God’s Will or Human Desire: The Irony and Criticism in Lin Pey-Chwen’s *Eve Clone* series

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*In the past, “Genesis” in the Bible portrayed how God created Adam and took a rib from him to create Eve. In modern times, Lin Pey-Chwen’s Eve Clone series cast contemporary digital technology for the role of Adam and created a virtual Eve. Subsequently, mass production was utilized for large-scale reproduction, or cloning.*

As the Internet becomes more and more popular, the daily lives of modern people can hardly be separated from the use of the Internet. For example, distance learning, online shopping, online dating, and telecommuting are all achieved rapidly via the Internet. Likewise, creative forms of contemporary new media art are also unavoidably interconnected with the Internet. Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite foregrounded how the Internet became a major place where activities of daily life took place. They stated that people had to pay attention to whether it created more social problems, such as sub-cultures, a digital divide, and social interactions while the development of the Internet was dazzling and seemingly created more possibilities. Wellman and Haythornthwaite emphasized that although most of traditional studies on Internet culture tended to separate these phenomena from daily life and then discuss how these phenomena influenced daily life, activities on the Internet in fact could not be separated from daily life. On the contrary, the two were intertwined and integrated.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This kind of integration became the proposition criticized by Michael Heim. In his essay “The Erotic Ontology of Cyberspace,” Heim states that the means through which humans understand the main structure of cyberspace has already determined how the reality exists within it. In other words, the phenomenon of the reality of the Internet exists in humans’ infatuation with technology. Additionally, this infatuation is similar to an aesthetic infatuation. That is, in cyberspace, humans approach the Internet like moths to a flame. However, where the light is dim, one may discover that it is only the illusory light of dreams and desires. The emotions we create for technological products (e.g., computers and the Internet) are far more profound than an aesthetic infatuation in that what we seek is a home where the mind and soul can rest. Our infatuation with the computer does not stop with sensual satisfaction; rather, it is a kind of erotic desire. Computers are not merely for utilitarian use; they are a spiritual crutch. Moreover, our relationship with these information machines is not limited to our use of them for entertainment or as tools; it is a symbiotic relationship. Eventually, it is a marriage of the minds![[2]](#footnote-2) The concepts extended from Wellman, Haythornthwaite, and Heim echo the creative intention of Lin’s *Eve Clone* series. In other words, she uses the juxtaposition of multiple forms of media such as images, devices, and interactions to shape an inseparable relationship between the virtual Eve and the actual technology, attempting to satirize and criticize a specific situation in which the digital technology (including cyberspace) and real life overlap into “the same” world and further extending the scope to considerations of how to rewrite human bodies into the virtual world of the Internet.

A critical proposition has long been shared by Lin’s creations: the concern for the relationship between humans and the natural world, expressed through criticizing technology. Be it her earlier *Substantial Life* (1999), *Chrysalis* (2004), and *Fantasy and Things* (2004) or the ongoing *Eve Clone* series (2006–present), be it the use of a virtual butterfly or the female form, these virtual creations, all seemingly alive, are recognized life forms in human civilization; they are art objects that have been transformed into simulacra (i.e., they seem fictional but are truer than reality.) Dani Cavallaro once stated that the virtual reality contained in cyberspace was an environment created by the computer simulating reality, where the physicality of the body can experience a manmade reality. In other words, cyberspace allows people to enter a virtual environment where they can realistically experience various real feelings in the real world.[[3]](#footnote-3)

In the contemporary era of digital media, be it television, video recordings, or virtual reality on the Internet, to a certain degree, they will eventually lead humans to a de-materialized artificial world. Virtual reality utilizes physiological sensations to lead humans from the physical world to a virtual, imaginary world.[[4]](#footnote-4) Humans can even use virtual technology to create any virtual world imaginable. A virtual environment is determined by the designer, and the designer plays the role of God or the Creator. Once the technological difficulties are overcome, the designer can create any kingdom with him- or herself as the leader. Therefore, it can be observed that Lin’s creative connotation implies a criticism of the contemporary collective consensual hallucination; she satirizes humans’ longing to play the Creator. Works in the *Eve Clone* series seem to say that the expectations of technology held by contemporary society are like seeing the world we live in with blind eyes; we always blindly consider the virtual space of the Internet as a world that is different from our physical world, more desirable and more hopeful. Nonetheless, these desires in fact all originate from a frantic belief in transcendence (as if to achieve eternality on the Internet). We believe that virtual space, this new technology, can break free of the limitations of time and space and physical boundaries, taking people away from this imperfect reality.[[5]](#footnote-5) Lin’s creative strategy is to use the superiority of mythicized new media technologies to mock and criticize the myths people worship.

Undoubtedly, a unique feminine writing strategy as a critical discourse can be observed in the *Eve Clone* series. Lin uses a female figure (Eve) as the creation, whereas technology with power symbolizes the masculine side. Created with masculine technology, Eve has a beautiful posture and a delicate shape. However, this seemingly pure shape of Eve plays the role of temptress; she represents a female body between purity and evil. For example, in *Revelation of Eve Clone*, the dim, feminine installation presents a vibrant visual shock. When viewers enter the space, their paths drive the group of huge Eves to move and activate (or accumulate) the passing of time. This time is not the mechanical clock people take for granted but a Biblical time accumulated in milliseconds through the calculations of the program. The imagery in *Revelation of Eve Clone* is like the description in “The Book of Revelation” of the Bible, “And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:18). The gigantic image of the group of Eve Clones also echoes the scripture, “And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15). The work used five different languages—English, Chinese, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew—to present each nationality and country, and it further symbolized the world of different political, economic, cultural, religious, and military characteristics. From them, Lin attempted to adopt feminine writings to criticize the myth of the attempt to imitate, control, and transcend nature in the contemporary technological culture. More importantly, this image of Eve in a virtual world realistically reflected the daily lives of contemporary people, such as indulging in the virtuality of online dating or online games.

In addition, the three works *Portrait of Eve Clone*, *Mass Production of Eve Clone*, and *Revelation of Eve Clone III* were all centered on another prophecy in the Bible—imprinting. As prophesized in “The Book of Revelation,” in the apocalypse, people who were imprinted with the Number of the Beast, 666, would not be able to escape from the constraint of beasts. Therefore, the work *Inspection of Eve Clone* utilized popular tattoo totems, namely, dragons, phoenixes, serpents, and scorpions, as metaphors for the constraint of beasts. On one hand, this work reflected the fashion trend that contemporary people like to leave imprints on their bodies. On the other hand, it criticized the inverted relationship of people being controlled by objects. The work *Portrait of Eve Clone* presented the symbol “666” in over ten different languages. Holography was also utilized to present the restrained yet graceful Eve with a seductive look in her eyes to generate spiritual interaction with the viewer. This mixture of good and evil confused the viewer. Moreover, in *Mass Production of Eve Clone*, small digital picture frames were utilized to display Eve being produced. This kind of mass production resembled a production line in a machinery factory, lacking life, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. The viewers felt desolate, cold, and alienated. This work satirized the lack of consciousness in reproduction and criticized the homogeneity of mass production.

 The aforementioned creation forms of mass production and reproduction were more intensely reflected in the series *Hands of Eve Clone* and *Fingers of Eve Clone*. The imagery of dismembered bodies called to mind the parts on an assembly line, still uncombined. Each part seemed unique and yet was uniform. Their existing in the form of specimens intensified the setting of the viewer being in an emotionless laboratory with cold creatures or biochemical creations. All in all, in this era when technological culture is extremely prosperous, Lin profoundly criticized human’s fantasy that they could play the role of the Creator. She utilized metaphors such as dismembered body parts, mass production, and the Number of the Beast from the Bible to repeatedly remind people that they must think about whether it was people’s desire that drove advancements in technology or the rapid development of technology that triggered the birth of human desire. She questioned whether humans had been kidnapped by objects after the objects were created.

Arnold Hauser once commented that art does not simply reflect society; rather, art and society mutually influence each other. For Hauser, art and life are closely related and inseparable. Art must maintain its connection with the overall reality and life, and it must serve as the foundation of aesthetic evaluation. Only then can art reflect phenomena in the most vivid and profound ways. In the *Eve Clone* series, Lin utilized mixed media as the form of her artistic presentation both to remind people to be aware of their being situated in the era of digital technology and to express her critical characteristics to the world as an artist.

1. Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythorntheaite, *The Internet in Everyday Life* (NY: Blackwell, 2002), p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Michael Heim. *Reading Digital Culture* (London: Blackwell, 2001), pp. 70-73.. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dani Cavallaro. *Cyberpunk and Cyberculture: Science Fiction and The Work of William Gibson* (London: The Atolone, 2000), p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Margaret Morse. *Virtualities: Television, Media Art, and Cyberculture* (Indiana: Indiana University, 1998), p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Kevin Robins. *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (London: Sage, 1995), p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)