Our current research project is named for a particularly insidious methodology of marketers: Product Placement. The Consumer Media and Democracy's online “Dissimorphia” defines product placement as “(a) Form of advertisement, without disclosing, its receiving the pertaining party.”

While praised by the advertising community as a recent and lucrative method, the origins of product placement in cultural media can be demonstrated by John Huston’s 1951 film, The African Queen (Katherine Hepburn’s character famously dumps boxes of Gordon’s brand gin over the boat). Product placement has found a home in the movies, to the extent that the Audi car company actually created a prototype model with the help of the film studio and director of the recent I, Robot. Product placement is becoming a very mainstream business practice within all arenas of art. The recent book by Russell Simmons’ Island Def Jam Record Group had in 2002 with the Hewlett Packard Company about placements in several musicians’ rap songs. Incidentally, Simmons is the brother of Joseph Simmons, a.k.a. Run of the acclaimed rap group Run-DMC, whose 1986 hit “My Adidas” influenced many musicians of the same genre to sing the praises of their favorite product’s advertisers. The product placement technique quickly took notice.

Product placement is tolerated in children’s media as well—any library or mainstream bookstore usually has a copy of The M&M’s Counting Coloring Book or The Cheerios Christmas Play Book. Kids can buy McDonald’s play sets at toy stores so they can celebrate life as a McDonald’s employee for years and years. McDonalds has been known to buy up companies that produce trading cards for popular cartoon characters and clothes for products, but do kids really ask, “Mommy can I dress up as an M&M this year?” Even Briti product lines of toy tools set for kids are made by Home Depot – another opportunity for practice to becoming an adult consumer.

Living in the city, deprived of front lawns, and with no unplanted outdoor spaces for open experimentation, we have to make our own space for creativity and play. Contrasting with the abundant opportunities we have to view ads and buy things, there is a paucity of situations where we can express ourselves in places that other people move through. Advertising dominates outdoor urban visual culture. Chain stores give birth to carbon copies of themselves with astonishing efficiency. Rats by pass Starbucks’ garbage dumpsters looking for a bit of biscotti to nibble on must be jealous of the coffee chain’s ability to breed and grow so quickly.

Our streets and our culture don’t have to accept the product placement pollution that drives them. Every surface in public need not have a sales pitch. Our cities should be places where we can play, be absurd, risk embarrassment, experiment, build temporary things outdoors, entertain ourselves and others, and live freely.

Product Placement is a series of actions and experiments designed to use products non-commercially – as raw materials that can be employed in creative and imaginative ways to alter surfaces, create new social and cultural spaces and potentially challenge and subvert the routines of the people who encounter them. This poster includes documentation of some things we have tried so far. Of course, there is much more to try, and more fun to be had in our public spaces. We invite you to join us.

**Cookies:** Sandwich cookies with solid cream filling in the middle are readily available and can be used to create biodrivable patterns. Slavishly copy a design to the back of the cookie and pass it completely to one of the sides. You will be using the cream side. The other side can be eaten, crumbled for birds, or composted. Slowly press the cream half to a public space. Be polite, but make sure you press firmly enough to get the cookie stick. You may want to moisten or lick the cream filling to make it adhere better.

**Palette Wrap:** You can find palette wrap in wholesale warehouses that sell directly to other artists. The material is typically used to affix large quantities of boxes or loose materials together as they rest upon a wooden or plastic palette. The palette wrap is sold with cardboard handles making it instantly ready for multiple applications.

We picked up garbage or discarded items and affixed them to poles, parking meter poles and other public furniture. The material can be used to blockade pathways and sidewalks or make abstract and ritual installations. We have also used palette wrap to conceal banks of free newspaper dispensers that are heavily oriented toward advertising. The palette wrap is a very flexible material and you can creatively direct it to many ends.

**Contact Paper:** Contact paper comes in a wide variety of decorative patterns. It is unlikely to peel off smooth surfaces but, if necessary, it can usually be removed without damaging the support. It sticks very well to the metal on phone booths and newspaper boxes. It also adheres exceptionally well to glass, Plexiglas, and printed advertisements such as the kind that are fitted into the backs of some bus benches. Contact paper is not messy to apply like wheat-pasted flyers. People will not get girty by rubbing against it, it is highly resistant to rain and snow.

You may want to measure the surfaces you would like to cover before getting started. It also helps if you get a corner or two of the protective paper on the back started and folded over for easy peeling. This will save you time and make the application of the contact paper less stressful.

In our experience, sloppily applied contact paper was removed from bench ads quickly. Neater contact paper coverings that are perfectly measured for the metal frame borders blend in seamlessly. Some of these have lasted for weeks or months.

**Adhesive Hooks:** Find hooks with adhesive backing and apply them to the public surface of your choice. Obfuscate advertisements in humorous ways or cover things that have dull colors or patterns. Encourage the use of the hooks by others: place mittens or other lost clothing items on one of the hooks. Place them on the sides of dumpsters so people can use them to hang unwanted clothing, bags of aluminum cans that scrapers can recycle, or other things that people may take. Note that the adhesive that comes on the hooks is not permanent. If you want to make the hooks hard to remove, consider applying epoxy glue around the edges on the back of the hook. Be aware that this might cause more damage upon removal.

**Chain Locks:** This strategy consists of chaining and locking found detritus to fences and other surfaces. We easily scavenged chairs and other pieces of furniture in alleys that we then relocated to bus stops that lack seating. Chairs were then locked to the fences of empty lots adjacent to the bus stops. Milk crates were added to make cubey spaces; tables create a pervasive approximation of a domestic setting. A suspended kiddie pool in the dead of winter is more decorative and eye-catching. New objects were added one at a time over a spread of days – allowing for passers-by to observe a slowly changing situation.

Not surprisingly, people have been seen sitting in the chairs waiting for the bus. At one point the crates were stocked with someone’s left-over fries and unused dipping sauce packets from a nearby fast food joint. It remains to be seen if more people might try using them to redistribute food or other items, or if they were merely acting as a trash receptacle on a block that lacks a public trash can.

All of these cheap locks could be easily smashed open with a well-placed hammer swing. Wood or plastic furniture will be less interesting to most ‘Scrapers’ than furniture made with metal. Fences on lots that are for sale or rent are more likely to be unbanded than sites that are in use.