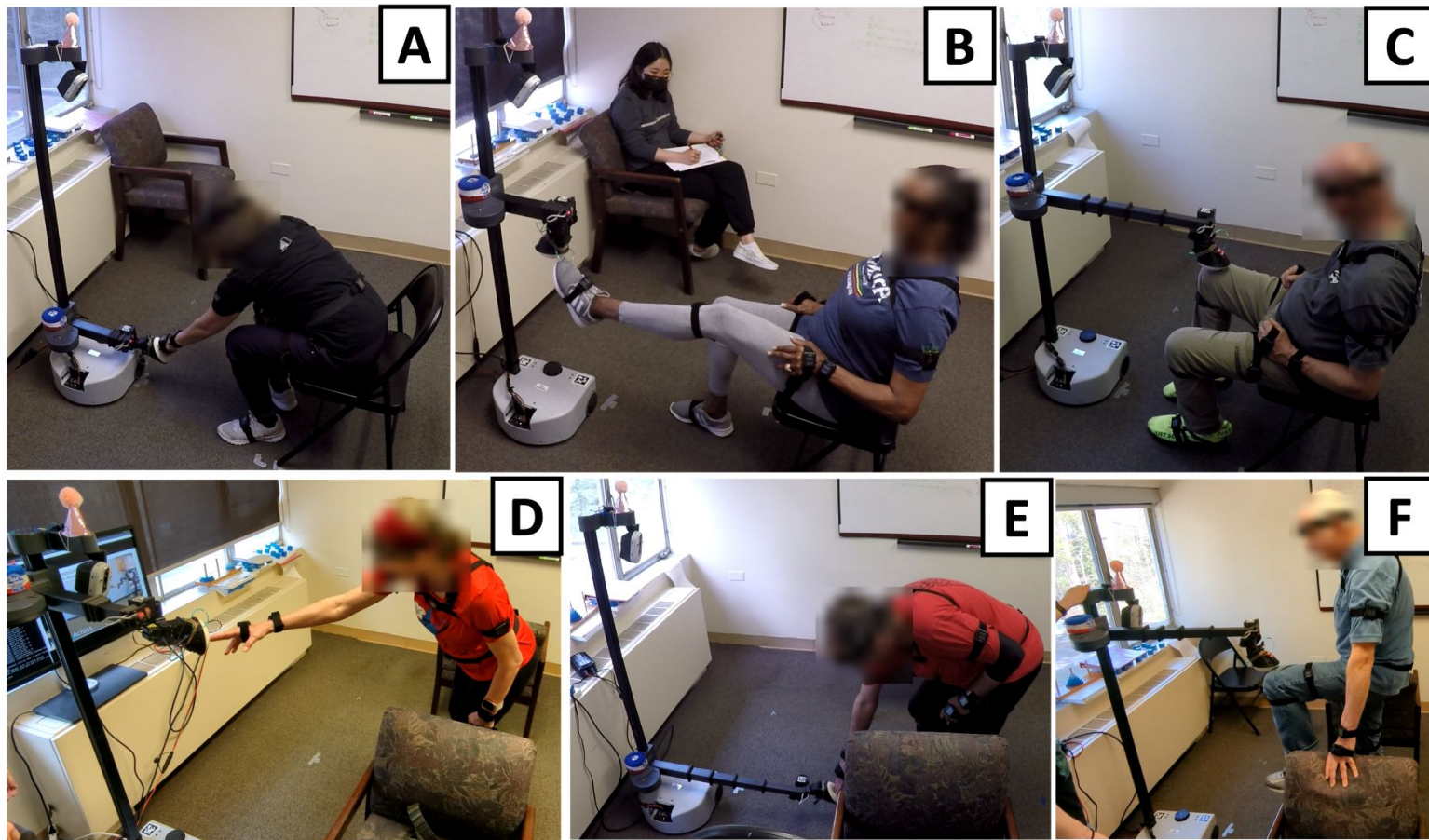
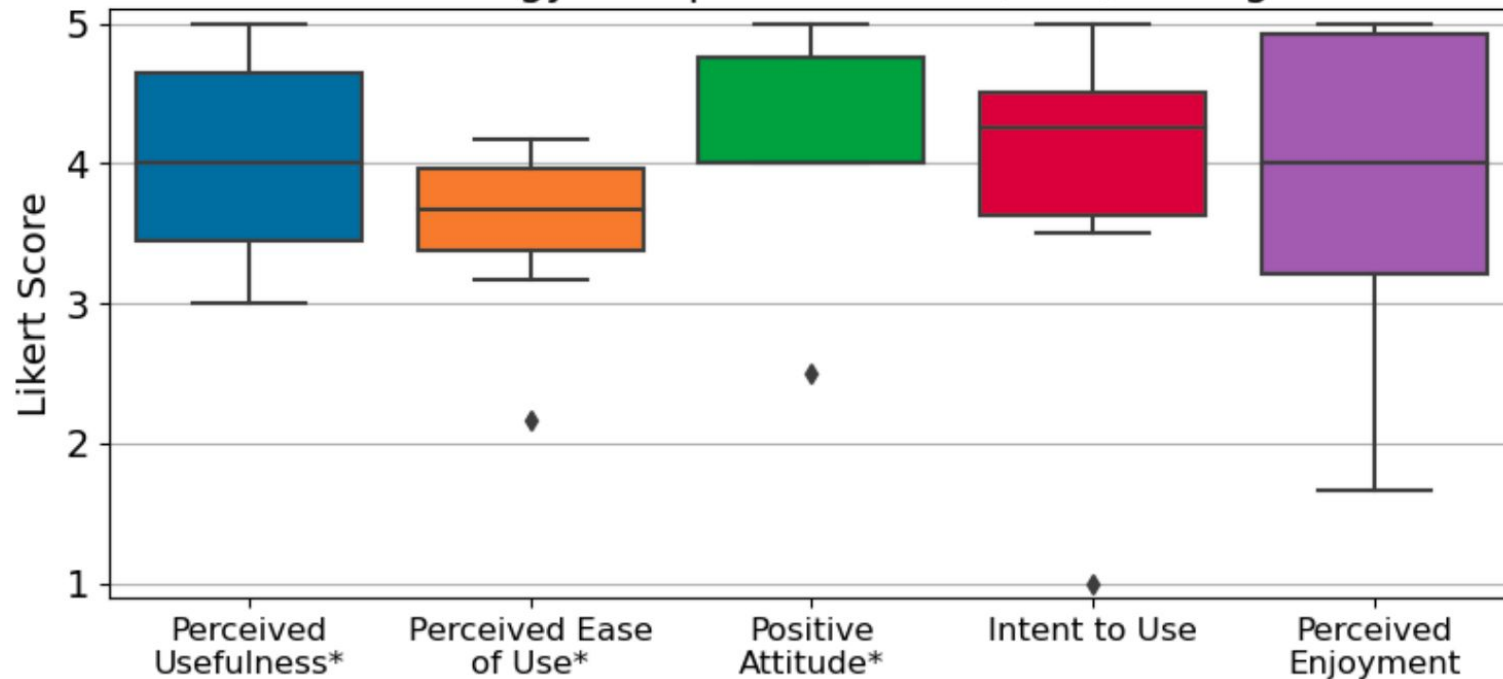


Fig. 4: We performed a user study with 10 people with PD. (A-C) Participants performing seated reaching, kicking, and calf raise exercises. (D-F) Participants performing standing reach across, reach down, and high knees exercises. Chairs were placed near the participant as safety devices for the standing exercises.

# First Published Results

10 people with Parkinson's disease, 1 hour each, 6 exercises

## Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) Ratings



**Stretch with Stretch: Physical Therapy Exercise Games Led by a Mobile Manipulator.** Matthew Lamsey, You Liang Tan, Meredith D. Wells, Madeline Beatty, Zexuan Liu, Arjun Majumdar, Kendra Washington, Jerry Feldman, Naveen Kuppaswamy, Elizabeth Nguyen, Arielle Wallenstein, Madeleine E. Hackney, Charles C. Kemp, **accepted to ICRA 2024.** ([website with videos](#))

# Questions to Consider for Each Example

- How can society benefit?
- What AI is currently used?
- How could a foundation model help?
- What could a foundation model learn?



# Stretch with Stretch

- How can society benefit?
  - Improve health of people with Parkinson's disease and reduce the workload of physical therapists
- What AI is currently used?
  - A deep model and RGBD camera estimate 3D skeletal models for personalized exercise
- How could a foundation model help?
  - Coaching, increasing engagement, creating new exercises, ...
- What could a foundation model learn?
  - How people move and make contact during exercise, common errors people make, methods used by professional physical therapists, ...

# Robots for Humanity

from Henry & Jane Evans, UIUC, UW, Hello Robot and others!

<https://spectrum.ieee.org/stretch-assistive-robot>

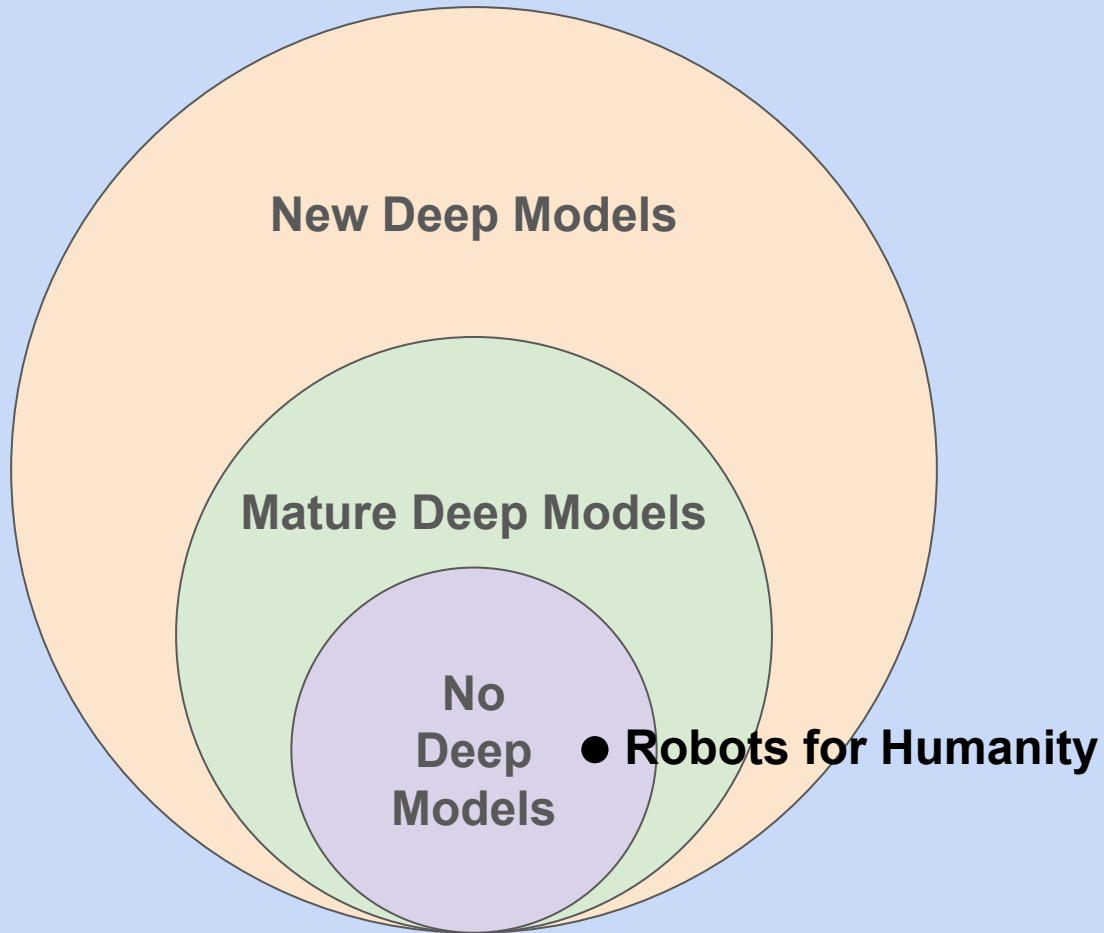
## Value of an Open Community

- Large multidisciplinary team
- Discovering new tasks
- Promising for early adoption



# Home Robot Applications

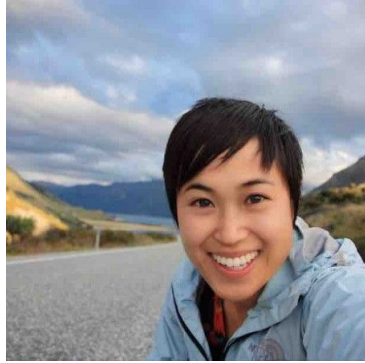
**AGI**



# The Power of a Community with an Open Platform



[Henry & Jane Evans](#)  
Robots for Humanity  
leads



[Dr. Vy Nguyen](#)  
Hello Robot lead



[Prof. Wendy Rogers](#)  
UIUC lead



[Prof. Maya Cakmak](#)  
UW lead



[Vinitha Ranganeni](#)  
Web Teleop lead



Remote Teleop (4x)

# Stretch Provides Meaningful Assistance



<https://forum.hello-robot.com/t/summer-research-on-in-home-use-by-henry-evans>  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/photography/2021/11/23/my-day-with-henry/>



# Stretch Provides Meaningful Assistance



<https://forum.hello-robot.com/t/summer-research-on-in-home-use-by-henry-evans>  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/photography/2021/11/23/my-day-with-henry/>



# Home Robots Can Enhance Life in Unexpected Ways



Photo by Peter Adams



# Questions to Consider for Each Example

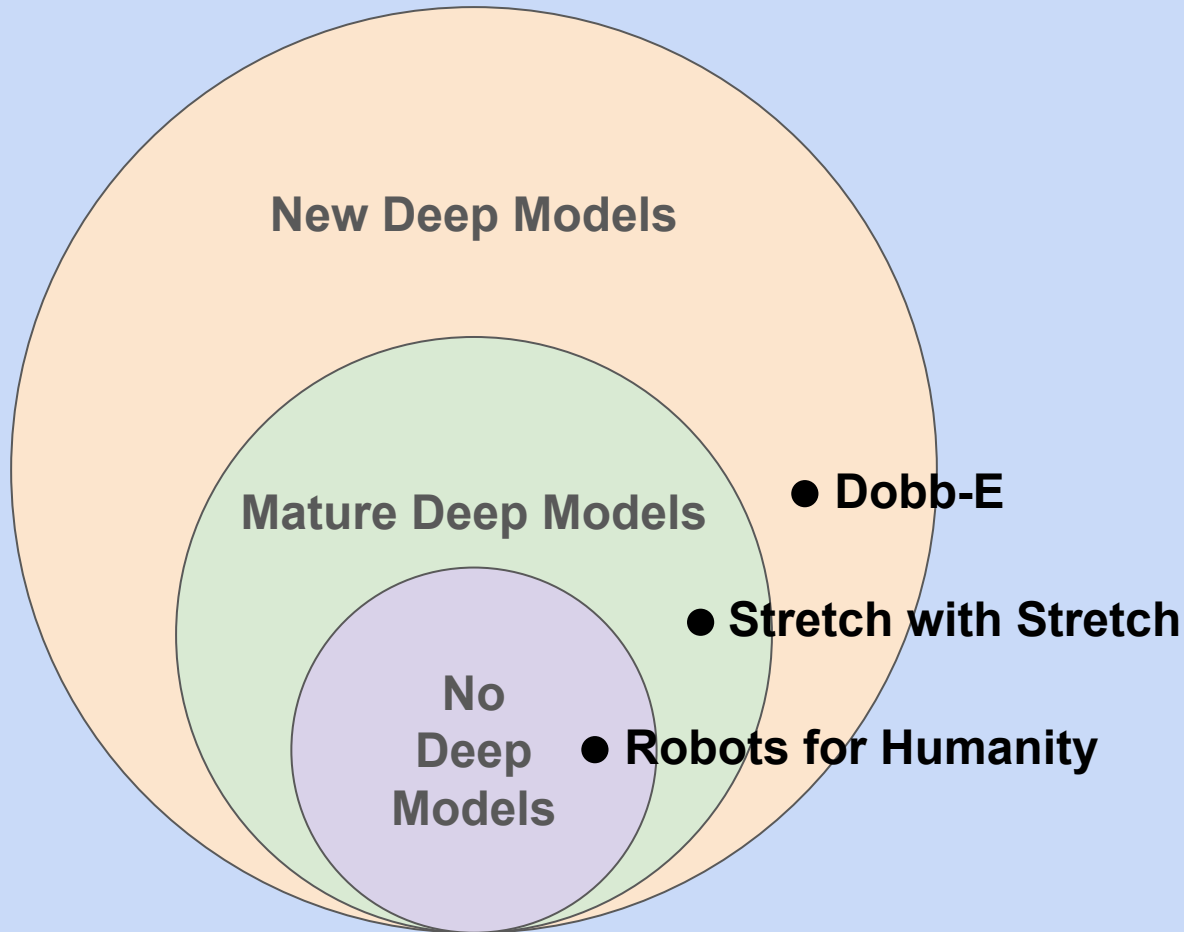
- How can society benefit?
- What AI is currently used?
- How could a foundation model help?
- What could a foundation model learn?

# Robots for Humanity

- How can society benefit?
  - Improve the quality of life for people with disabilities, reduce caregiver burden, and empower people with disabilities
- What AI is currently used?
  - Deep learning is not currently used
- How could a foundation model help?
  - Increase ease of use, automate undesirable tasks for people with disabilities and their caregivers, provide peace of mind, ...
- What could a foundation model learn?
  - How people care for each other and themselves, [activities of daily living](#), fundamental aspects of being human, ...

# Home Robot Applications

**AGI**



- Mass adoption determines the future
- Human factors promote adoption
- Open communities accelerate progress

hello robot®



- Mass adoption determines the future
- Human factors promote adoption
- Open communities accelerate progress

**We would love for you to join the  
Stretch community!**

hello robot<sup>®</sup>

