

DRAFT

# # Technological Counterproduction: System Misuse and Reinvention

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### Mark Walhimer – Machine Aesthetic / Surrender Machines / Acceptance Feed  
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Doreen Rios defines counter-production as the moment a technical object is taken beyond its intended use – when human encounter transforms the tool into something its designers could not have anticipated. The radio built for broadcast becomes a site of remediation. The printing press built for reproduction becomes infrastructure for radical distribution. The question for any practice working at the edge of technology and art is whether it is genuinely misusing its tools or merely aestheticizing their correct operation. The three bodies of work here – *\*Acceptance Feed\**, *\*Surrender Machines\**, and *\*Machine Aesthetic\** – sit precisely at that edge, and the most interesting question about each is which side of it they occupy.

The clearest case is *\*Acceptance Feed\**. MediaPipe face mesh is infrastructure for identification and surveillance – its design intent is to locate, classify, and label. Here the entire recognition apparatus is stripped away. What remains is a single measurement: the distance between two lip landmarks, treated as a proxy for breath. Surveillance technology becomes a tool for presence and vulnerability. The system built to reduce a person to a data point is redirected to register the most intimate and non-identifiable signal the body produces. That inversion is not incidental – it is the work's architecture.

*\*Surrender Machines\** operates the same logic at the level of production itself, and introduces the central tension of the practice: the pride of building the machine. Most generative art celebrates the builder. The complexity is the flex. Here, code – a tool optimized for output, efficiency, and control – is redirected to run on anger, ego, and attachment, the three emotional states that prevent surrender. The gears multiply and break as those states intensify. The machine destroys itself at high stress values. A random timer runs silently and, when it expires, the system fades to shadow regardless of the operator's intent. That timer is the Simondonian move: the machine has its own associated milieu, its own timing, its own terminal condition that the user cannot override. The ghost-in-the-machine move – projecting human emotional states into mechanical behavior – is what the work diagnoses. The resolution is the surrender itself: releasing the projection, letting the technical object be what it is. The fact that the machine is beautifully made is load-bearing. If it were ugly or broken from the start, releasing it costs nothing. Surrender means something only because you built something worth keeping. The zero state – all sliders down, a single clean sine tone – is the machine working simply and without spectacle. The pride of building is exactly what has to go.

*\*Machine Aesthetic\** makes the counter-production argument at the level of theory. The artist statement insists that the loop is the work – not the screenshot, not the recording, not any reproduction more legible than the running code. This is a structural argument against the browser's own logic, which is optimized for frictionless consumption and perfect reproduction. Its spatial dimension – a distributed room where visitors enter with iPhones and alter the work in real time – is structurally the World Poetry Center, Veracruz: a space designed not to display art but to produce it in everyone who passes through. Everyone who enters becomes a maker, not an audience.

The uncomfortable question Rios raises is whether commodification forecloses counter-production. If these works are editioned and sold, they become Veblen goods – value derived from status and scarcity rather than from what the object does. Counter-production as luxury commodity is the cannibalization she describes: technology absorbing its own critique. The answer may be in the work that has no market logic at all. The breath tracker is useless beautifully. Nobody buys a webcam sketch that listens to your exhale. That is the artisan pole asserting itself inside a digital practice – the manual labor that returns in unexpected form, the misuse of code for no commercial reason. Rios maps the abstraction spectrum from artist to designer to artisan. Mark studied industrial design – the manual-labor-adjacent discipline that sits between art and production. Code-as-artisanship may be where that training resolves: the hand returns, not in material but in the specific misalignment between tool and intent that is, as Rios notes, where the most interesting work happens.

The colonial dimension runs beneath all of it. The tools themselves – the LLMs, the face mesh, the browser – are foreign technical objects carrying embedded worldviews, trained predominantly on English-language, US and European sources. Counter-production, in Rios's hundred-year Mexican modernist lineage, is what happens when a community takes a foreign technical object and remakes it from the inside. The question this practice has not yet fully answered is whether it is doing that remaking – or whether it is fluently operating within the very systems it appears to misuse.

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On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects, Gilbert Simondon  
The Concept of Mind, Gilbert Ryle  
René Descarte "mind-body dualism"