**3D Printing**

3D printing has been around for a while now. I remember hearing about it back in community college. My pc repair teacher had described a 3D printer that carved wall murals out of giant blocks of foam-like material. They could be easily transported in sections or blocks to a construction site (residential or commercial) and be placed on a wall with little effort and time. Now that this company Shapeways is making 3D printing widely available for the consumer, the sky is he limit for what an artist can produce in the digital and physical sense. According to Shapeways’s CEO they have eliminated some of the steps in turning a digital 3d model into a physical object. You can send a moving or complex mechanical object to them and have it made within ten days; you don’t have to troubleshoot assembly of multiple parts in a complex object because the 3D printer does all or most of the work for you. I can see how this would save time for people in the fields of product design or arts and crafts.

I do see some potential problems with the process though. For instance you could be working on a prototype for a new revolutionary invention, and you send it to Shapeways to save yourself some time and money building whatever it is. How do you know if someone looking through your designs for problems (that may occur during the 3D printing) isn’t going to steal your idea or alter it for their own gain? I know patents can prevent this, but in the beginning you start with a bare-bones-basic design without obtaining any patents. Also I know there are many picky and/or critical artists out there that may have a problem with their designs being “tweaked” (even when the changes are discussed with the customer/artist) in order to be printed successfully. They would rather go through the process of making their idea come to life their selves than have a 3D printer do it for them.