



SELF- I recently read an article about Jessica Stockholder where she said, “Clothes act as [our] skins over our skins; carpets act as skin on our floors; walls are the skins of our rooms, we see the outside skin of the furniture, and paint acts like a skin on all of these skins, including that of the gallery wall. All of these skins are intermingled and woven together.”¹

COOPER- Her work is very interesting to me.

SELF- Do your ‘installations’ function through the human form in the manner in which her ‘architecture’ does?

COOPER- (silence) No, I would say that my work, particularly the installation forms, function with human,

or perhaps mammalian perception (I don’t believe in placing humans in a hierarchical relationship with animals or vegetation). I mean to say that the aesthetic machines and situations are organic in visual construction, contained and sectioned with orifices where the supply (being provided through interaction with a viewer) either enters or exits. Process and production are set forth as possible results, yet the presented is often separated from its whole, dis-articulated and pinned-down for examination. An explorative approach, learning to drive by becoming an auto-mechanic.² The situations often have in-human agendas; they absorb meaning and re-formulate the familiar.

SELF- If the elements are a representation of the inside, removed for re-definition, is there a definite counter-component existing outside the human-animal structure?

COOPER- The formal structure is really interesting, layers upon layers of the human/ animal body and human/animal psyche are wrapped and protected within: bone fragments and chemical anti-agents. (Layers of skin, layers of bone, vein layers, other bones form containers that have organs in them, a system of layers.) But to discover this and to facilitate the by-products we make tools. Some receptive like sinks and toilets, while others are explorative like endoscopes/speculae and plumbing-snakes. Objects we design for interaction, instruments that work with our given parameters allowing for enhancement and controlled, immediate evolution. In the case of dis-ability, such as immobilization, walking is abandoned for the more mechanized motion of wheels/rolling, a decision based on the conventions of a modern existence amongst paved path-ways and elevators.

¹ Jessica Stockholder. Jessica Stockholder (London: Phaidon Press, 1995) p.54.

² “Biology and Art take as their medium the manipulation and development of form; both dependent upon the revelation and production of secrets as their modus operandi. Fiddling about in the sticky fascia separating and connecting the familiar and unfamiliar, biology and art share the affinity for tackling what is most uncanny in life. Think of the genesis of species crafted out of nature’s own highly stylized and bizarre laws to produce visionary beings no one could predict: species transformations which tax the mind. In this sense, ‘nature’ is just another way to name the sheer madness of biological generation.

But where science is hell bent on denuding and taxonomizing precisely what is most strange and inexplicable in nature, one saving grace of art, I hope, is its desire to thrash and journey into the corridors of as yet unperceived realms. So imagine when the artist becomes [pseudo] biologist, unlocking the secrets of DNA sequences of which s/ he is the very progenitor.” Thyrza Nichols Goodeve. “Matthew Barney ‘95 Suspension (Cremaster) Secretion (Pearl) Secret (Biology)” (London: Parkett 45, 1995) p.68.

(pause)

The same could be said for mental disability, rather than change the external world from which the afflicted reacts, internal medicine-machines are introduced to alter the brain into reacting more properly to the given external situations from the inside. Pills designed to specifically re-instruct any situations of abnormal occurrence within the body. Prosthesis combines the body with the tool, the human as the instrument.

(wandering)

I knew this guy whose legs were all screwed up from a genetic-nervous disorder and he told me that he would walk better if he amputated his legs beneath his knees and used the latest prosthetic developments.

SELF- I find your use of a kinetic situation to be a system of mimicry. Often clumsy, crude inventions are designed to engage in human activities, like automatons secretly providing the inane tasks and idle trivial moments.

COOPER- The fluid, unending method of mechanics: continuous, repetitious and cyclic. Machines are either predicated and working, or are coming apart, destroying themselves and headed for the opposite of working—still/broken. Electronically controlled situations are ordered and organized; for me this becomes an area of composition, an opportunity for aesthetic structure that is happening in time. Maybe it is less static.

SELF- You mentioned the role of medicine in an increasingly detached society, as a device of correction. In a televised society with comparatively little connection to the real (video reproductions and edited playback perception), where does the necessity of psycho-altering drugs begin and end? When, as a populace, there is no respect for anything being original and not digital or Styrofoam, how is abnormal [reality] defined? Are pills such as valium and lithium employed to keep the consumer patient attached to the accepted pathways and daily routines (open it up and throw away its container)? The cure itself is a commodity. The detached are sick, while the use of seamless technology and computer-enhanced production moves further and further away from anything “real” in popular media. Does your capsulated pill-form reflect use as well as aesthetic?

COOPER- I am interested in how a product/object is physically engaged. The capsule

³ Manufactured by several major corporations, usually with interests in pharmaceuticals and human health products. The injectable transponder is a passive radio-frequency identification tag, designed to work with a compatible radio-frequency ID reading system. The transponder consists of an electromagnetic coil, tuner capacitor, and microchip sealed in a cylindrical glass enclosure. The chip is pre-programmed with a unique ID code that cannot be altered; over 34 billion individual code numbers are available. When the transponder is activated by a low-frequency radio signal, it transmits the ID code to the reading system. According to the manufacturers- although specifically designed for injecting in animals, this transponder can be used for other applications requiring a micro-sized identification tag. Developers at the Department of the Veterans Affairs are developing applications where the bio-chip can act as a nerve sensor to inform the brain (via inductive transmission or spinal/radio receiving devices) in areas of the body where nerves are damaged; such as a loss of feeling in fingers for grip-control, alarm signals for extreme conditions, etc. The general size for these devices is eleven millimeters by two millimeters.

form arrives from the design of chemical-based products such as aspirin or suppositories designed around a willingness to ingest, a process paired with access provided by various ofificial locations. Pills are round and smooth, they flow with the internal workings and do not obstruct. An interesting crossover happened for me when through researching barcode technology, stemming from my fascination with codes and part numbers as specific identity, I found a relatively new device known as the bio-chip, a small passive implantable unit that when activated, emits a digital code.³ Currently in use in animals for inventory purposes, rumors are abound about human applications- unmistakable identity, tracking and surveillance. This really clenched it for me, some how the shape of this transponder closely relates to our progressive nature. It is a result of our technological invention and the physical requirements of our natural state.

SELF- Spiritual ergonomics?⁴

COOPER- well, uhm.... yes, however, I can't help but feel that there is a separation between the body and the spirit, don't ask me to elaborate...mmm... all the answers are just speculation anyway. The portions are connected, but I don't believe they are dependent upon each other either. Maybe the mind is the link. So in one way the body is a vehicle and a machine, definitely an extension of desire.

(pause)

A desire to survive, to move about... to live. This physical engagement is not limited to the immediate and purposeful, however, most of my interest lies somewhere in between the physical production design and the mute understood qualities of invention... like how a toilet doesn't really fit any specific rear-end but instead fits practically everyone (I wish to reserve the right to amend that statement at any time). I am drawn in by the selectable aspects of human interaction with objects. When faced with something foreign or new, decisions are made and questioned:

- 'how close should I get'
- 'where have I seen that before'
- 'how was that put here'
- 'how do you pick it up'
- 'what is it made out of'
- 'how many of these were made', etc.

⁴For the sake of continuity I have edited a section of conversation where COOPER began discussing the adaptable state of the pill as both body-medicine and body-vehicle, he described the capsule as a placenta-like form where nutrients were both informational (time capsules, probes) and food source. He detailed one of his sculpture's concepts with the ability to electronically, through the use of a convenient-store-type security camera, record the external, internally; a camera obscura (pinhole) that removes pictorially the outside and translates it to the dark chamber/inside. This relationship becomes an issue of (electronic) transformation between physical existence and perception, very much a part of emotional reactions like fear in an uncertain situation or mental-stress physically upsetting one's stomach (apparently a symptom he suffers from frequently). He mentioned the use of the capsule form in space exploration and particularly the early atmosphere experiments preceding NASA's development, called the MAN-HIGH Projects. Where a sealed one man environment was lifted with large balloons into the earth's highest atmospheric rings to test the affects of high altitude on the body.

(pause)

Sometimes these questions aren't inherent, they are enforced. Taught locally by [sensory] experience (oww, that is hot—don't touch it) or remotely experienced through television and media. For example, people do stupid things from watching television: some characters in a movie lay down in the middle of city-traffic for fun and some kids in suburbia do the same thing and die. (Sort of a combo wouldn't you say, first remote experience and then erroneously, local experience.) This reminds me of an interview I read from an article on Paul McCarthy. He said, referring to stuffed animals, "Towering over our heads, they shock us back to the confusions of childhood and a crisis often associated with effigies: it seems impossible to see them as mere lifeless objects, reinforced by cartoons and animatronics." He goes on to quote someone else who said in reference to wax figures, "looking at them we suddenly feel a misgiving: should it not be they who are looking at us?"⁵

SELF- There is a sense that with your installations, one's knowledge of an accompanying drawing is consciously (as well as schemingly), linked to the method. This case is extremely noticeable when architectural elements are portrayed within the drafts. While with all of the associations conferred between the necessity of a wall and the objects, much of the contemplation is private and only evidentiary. To be complete, the work, the wall and the drawing need each other. In fact, it is hard to approach your sculptural forms without involving dialog about drawing. Your drawings have considerable roles in both production and perception.

COOPER- Drawing is everything; it is where I discover, invent, process, it is extremely necessary to my being. I communicate more thoroughly through image and marks. And as an artist, I enjoy making drawings an integral part of my decision making process. If I am working on a project and I am concerned about some portion, I can make it happen first, in the drawing. Of course that is just a logistical approach to sculpture-drawing. I must also point out my interest in making drawings where both discourse and visual information in one sudden instant create space where new meanings may float and flirt with one another. A conjugation of different moments, times and meanings in one instant of perception.

- COOPER

⁵Paul McCarthy. Paul McCarthy, (London: Phaidon Press, 1996) an interview with Ralph Rugoff on p.78 and a quote from Ortega Y Gasset on p.138.