

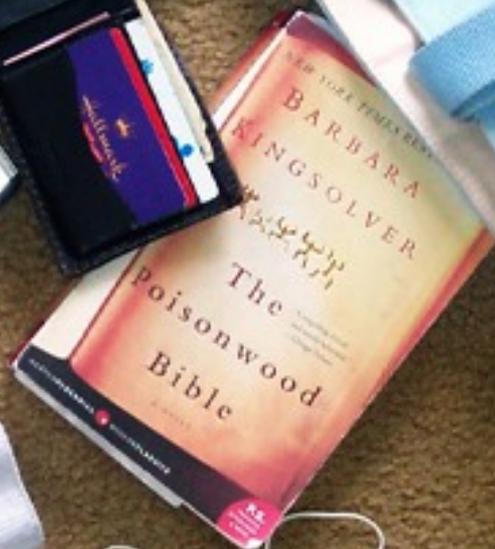
The Gadget Maker

a public performance / installation
by Mark Argo

Toronto, Canada – Summer 2007

The Gadget Maker is a performance / installation exploring the theme of adaptation as it exists in the relationship between humans and technology.

The Artist creates an Atelier environment, hand-making customized versions of popular consumer electronics, encouraging the view and participation of the audience.



Introduction

There was once a time when the most advanced piece of technology one carried around was a watch. Those who sported a digital watch could boast such features as being able to set timers, schedule alarms, and even tell time in the dark. Today the watch is, in most cases, the least technological object we tote around. It has been superseded by MP3 and video players for our personal media, digital cameras for photo blogging, GPS receivers for positioning ourselves globally, USB 'thumb' drives for storing our random files, Blackberrys and PDAs for keeping us connected with our workplaces and of course the mobile phone, which promises to perform any other task left over from your myriad of personal devices - including telling time. In fact, it's becoming less and less common to see a watch adorn the wrist of those who have adopted these smart objects into their lifestyle. In the rapidly-changing digital landscape we have quickly adapted ourselves leaving behind those technologies that no longer apply.

In this sense portable consumer electronics are strong symbols of cultural adaptation. They rank our evolution in the Information Age and represent the ways in which technology has redefined our social relationships and private boundaries.

The quickly-rising trend of electronic modification, or 'modding', is an effect of this adaptive process. Through modification we attempt to alter our mass-produced consumer gadgets for a better individual fit. This action serves as a response to the numerous ways we have already adapted to technology: in the way we listen and speak to each other, how we use our memory, and how we seek out new social connections. These elemental shifts in human behaviour, and the technologies that enable them, are the subjects of my new work.

'The Gadget Maker' explores the affects of the rapid adoption of technology from within the cultural space of consumer electronics. This approach draws influence from artists such as Marcel Duchamps, Andy Warhol, Nam Jun Paik, Jeff Koons and RTMark for whom the re-appropriation of cultural objects was central to their artistic vision. Through modification, repurposing and recreation of popular electronics, 'The Gadget Maker' draws upon popular perceptions and experiences surrounding our personal technologies.

The Installation

The Gadget Maker is a site-specific installation with aspects of performance. The artist transforms a store-front property in a highly visible pedestrian area into an Atelier. For the duration of the installation, the artist assumes the role of 'The Gadget Maker', echoing the atelier tradition of artists and craftsmen in traditional mediums. In this role, the artist hand-makes personally altered versions of personal consumer electronics inspired by the most popular of portable gadgets on the market: MP3 players, mobile phones and digital cameras.

Since the installation takes place on the urban street, the audience is the casual passersby. By witnessing the creation of these objects by human hands, the audience's perception of electronics is demystified.

The inspired objects will illuminate controversial inferences of their mass-produced counterparts, using the theme of adaptation as a creative device. By showcasing the paternal relationship between 'The Gadget Maker' and his 'gadgets', this adaptive process is exemplified, inviting the audience to further question their own relationship with technology.

The final objects will exist as one-off computational sculptures and will be maintained for International exhibition and private collection. Under no circumstances will these objects be made available to commercial mass-production.

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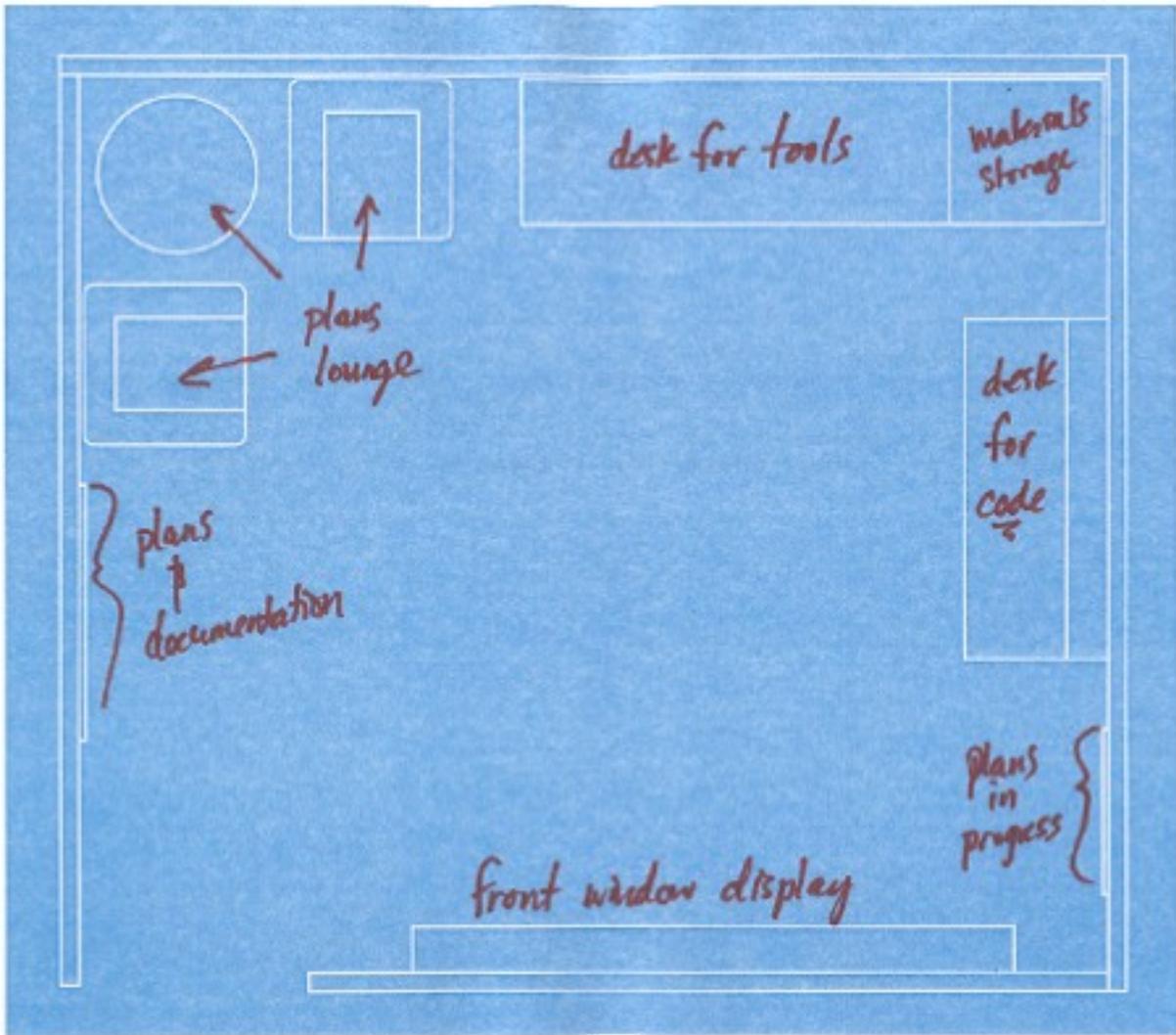
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41 F. HOLT 41A
WATCHMAKER & JEWELLER

CHLORIDE
GRANLEY





The Atelier

The Atelier is composed of two main sections: *the workshop* and *the gallery*.

The workshop is divided into two areas, one area for programming electronic components and another area for constructing and finishing the objects.

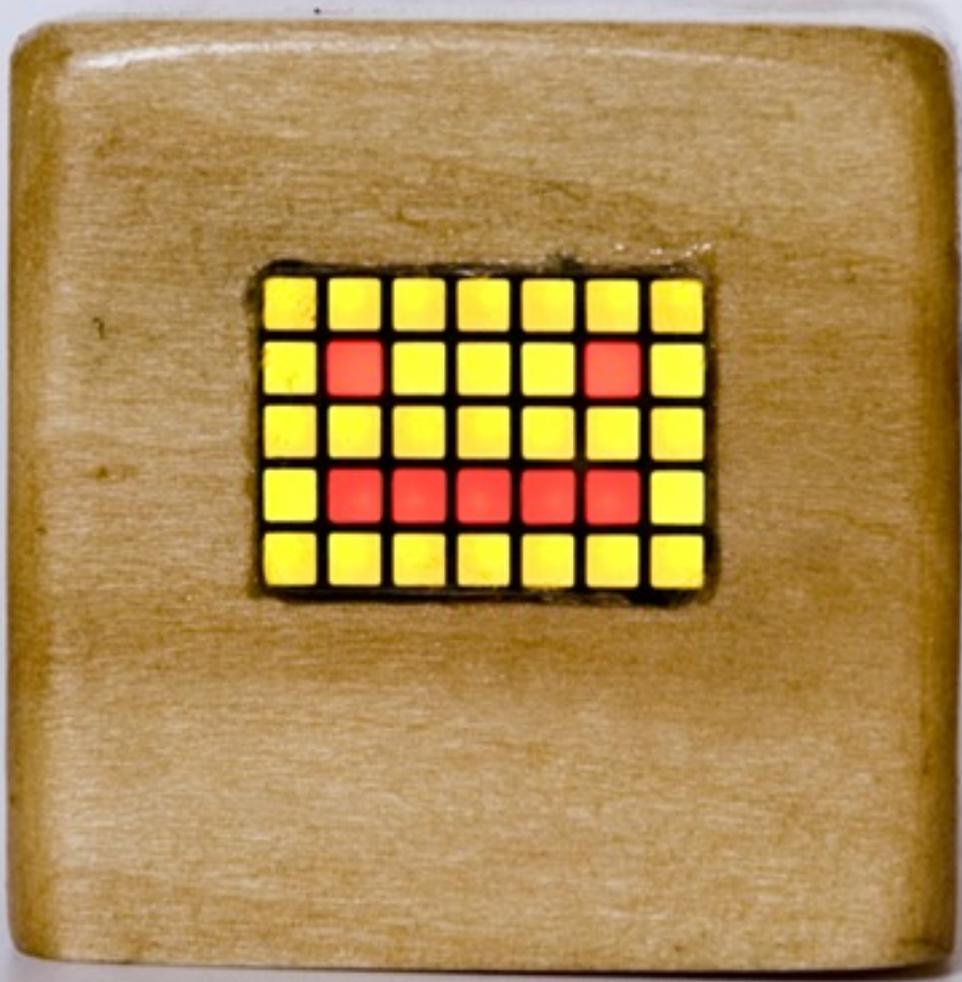
The gallery features the finished objects, as well as prototypes, sketches, technical plans and other material to help explain the process of the project.

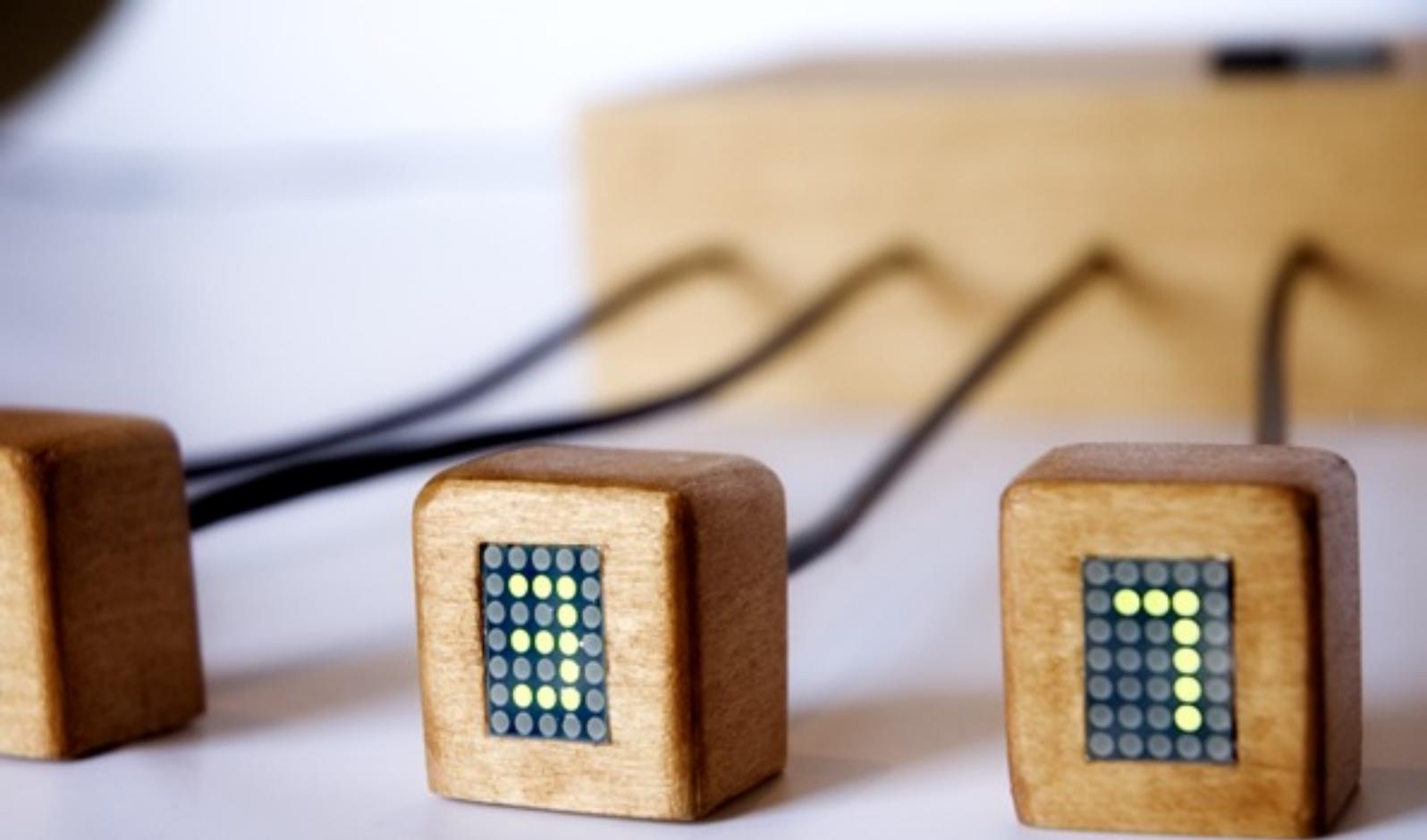
The Objects

The technology behind consumer electronics progresses rapidly. In order to reflect the current state of commercial electronics, I intend to use the newest technology as my artistic medium.

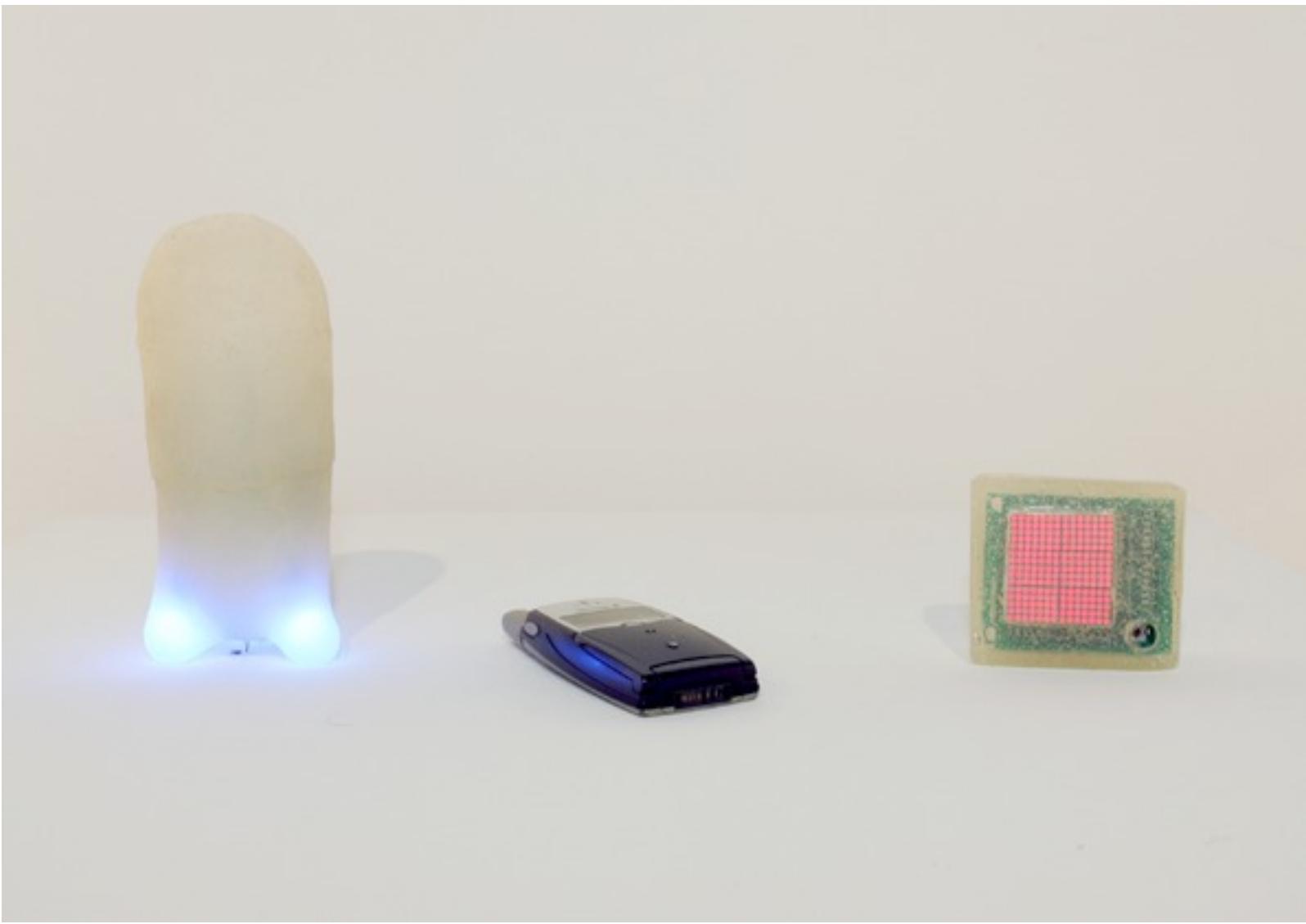
The inspiration of these pieces will draw from alternative energy, digital copyright, wearable computing, personal media, and electronically-mediated social relationships.

Here are some examples of my previous hand-made gadget work:





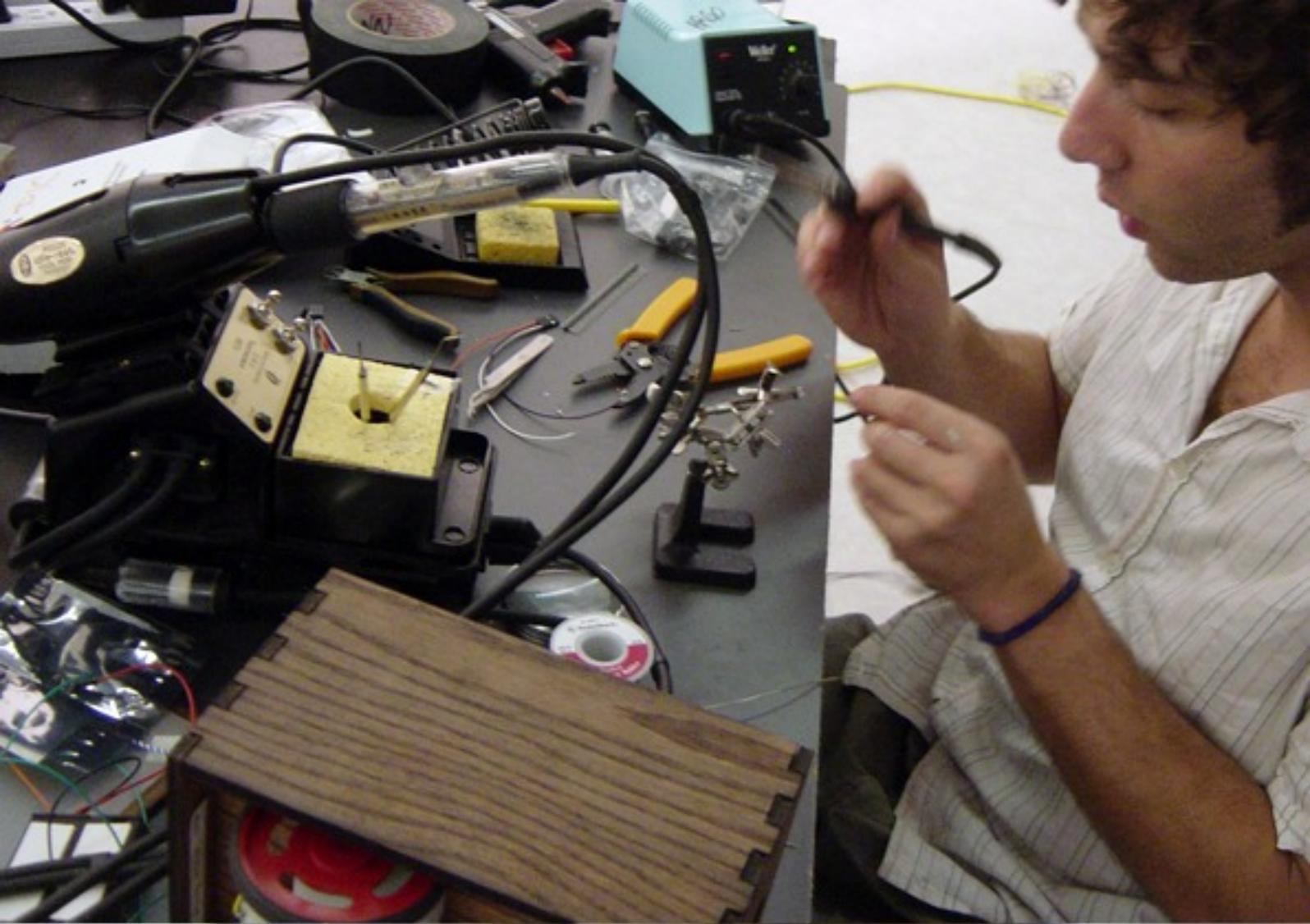
previous page - PixelDoodle (2005)
left top - Block Clock (2006)
left bottom - 9VGuy (2006)
below - hugMS & .dot.dot.dot (2004)



*below, right are images from **Nicebots** (2004),
A workshop / gallery installation at La Musee
d Art Moderne e Contemporaine, Nice, France.*

*29 Robots were made by hand over a two
month period.*



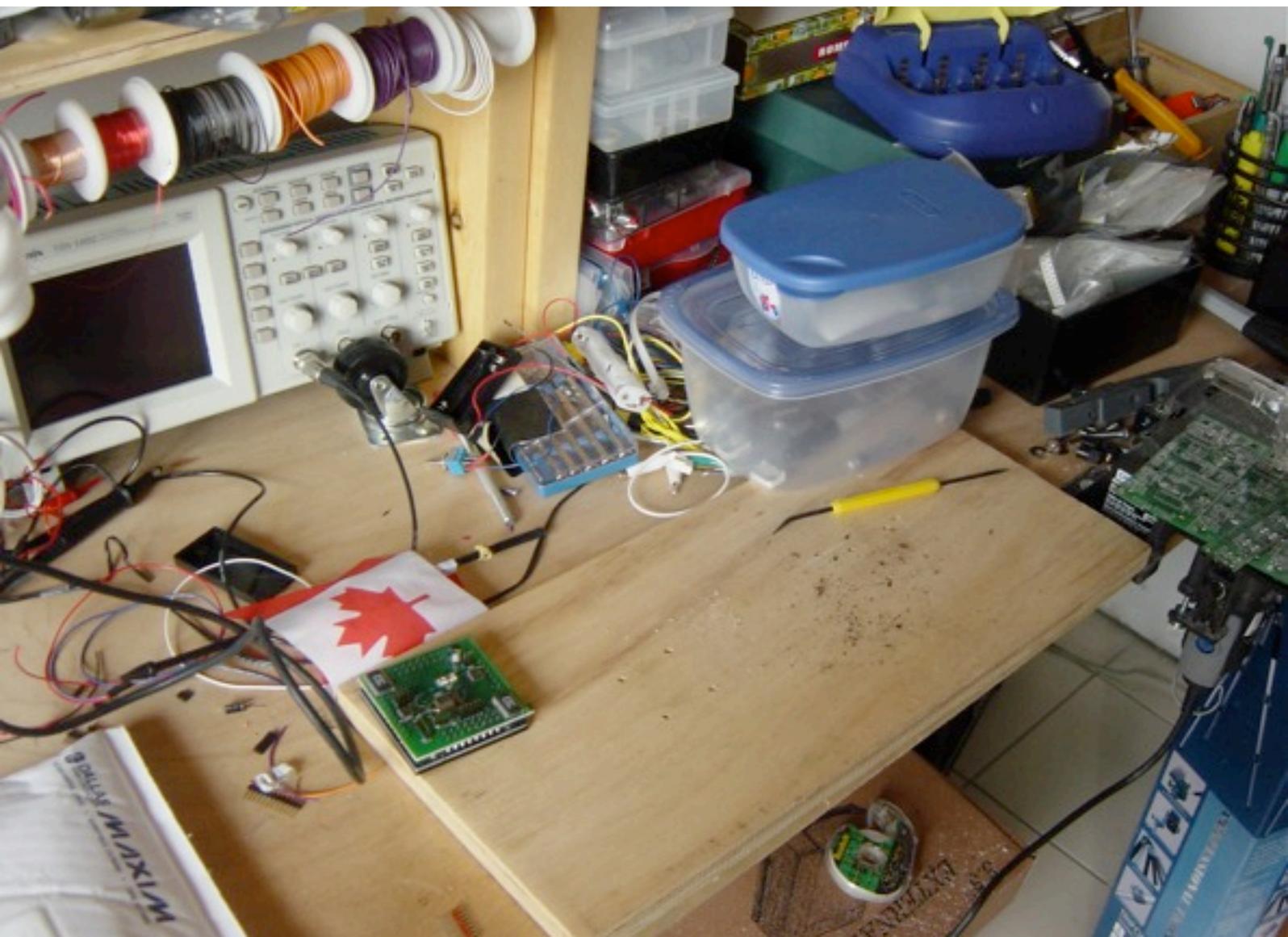


Finally...

Given the theme of this project, I am assured that 'The Gadget Maker' will be met with great public interest. The concepts lend themselves to popular discourse within the artistic community and I look forward to participating in this dialogue.

In addition to the installation, I am preparing a series of workshops and lectures focused on hardware modification and how people can get involved in adapting their own gadgets for personal use.

The progress of the installation will be steadily documented, and will be released in the form of a DVD Kit by the end of 2007.



Mark Argo is a Canadian-born new media artist living and working in Italy. By creating physical devices that serve as interfaces for computing, Mark has been able to explore the spaces where humans and technology connect. His work has been exhibited internationally in Asia, Europe and North America, and featured in major technology magazines such as Wired and Linux Journal. In summer 2006, he had his first solo exhibition at Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, Canada entitled "Communication Mods". Mark is currently in residence at the Fabrica Communication Research Center in Treviso, Italy.

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