



THE SOCIETY FOR THE PRESERVATION OF USELESS OBJECTS



Date: Thu, 04 Dec 1997 15:10:57 -0600
From: ahabunim@midway.uchicago.edu
To: waz@easy.co.uk
Subject: Useless Question

To The Society For The Preservation Of Useless
Objects, London, UK

Sirs,

I recently purchased an item from a junk shop that appears to be entirely useless. I am wondering if any of your members knows what it is and whether they can confirm that it is indeed useless. Allow me to describe it:

It is approximately the size of a clothes iron, and with a similar shape—a body with a handle. It is made of dark red bakelite. Instead of an ironing surface it has two rollers, one towards the front and one towards the back. In the middle is a transparent plastic grille. Under the grille, inside the body of the thing, there is an incandescent light-bulb. A cord extends from the back of the device. When you plug it in the bulb lights up. That's it. It appears to have no effect on anything at all and makes an inefficient lamp. Some potential clues to its uselessness are that it is embossed with the words "Roll-a-Ray" on the front, and is manufactured by the no longer extant D.A. Sutton Company in Wichita, Kansas. I must say it has the rather attractive styling of the 1940s or 1950s.

Any assistance you could give me would be probably be most unhelpful.

Regards,

Ali Abunimah
Chicago, Illinois

Date: Fri, 05 Dec 1997 03:39:52 +0000
From: waz@easynet.co.uk
To: ahabunim@midway.uchicago.edu
Subject: Re: Useless Question

Dear Sir,

We at the Society For The Preservation Of Useless Objects have been very excited by your email, since it is the first one we have received since setting up the web page which has merited a response. Quite frankly it is beyond me to even begin to imagine what it is that some people think email is for. But enough of my personal life.

While we at the Society were moved and impressed by the eloquence of your description, I must inform you that we cannot promise a firm confirmation of uselessness by description alone. It is true that anyone would be hard pushed to come up with a genuine use for the object you describe, but without a photograph (or a detailed technical drawing with lots of figures and diagrams), I am afraid that the current committee is honour bound to limit its deliberations to mere speculation.

On balance, we tend to share your view that the object in question is not of any particular use, but we must emphasise that this is by no means final. We have been caught out before, sad to say, and we simply cannot afford another disaster like the Electric Pencil Sharpener Affair of 1978.

We trust that our efforts have gone in vain. If you require any further lack of assistance, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Best Wishes,

Wayne Myers
<http://easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~waz/society.htm>

Date: Fri, 5 Dec 1997 08:08:27 -0600 (CST)
From: ahabunim@midway.uchicago.edu
To: waz@easynet.co.uk
Subject: Pointless Answer

Sir,

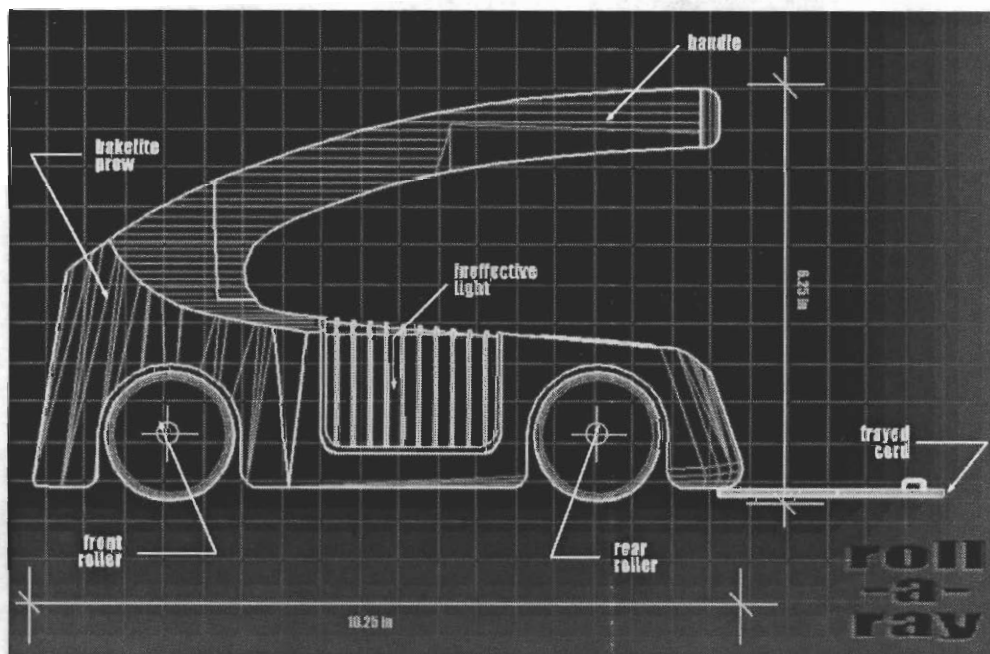
I am delighted that my decision to contact your august Society has proved as futile as I had hoped. While I understand that such a congregation of expertise cannot be expected to render any final judgement without first ensuring that procedures are followed in the most onerous manner, I am indeed honoured to have benefitted from your learned deliberations such as they are. As a result of the application of your many years of experience, I am no wiser today than I was yesterday.

You asked me how I came into contact with the Society, and having thought about the matter, I must admit to some vexation. You see

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—SPUO

I found myself in possession of an object of no apparent practical value, and set about proving that it was indeed useless. But as a naturally cautious man, and a scientist, I could not allow my hope to triumph over cold investigation, so I turned to the World Wide Web and using various devices known commonly as "search engines," no doubt after the manner of their propulsion, I entered as many words



and combinations as I could devise that described the object, both in form and (lack of) function. The early results of my experimentation were encouraging as I was unable to find even a remote allusion to the object in my possession. Working on the hypothesis that a device that had been harnessed to the fruitful benefit of human kind would enjoy widespread recognition, I took the lack of any such recognition for the "Roll-a-Ray" to indeed be a sign of the most abject uselessness. In order to further test my hypothesis, I entered the word "wheel" into the search engine and as my theory predicted, I came up with some 954,321 references. When I repeated the experiment for other objects of known usefulness such as "house" or "oil rig" I came up with similar results.

So far so good, but now to the cause of my vexation. Encouraged by these early results, I nevertheless wanted confirmation from a body whose expertise is unknown throughout the land. Again, availing myself of the engine, I entered simply the words "useless objects" and was immediately directed to your learned Society. In fact, to my alarm, it was just what I was looking for. So with the greatest respect, and trepidation, I submit to you that your Society seems, despite your most earnest efforts to prevent it, to have fulfilled a genuine need, and therefore to have found a function. I am certain that your foremost philosophers will engage themselves to finding the truth of this matter.

Respectfully,

Ali Abunimah

