

Etude I: StrangerThings

Michael Hemingway | Sept. 21, 2018

The rocks in our Apartment

Our apartment has a collection of small rocks and stones often remarked upon by guests. They vary in size and shape; most are as large as a fist and a few as large as your average toaster.

They'd all been collected from the shores of Prout's Neck, Maine - a place where my girlfriend's grandmother has a summer home. There's a "Rock walk" around the peninsula with these jagged beaches of slate-gray stone, littered with little interesting rocks brought in at high tide. We marched these all the way around the Neck to our home and bought them back here, where they now sit holding doors open, keeping books in place and providing company to the other objects on our coffee table.

Their emotional purpose is really just a link to the beautiful time she and I share in that neck of the woods.

Being stones, they've got this wonderfully powerful and primal reassuring feeling when held in the hand, and on a table, the roundest of them would look well placed in a Zen garden. Some of the smaller ones look like thick stone knives - with long and angular shapes in uniform cold stone gray. People seem to like them, or at least find amusing how many of them there are around the house. A lot of my male friends like picking them up - perhaps it's some caveman aesthetic thing that entices this.

As a material, the stones make for powerful resistors, and only by shortening the distance between the two leads of a multimeter can one even tell that they conduct electricity at all. They're rather sturdy, though some I'd imagine, as I saw on the beach, are literally a stone throw's away from shattering.











1967 Ferrovie Statali e444 001 Model Train Engine

Wonderfully detailed and largely meaningless to everyone but myself and my father, this is a little model train engine from a set I've long since lost and stopped collecting, that I'd acquired way back when in Milan, Italy. I used to go to the local magazine shop every other week and get the latest train magazine that came with a part (be it rails, little figurines, trees, road signs - what have you) to eventually build a model train set. I'd read the magazine about the history of trains, and then archive the piece collected, or build it if need be. At one point my dad got me this little engine, and it's the last piece I have from that set. It's better painted than the ones you can find now for the same model, and to my knowledge it can still pull cars on a powered rail, though I have nothing to test it with.

With some knowledge of the actual train, this little model is near impeccable. And whilst I never applied the supplied 'dirt paint' to give it authentic flair, it's acquired that over the years anyway. The train measures some seven inches long and one wide, with powered wheels on both ends. It's built of sturdy plastic, and painted in acrylic. Note the small tortoise on the side - this train was known as the "tortuga".



For reference, the actual train



My Golden Fan

On some hot summer day last year I found a discarded fan on the street and decided to take it home. I have this thing with taking old electronics off the street to try to repair them, or at least take useful parts off of them. This time to my surprise, the fan was fully functional! I took apart the case to clean the thing, and in doing so decided on keeping it bare. I then chose to decorate it, painting it in black and gold. It's been a useful device, and I love the way people either love it (myself and some friends) or hate it (my girlfriend and anyone with an ounce of aesthetic sensibility).

Gaudy as it is, I love the matte texture the black spray paint gave it over the smooth white PVC, and watching the exposed wires move as it does. I really appreciate 'bare machines' like that; that offer their entire functionality unadorned.

Being an electrical device, it conducts electricity as usual, and the paint it's covered in conducts as well, although not well enough to interfere with the machine. The base, stand and fan blades are all plastic, with the metal motor being the largest metallic surface and largest contributor to the overall weight of the thing. It has free-floating controls that I one day intend on moving to the bottom, a result of no longer having a case.







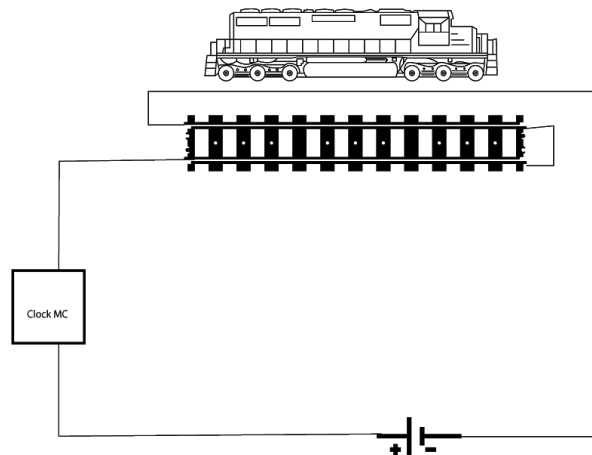


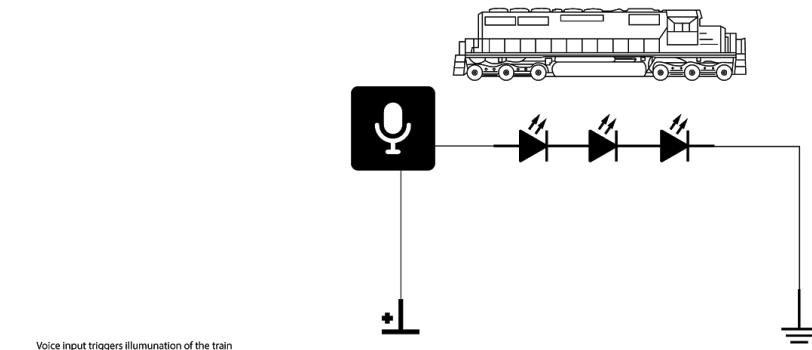
Making a switch

Finding it difficult to turn a stone into a switch, I'd select the FS model train; it's got a charm I think would lend itself well to enchantment. I'm not too keen on modifying the thing itself, but with some powered rails, or even just contacts on the base, I can get the thing to turn its lights on, and maybe with a few carefully placed LEDs, simulate the shadows of people milling about the insides of the little beast.

The most compelling feeling I could try to impart on someone else with this toy is that of the wonder and sublime curiosity I had with trains when I was little. To make this thing come alive like that, as if in a kid's imagination, would be outstanding.

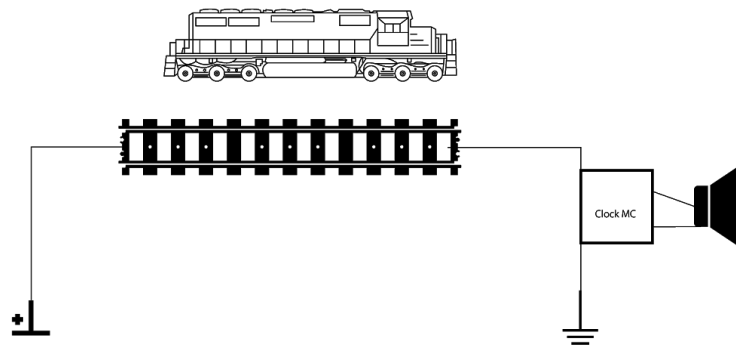
Train is suspended, with small brushes keeping it in contact with the rail





Created by Andrew Lynn
Star Trek: The Motion Picture

Created by Andrew Lynn
Star Trek: The Motion Picture



Rail is electrically isolated, where movement of the train back and forth (as if a child playing) would connect the circuit, and trigger light and sound