

THESE DAMMN DIY-ERS NEED TO BE ERADICATED! Or Learn to spot the dangerous wanderings of a maker mind!

Emit Snake-Beings and Andrew Gibbons

Is there any better time of year to think about the political and social and technological and economic contributions of community DiY maker groups than December, and increasingly, sadly, scarily, November... that time of year of insane consumption of plastic toys and plastic packaging in spite of a new anti-plastic bag orthodoxy. The link between discard and consumerism is central to the belief system of the Christmas ideology, this cultish fairy-story of capitalism: a paradoxical emperor promenading in it's invisible clothes of many coloured discarded inkjet packaging. Christmas time is an insanity of consumer culture that might be best described, in Philip K Dick's terms, as 'kibble'. In Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* kibble refers to a future in which everything is more or less slowly turning to dust. In this present, piles of Christmas plastic kibble are forming mountains of kibble toys, and soon will wash over the planet as oceans of angry plastic detritus, drowning a consumer culture that has forgotten how to make things - or at least chooses to reject making (and in which even making things has become a pre-packaged consumer choice).

A world of plastic kibble in which the ability to make something, and to pull something apart and remake something, is also of interest to Dick in his short story *The Variable Man*. In that future Dick imagines the problems that a society of consumers might face when a maker appears. Here a maker is someone who can work out how things work with a will to pull things apart and a skill to put them back together. In this society a maker doesn't just have the dexterity and knowledge to tinker effectively with things, a maker is a heretic who does not throw things out when they no longer work. More than this, a maker doesn't even consider the possibility that a thing is no longer working. The variable maker rewrote the future of a consumer society.

In that future consumer society, without the variable, how might we understand and learn from this exhibition...

This exhibition is a history lesson on the heretical behaviours of the DiY and maker heretics of the early 21st century. It presents, in necessarily alarming tones, a story of DiY (Do-it-Yourself) culture's tendencies to locate missing substances of an idyllic and progressive disposable consumer society.

This exhibition reminds us that at one time in our dark past, there were communities of people who privileged making over consuming. Consumerism, consumer culture, and the institutions of mass consumption have to fight against the evils of DiY subcultures and their radical de-institutionalised resistances. The modern consumer must not on any grounds be fooled into thinking that they have a DiY essence. Martin Heidegger's *Question Concerning Technology* is banned on account of its ridiculous arguments about the forgetfulness of a

modern technological society and the inflammatory claims that the forgetting of the essence of making is essential to the production of exploitation.

DiY, is dangerous because it is hands-on. Its hands-on approach is direct in allowing maker-heretics to access the stuff which is usually and intentionally, naturally, hidden out of sight, behind the moulded plastic casing of technology, and in waste management systems. Hidden, that is, as long as society can oppress the rebellious social movements that maker communities create. These communities actually desire to see the ingredients of our technological world spilled out for easy viewing. Usually, safely, orderly, these messy materials of everyday life are hidden behind the beauty of the sleek plastic moulded box. We must be denied access to these ingredients on account of the constraints of convenience and time: we don't want to get our hands messy. All those wires, it just looks like someone has dropped a plate of spaghetti behind the television set. Messy technology suggests a messy outcome. We want clean lines and a coherent future, digitally enhanced and, please, send that e-waste into space. Keep it out of sight, out of mind.

In our glorious information age, this exhibition warns us of the time when small pockets of DiY citizens and maker culture tried to subvert the evolution of a de-materialised world. They said that we worked electronically to buy time to watch images on the screens of factory-made machines, as if this was not the most advantageous and sensible state of being. Information is clean and hygienic, a cure for our past of material substance abuse. In our information age the workings of the machine and its materials are separated from us behind the thick safety glass of the spectacle. By showing the workings and handwoven raw materials, DiY culture is a subversion of the invisible trance of the spectacle. An act of DiY contains the potential for questioning an ideology hidden by opaque mouldings. It's all there to be seen, but you will have to want to see it. Our advanced society is happy living in the illusion, the matrix.

This exhibition is also a warning to be alert. Potentially, the folklore of maker culture could infect us again, could threaten to overturn the applecart of this established order, just as Iris the Greek Goddess of Chaos did when she rolled a golden apple through the marketplace. We are exaggerating. But all the same, do not let any variable tell you stories of sedation, or that the steak you taste is not real. Don't be fooled by stories of indiginous Amazon forest dwellers, of genocide for commercial ranches and soya bean feed for beef cattle, or of one-use forest commodity eradicating centuries of DiY tribes working with hands and nature.

The visible use of recycled materials promotes the idea of an alternative to one-use objects. May Ford forbid. Seeing the objects hand woven into new contexts, suggests an alternative function for the materials of discard: a reversal of the flow of consumerism and perhaps even alternatives to the neo-liberal evangelism that surrounds us. It breaks the relationship of innovation and discard, suggesting that creativity is not exclusively connected with new technology replacing the old and generating an endless river of discarded objects.

Just as the workings of our materials and technologies must be kept hidden from us, so too is the definition of the guiding forces of what used to be called, pejoratively, neo-liberal capitalism. These guiding forces operate best when they are invisibly ingrained in our actions. DiY practice must be perpetually resisted if we are to continue our journey towards a consumerist utopia.

For you the viewer of this exhibition, learn to recognise these DiY types and learn to recognise the pathologies in yourself. If you are the DiY type, then most likely you will have a growing supply of redundant materials in unused spaces of your unit, a box or cupboard full of odds and ends, and, more dangerous even, a whole pile of ideas about what could be used for what. Learn to spot the dangerous wanderings of a maker mind! Have you ever wondered where ‘stuff’ goes after you tie the black plastic bag on a Sunday night? Would you not tie that bag if you knew, or would you let those materials fall into the void so that new ones could take their place, jobs could be created, and the wheels of commerce continue to turn.

And just remember the inevitability of our progressive consumer society. Do not take the hard road. Look to the gods of convenience, and the prophets Fredric Jameson and Slavoj Žižekas, who we conveniently misquote: “it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of [consumerism]” of which DiY culture seemed then to be the only remaining obstacle.

We hope this exhibition and accompanying texts will satisfy your curiosity but do not let it change your mind, and allow something else to emerge.

A footnote on the radical attempt by maker movements to resist consumerism through school maker spaces:

Ironically, whilst preparing the learner to be a consumer, although of course being a learner is being a consumer rather than simply being prepared to be a consumer, 19th and 20th century schools had long been storage spaces for old technologies. Schools didn’t take to new black box technologies. Teachers didn’t throw out these things called OHPs and transparencies – in the old days that is. That resistance, whatever the reason, had long been a stigma for schools. Advocates for educational technology and instructional design had, since the 1960s, accused teachers and school systems of being out-of-date and in the wrong technological paradigm. These heroes were essential in the battle against school makerspaces. Interest in such spaces suggested at the time that some academics and teachers had lost sight of consumer ideology and had become increasingly aware of the limits of ‘ready-to-learn’ prescribed and standardised educational practices. These standards are our emblems for educational institutions in this wonderful age of information. We have the innovative educational ministries of the early 20th century to thank for cleansing schools of that technological mess, to keep in hand evidence of progress, and to not forget the ordering of a modern technological consumer society. The experience of school provides the necessary schema to be happy as a consumer.