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Review of Jason Walker's 'Timing Chain', 499 words

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A trumpet call to higher ecological consciousness, this piece is fundamentally a cautionary tale. In Walker's precisely crafted work, people and nature are one and the same. The disparity between this ideal and the current practice reveals people as poor stewards of our natural counterparts.

Walker—noting that our definition of nature includes 'untouched and untainted by the human hand'—ponders this disconnection; "At the very heart of our own description of nature we exclude ourselves from it. Does this mean I am not natural? Although this argument may seem purely semantic it is not. The way in which we perceive nature inadvertently describes the way in which we perceive ourselves."

As the title implies, a 'timing chain' is both regulatory and essential. Its mechanical implications include "transforming motion from rotary to linear, where high stress loads or maintaining a specific drive ratio are important." Walker suggests that the timing—between nature and humanity—is out of synch, and that the rhythm of the natural world is the 'drive ratio' to which we must adjust ourselves. Given our culture of instant gratification, meeting this demand is far more complex and difficult than it seems. However, as Walker proposes, our failure to comply may be as disastrous as if the timing of a vehicle fails—complete cessation.

Based on the archetypical teapot form, the presence of a handle, lid, body, and spout are the jumping off point for technical virtuosity and innovation—despite the fact that the 'function' of the teapot has largely been abandoned. Unable to pour, the handle is ungainly and the bird's neck has as many double-backs and kinks as tenement plumbing, yet Walker is able to manifest an unforeseen grace.

This piece 'works' unexpectedly—the chain set and gearing are meticulously constructed so as to be able to move and turn, with the effect that the teapot rotates upon the base where it rests. This rotation recalls a Copernican model—a schema illustrating a universe of possible ecological balance. Given these astronomical analogies, this piece also gives the impression of the view of the earth through the wrong end of the telescope, rendering that which is closest and dearest to us at great distance.

Thus, we are able to view this imbalance somewhat impartially, at the slight remove which Walker cunningly provides. To make this point explicit, a bird nest is drawn on the main body of the teapot. The viewer is afforded the unusual perspective of sitting directly above this nest—a conceptual double-entendre that forces a sympathetic position; suddenly, we are the ones observing from afar humanity's crazy mechinations and the industrious destruction of nature.

Whether Walker's vision of annihilation includes the entire earth or only its peoples is debatable and, at heart, futile—since humans suffer the unfortunate consequence of either course. At worst, this compassionate view engendered by Walker's work reminds an already receptive audience. At best, it becomes the basis for a personal or collective action; let's hope for the best.