

In which silencing others "builds a more peaceful world"

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This *NYT Magazine* list of "[32 Innovations That Will Change Your Tomorrow](#)" is fascinating. I'm especially amazed by #1 (clothing that generates electricity and charges gadgets), #6 (cars smart enough to avoid causing traffic jams) and #23 (smart teeth!). Others (#20, #31) are sort of sci-fi disturbing but only mildly so.

And then there's #14, on which Catherine Rampell reports blithely:

When you aim the SpeechJammer at someone, it records that person's voice and plays it back to him with a delay of a few hundred milliseconds. This seems to gum up the brain's cognitive processes — a phenomenon known as delayed auditory feedback — and can painlessly render the person unable to speak. Kazutaka Kurihara, one of the SpeechJammer's creators, sees it as a tool to prevent loudmouths from overtaking meetings and public forums, and he'd like to miniaturize his invention so that it can be built into cellphones. "It's different from conventional weapons such as samurai swords," Kurihara says. "We hope it will build a more peaceful world."

Um, really? A device for totally silencing other people will build a more peaceful world? It doesn't take much imagination to see how easily this could be a tool for breaking up protests, undermining minority perspectives (not just "loudmouths!") at public forums and generally stifling dissent. This may be less chilling than the mass distribution of Tazers, but not by much. If the SpeechJammer is mass produced and issued to riot cops and city hall security guards, that'll be a big blow to public democracy.

The teeth that know they're about to develop cavities, however, sound awesome. So yay, technology.