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The Beggar Robot by Sašo Sedlaček (Slovenia)

Beggar Robot is a robot for the materially deprived and is constructed entirely from old computer hardware and a few spare parts that were obtained at no cost. As a low-tech, friendly device, it advocates three main ideas in contemporary activism. It is a surrogate agency created for a world in which the marginalized such as impoverished individuals and families, refugees and asylum seekers, elderly people, disabled people, and those hidden from the public view, will never step onto the street to beg, except in the most dire of circumstances. The robot has access to areas normally off-limits to beggars, such as shopping malls and community events, where the richer members of society more often frequent.

The hypothesis is that this part of society is only able to show some sympathy towards the marginalized if they communicate from a safe distance and via a technological interface. The project tests and exploits the advantages of robotic interface by bringing the Beggar Robot to public spaces in different countries and adapting it to the local context and local language, to beg in the name of the poor. The project is both a social experiment and a low-key, humorous charity action, which raises public awareness of invisible deprivation and possible remedies.

As a machine built out of computer parts recycled from the ever-growing electronic junkyards, the robot also bears an environmental consciousness for a world dominated by the ideology of endless development. Moreover, the robot advocates the concepts of open source and do-it-yourself tactics and their consequences for social action, by allowing people to freely make their own copy of the robot. Anyone interested in obtaining the instructions of how to build their own robot replica can leave a contact with the robot, or go to the artist's website (www.sasosedlacek.com).