

Kevin Todd

(Re) creating nature

Our relationship to things is changing and some of the assumptions we have about the fundamental characteristics of 'things in the world' seem uncertain. We assume that, say, natural things such as trees are authentic, and that they have a characteristic that is natural.

Similarly, aspects of art theory assume that the object, which is considered authentic, precedes the image; a photograph is *of* an object. The object is the measure of the image. However, as we know, appearances can be deceptive and an object, such as a tree, has qualities additional to its appearance that allow us to relate to and recognise it as a tree. The *treeness of the tree* as the German philosopher Heidegger might have called it.

George Pattison, in his *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to the Later Heidegger* (2000), quotes Heidegger discussing enframing: '...a way of objectifying our world and our experience (including our experience of ourselves) in such a way as to make what is enframed available for our use, manipulable and transformable in the service of designated goals and purpose' (p.2). Science and technology are outcomes of this attitude and allow for a certain degree of control (and of course the promise of greater control) as they exclude or empty those qualities that cannot be enframed and allow us to exploit things as a resource.

Increasingly, we are intervening to shape things in the natural world to suit particular needs or outcomes, such as the genetically modified tree, grown so that its fibres optimise digital print quality when it is converted to paper. (The artist Kevin Todd learned of these trees while doing a project at the Australian Pulp and Paper Institute in Melbourne.) Beyond aesthetics, this tree is fundamentally different and calls into question our assumption of what is natural or authentic. The *treeness of the tree* has been altered; enframing is causing change at a more elemental level.

Kevin Todd's computer-generated forms and the resulting objects, some of which are 'printed' using 3D technology, question our involvement with nature. Although the work is aesthetically appealing, Todd undermines its rationality by modelling imperfections, as if to warn that these are also part of nature — the part that refuses to be controlled. In the virtual world of the computer, where everything is predicated on number, we have created a predicable and rational environment and he doubts that in reality nature will conform.

Ultimately, Todd's works point, through their artificiality, to absence, and the nature he is (re)creating is empty. He is suspicious of beauty, of appearance and the seduction of technology and progress. Their promise involves deception. His objects are preceded by the image in the same way that enframing produces outcomes that reinforce its correctness as an approach to the world. His objects are *of* the image.

However, this work, *(Re) creating nature*, also exists as a *thing in itself*; as a product of imagination and of technology. If the computer is an expression of the imperialism of reason, then it is essential that artists challenge and question and try to find the imperfection. Not that Todd is anti-rational; he clearly greatly enjoys the computer for the stimulation and pleasure of making his work. Whether this work is authentic or incompatible, or fits a category or relates to our concept of what is real, is largely beyond its insistence to exist as a *thing in itself*.

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