

MOVING PARTS

TILDEN IS JEWELLER LAUREATE FOR THE INFORMATION SOCIETY. HER MÉTIER IS LINKING. LIKE THE GRASS LAWNS THAT SPREAD THROUGH OUR SUBURBS, COMMUNICATION NETWORKS REPRODUCE THEMSELVES THROUGH EXPONENTIAL CONNECTIONS. THE BUZZWORDS OF OUR TIME—CONVERGENCE, LEVERAGE AND ROLL-OUT—ALL CELEBRATE THE GAINS IN POWER MADE THROUGH STRATEGIC LINKS.

MOST OF THESE LINKS ARE ABSTRACT. THEY TAKE THE FORM OF TEDIOUSLY WORDED CONTRACTS, OR INVISIBLE CODE. IN PLACING A BICYCLE CHAIN IN A GALLERY, BLANCHE TILDEN GIVES THIS PROCESS A MATERIAL REALITY. IF YOU LOOK A LITTLE CLOSELY, HOWEVER, YOU WILL SEE THAT TILDEN HAS MADE A SUBTLE CHANGE TO THE LINKING DEVICE. RATHER THAN STEEL RIVET, BOLTS MADE OF GLASS HOLD THE CHAIN TOGETHER. TILDEN'S BICYCLE CHAINS ARE THUS ONLY FOR DISPLAY, AND DEFINITELY NOT ROADWORTHY.

BUT TILDEN'S CHAINS SHOULD NOT BE VIEWED IN ISOLATION. THEY ARE WEDDED TO THE CONTEXT, WHETHER THE BODY OR THE INSTALLATION. SO WHAT DO WE SEE HERE? ON THE WALL IS A COLLECTION OF TILDEN'S EXQUISITE HANDICRAFT. CHAINS IN A VARIETY OF ASSORTMENTS OFFER THEMSELVES TO THE TOUCH. THEY ARE A JOY TO HANDLE—THE LINKS CASCADING INTO THE PALM LIKE MERCURY. BUT WE ARE PREVENTED FROM TOUCHING THEM BY A SERIES OF REAL BICYCLE CHAINS, STRUNG UP AS A SECURITY CHORD. THE CHAINS ARE IN DIFFERENT CONDITIONS, FROM SILVER, BLACK AND RUSTED.

THE INSTALLATION RECREATES THE VERY MOVE THAT DISTINGUISHES TILDEN'S BRILLIANT YOUNG CAREER. SHE HAS CRAFTILY TRANSFORMED AN ITEM OF PRACTICAL UTILITY INTO AN EXPRESSIVE MEDIUM. OF COURSE, THERE IS THE HISTORY OF THE READYMADE. DUCHAMP'S VENERATION OF THE BICYCLE WHEEL FIGURES GREATLY IN THE HEROIC DAYS OF CONCEPTUAL ART. BUT TILDEN'S "WORK IS MORE THAN A READYMADE. HER INTERVENTION IS ANYTHING BUT PASSIVE: THE SKILLED CRAFTSMANSHIP OF THEIR ASSEMBLY IS A HOMAGE TO THE MACHINE ITSELF.

WHILE TUNED TO THE NETWORKED SOCIETY, TILDEN'S CHAINS ARE ALSO AT ODDS WITH THE SILICON AGE. TODAY'S 'SMART' MACHINES PROUDLY PROCLAIM 'NO MOVING PARTS', AS A GUARANTEE OF THEIR RELIABILITY. OF COURSE, THE LOSS IS SENSUAL. WELL-TUNED MACHINES GRANT CONFIDENCE IN THE WORLD. THE VELVETY 'CLICK' OF A LEICA CAMERA JOINED THE RANK OF SENSUAL DELIGHTS SUCH AS HONEYED SAUTERNE OR ALHAMBRA TILES. TODAY, THINGS WORK WELL AND LOOK BAD.

FAR FROM NOSTALGIC, THESE MECHANICAL PLEASURES ANTICIPATE A POST-DIGITAL ERA. ALREADY, THERE HAVE BEEN STARTLING ADVANCES IN WIND-UP TECHNOLOGIES, WHERE INVENTIONS SUCH AS THE 'TENSATOR CLOCKWORK GENERATOR' MEAN THAT MOBILE DEVICES SUCH AS PHONES, RADIOS AND MINE DETECTORS CAN BE POWERED BY HAND. FAR FROM OVER, THE MACHINE AGE MAY BE ONLY JUST BEGINNING.

YET WHILE TECHNOLOGICAL LEAPS ARE MADE IN ALL DIRECTIONS, THE HUMBLE BICYCLE REMAINS SETTLED IN ITS CURRENT STATE OF EVOLUTION. IT IS ALREADY PERFECTLY EFFICIENT FOR ITS PURPOSE. A COMPUTER CHIP WOULD MAKE NO DIFFERENCE TO ITS FUNCTIONING. THIS SELF-SUFFICIENCY MAKES IT ENTIRELY SUITABLE AS A SUBJECT OF METAL CRAFT, WHICH PROJECTS A LIFE INTO THE OBJECT THAT IS INDEPENDENT OF TASTE. TO GIVE THIS EXPRESSION REQUIRES GREAT BALANCE AND DISCIPLINE—TILDEN'S HALLMARK.

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