

Prototype for a Machine that Creates Video Static. Prototype for a Machine that Plays Five Finger Filet. Prototype for a Machine that Inserts Razor Blades into Apples. The absurdity of these machines comes from their deadpan description-titles, the seemingly inappropriate application of technology and materials, and the questionable logic behind investing resources into the invention of devices with such dubious goals. But when we pose those questions to "legitimate" expressions of technology, do those machines and systems not seem equally absurd by those standards? Does the cannon that a farmer fires at the skies to scare away the hail not seem Neanderthal in its logic? Are the everyday Rube Goldberg contraptions that service our



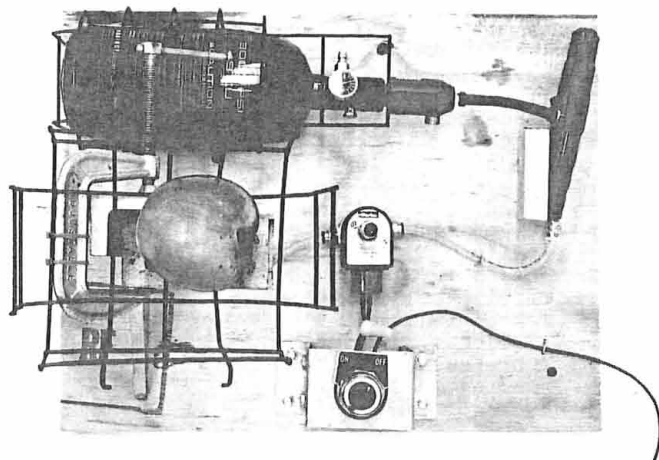
video still from early test
performed on Halloween 2010
<http://youtu.be/x5Gmsb5DnC8>

hygiene and food preparation needs not of dubious design and manufacture? And with regard to intention, to whom are these objects targeted and to what potentially covert social, political or economic ends?

The common perception of technology is that it is an apolitical entity with ancillary and momentary contact with culture through its users. A more realistic picture of what technology entails is painted in Arnold Pacey's "The Culture of Technology." The common use of the term "technology" refers, according to Pacey, to a limited definition that encompasses only the technical aspects of a much larger domain - the remainder of the space being split between the cultural and organizational considerations. This more comprehensive view of technology affords an investigation of the complex political conditions embedded within this broad field - and indeed, within every designed technology object.

"A Prototype for a Machine that Inserts Razor Blades into Apples" is a foil for every other invention in our designed world. A deadpan, purely technical description of its function makes it no less sinister. Are other technology objects, machines and products so accurately or honestly labeled? Does its

labeling alter our perception of its intent? Does its shoddy construction, its label identifying it as a prototype or its presumed existence in an art context make the user of the device any less complicit in the act of inserting a razor blade into an apple? A technical manual for a safety-certified finished version of the product, capable of performing the action en masse accompanies the object. The prototype, however, provides very little technical mediation in the act of picking up a razor blade and getting it into the fruit. In the end, the difference between this prototype paired with its documentation and a properly designed, engineered and marketed machine is in the transparency of its intention. If we consider both types of objects to have their own embedded political ideology, then how can we compare the one that ignores or hides its place in political systems versus the one that blatantly, and perhaps with blissful ignorance, announces its cultural locus? These sorts of questions and the discussions that follow them were my motivations in creating this series of seemingly irrational inventions during the years 2010-2011 -- Rob Duarte



Soft Publics

Mike Manalo / The Rare Studio

According to current Los Angeles Municipal Codes, any registered hitched trailer is allowed to park on the street as long as it is attached to a registered motor vehicle with the State of California. Our purpose is to facilitate temporary sites for legally protected speech.

The system is made of three parts: a registered vehicle / a mobile panel system / a registered cargo trailer. The panels are a deployable system that essentially extend the legally-defined space of the parked vehicle, thereby enabling a range of temporary "edits" of the urban streetscape.

1. Visual Blockade is a physical screen to block a building's visibility from the street or a specific form of advertisement along the streetscape.

2. Shelter for Occupation can be for a variety of uses. It can house a small demonstration or be a small pop-up park for a neighborhood that is devoid of public space for leisure and play.

3. Alternate Wayfinding is a mode that redirects pedestrian or street traffic with iconography. This is one of the specific modes that re-negotiates how the right of way is used and defined.

4. Virtual 'White-Out' triggers through QR Code white-out of a building or the phantom appearance of a proposed improvement. By using our smartphone app the panel system has a digital layer that extends a message beyond its physical structure.

5. Activator Mode is where the system creates a spectacle through the structure for people to gather. We recommend using this mode when creating a meeting point.

6. Re-territorializing is a mode where this space is filled with borders and boundaries for specific uses and functions. This mode helps build hierarchies or specific orders for groups wanting to use the space.





:: An illustration from my pocket technical menu for an imagined industrial instantiation of the machine. The 16-page folded pocket manual was constructed by piecing together technical illustrations and text from patent filings for a variety of methods and machines used in processing fruit, dispensing safety razors, etc.

Patent applications are a frequent reference for me, as they often describe inventions in excruciating technical detail, yet with seemingly no awareness or acknowledgement of their political implications.

