

Into a void

Encountering Cullen's sculptures on mass is like coming across a set of generative signifying machines, where every element is engaged in an unspoken purpose, constantly accruing meaning. Even one small object such as the 'orange' of The Orange Theory accumulates significance, through its mimesis of an orange, in the jerk of the orange as it revolves in an imperfect movement, by its juxtaposition with the chair and its occupation of an illuminated void, and then the chair begins signifying and so on. Cullen's work appears to demonstrate what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their book, A Thousand Plateaus, called a paranoid despotic signifying regime, a regime of signs in which "the world begins to signify before you even know what it signifies." (112) Like a paranoiac deriving meaning from the smallest coincidence, the constant referral of one object to the next, from one circle of signs to another, in an infinite network is almost overwhelming, everything must be interrogated for its significance.

The interpretive texts and titles that accompany Cullen's sculptures organize these radiating circles of signs around ideas of knowledge as expressed through the machines of science, history, gardens, models and art. His sculptures are mutable signifying regimes, the central signifier that over codes all the referring signs can be drawn from any one of the knowledge-machines listed above, each sending the work off on a new generative spiral of meaning.

This ever expansive, expressive enunciation of his sculptures as science-machine, garden-machine, model-machine and art-machine is predicated on a pragmatic assemblage of objects, actions and enabling mechanisms: buckets, motors and water pumps, plastic and copper pipes, rulers, chairs, plastic fruit, globes, fimo rocks, fibreglass lined cardboard boxes, ladders, ropes, record players, tables, books, paint, filler and silicon. The act of assembly, or construction of each sculpture remains visible: unconcealed rough cut holes, visibly reformed support structures, electrical cabling, globular silicon sealant and unerased markings. Dominating all of this is movement, the revolutions per minute of pumps pushing of water from one point to another, and motors driving objects with strings and rubber to form circles or figure eights.

All these components are stoically themselves, a bucket is a bucket, just as a ruler is, in all its object specificity, a ruler. Yet, when reading the expressive content of the works, the essential 'thingness' of the components, the assemblage of signs that constitute each component, their relationships to each other, combined with a scientific central signifier generate a force of veracity in the art work. The work begins to evoke the mythology of the obsessive inventor, backyard engineer, or gentleman scientist which attaches itself to the independent and historical pursuit of new discoveries. The ongoing cycles of water

and the repetitive circles that the motors generate appear to demonstrate the purposeful pursuit of knowledge.

However, this evoked veracity obscures the deliberate misrepresentations that Cullen's assemblages perpetuate. Where a scientific reading of Discovery of Oxygen appears to present a process demonstrating the existence of oxygen as a gas, the discovery of oxygen was through the primary agencies of combustion and respiration. Over coding the work with the formal garden, the pragmatism of the buckets subverts the formal aesthetic properties of a water feature. The oxygenation of the water through the agency of the pump demonstrates a redundancy of purpose in the absence of oxygen dependent life. The central over coding signifiers are revealed to be deceptive, concerned with distortion and the production of false knowledge or model making that misrepresents its point of reference. There is no orange theory per se, r/p/m only mimics the form and not the substance of an oscillating pendulum. As a result the sculptures become untrustable diagrams of knowledge and the production of meaning is overloaded by its cancellation. With this overload of information comes a sense of impotence, pointing to the impossibility of interpretation and provoking a flight from the territory of the knowledge machine. In the light of this, Brains Pear Sculpture gains purpose where before it seemed senseless. The rotation of the pear on one spot in the centre of the book Brain's Diseases of the Nervous System diagrams the transformation of accumulated and verified knowledge into a redundant object. The only transmission of knowledge allowed to the thick reference book, first published in 1933 and now in its 12th edition, is what can be gained from the spinning of the pear read against the book's title. The endless revolution reforming the purpose filled book into a neurological symptom of a voided knowledge system.

REFERENCES

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