

The Phillip Review

Sara Mameni**Invasion of the Cybernetic Hand and Other Predicaments***Kristin Lucas: If Lost Then Found*

Or Gallery, Vancouver, 1 December, 2006 to 13 January, 2007

In 1986 Stelarc announced that “evolution ends when technology invades the body.” The evolutionary halt, he maintained, was necessary as it was no longer advantageous to remain a human or evolve as a species, since “the body’s complexity, softness, and wetness would be difficult to sustain” in the coming digital environment. Stelarc’s performances, featuring prosthetic and digital attachments designed to respond to his muscular movements, were inscribed in a utopian rhetoric signifying a Cartesian desire to transcend the dripping body. In time, he had hoped that the wet body would yield to its dry-cleaned technological Other in order to survive on this planet.

Evolution and dry-cleaning were the two things that came to my mind when I saw *If Lost Then Found*, Kristin Lucas’s recent exhibition at the Or Gallery. This unlikely association was prompted by *Ocean Liner* (2006), an assemblage that combined such ordinary household items as an ironing board, a rice-cooker, and a set of plastic leaves sprinkled with a white powder to stage a snowy, alien landscape. I first thought of the rice-cooker as a surveillance camera watching the silence of the winter scene; then I decided that it could also double as a motor capable of generating enough power to activate the attached propeller which could in turn guide the snowy landscape on its marine voyage. These seamlessly amalgamated throwaway products in their novel configurations alarmed me as to what scenarios might be taking shape in my kitchen cupboard.

Sitting beside *Ocean Liner* was a zoomorphic black stool fused with four wheels and two metallic wings. The large grilled wings, made out of lawn chairs, appeared to have steered the buoyant stool through the room and landed for a temporary rest. The sculpture seemed ready for a second take-off. A few steps away from the stool sculpture, and undoubtedly in telepathic communication with it, was *Social Climber* (1998), a six-legged remote control ascending a plinth. The implied narrative conveyed through the titles and the intricate armatures of Lucas’ sculptures helped to animate the assemblages in the room. The resulting static dynamism of these sculptures evoked visions of organic motion and growth and led me to imagine how they would behave if they were plugged in.

Groaning in the rhythmic tone of an off-the-hook telephone, the toy *Chicken Little* (1996) was delicately wired to an oscillator housed in a Band-Aid box. Willingly suspending my disbelief in Lucas’ lyrical constructions, I believed Chicken Little to be on life support and blamed the drizzled washing detergent for mutating the ironing board into an ocean liner: evolution was drenched in tetrachloroethylene.

What would it mean for a machine to evolve? Writing in the late 1940s, the American mathematician Norbert Wiener theorized that evolving machines were those that could “learn and reproduce themselves.” Learning was the mechanism by which a machine transformed itself in response to past experiences, while reproduction was the replication of input into identical output data. Learning and reproduction were defined as interlinked phenomena whose efficient operation relied on an effective feedback mechanism. Through feedback, a machine could detect changed environments and assess appropriate responses.

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