

Influences /



BY COOPER JACOBY  
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## Portfolio: Cooper Jacoby

Corrupt pennies, Parisian sewers: as his Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden show draws to a close, the LA-based artist shares some significant images



Courtesy: the artist

### Strike Error Penny, 1982

Minting is one of the most safeguarded forms of intellectual property, so of course it's satisfying to see it implode once and awhile. A single mint press can manufacture hundreds of coins every minute, but every so often a micro-vibration or speed change will create a misregistration between the die and blank, resulting in an error like the tiny decapitation pictured above. (The bad joke here is that *capital* derives etymologically from Latin's *caput* - 'head'). As is suggested here by the physical slippage between face and support, the penny has mutated through a long series of abstractions - copper-plated zinc replacing the original copper-alloys, currency uncoupling from a fixed material reserve, high-frequency trading algorithmically shrinking the unit of exchange below 1 down to infinitesimally small fractions and fast data.

What I find so absurd about these coins is how a whole speculative market has congealed around something unfit for circulation, with their value increasing relative to how mangled their automated production spit them out. I assume there's a latent, industrial nostalgia backing many of the bidding collectors, but these pennies nonetheless seem like good specimens of a material friction, a tooling trace of a medium that continually tries to better disappear and diffuse itself.



Photograph: Cooper Jacoby     **Sheila Klein, *Vermonica*, 1993**

Fifteen years before Chris Burden unfortunately copy-pasted this in front of LACMA and created the city's most ubiquitous wedding photo opp, *Vermonica* - an oasis of various streetlights - emerged in a strip-mall parking lot a few miles to the east at the junction of Santa Monica Boulevard and Vermont Avenue. I always catch it in my periphery like a glitch, an unedited cut that reveals the inventory of props in the back of the shot, and assumed it was the dead stock from the nearby Department of Water and Power facility. To some disappointment, I later learned that this typological cluster is actually a public artwork by an artist named Sheila Klein, yet there is no sign or plaque in place to identify it. This was somewhat redeemed when I found out that it's titled *Vermonica* (a compression of the intersection's street names), which rings like the script name of some obscure supporting character, lurking silently in the scene.



Cynthia Goodman,  
*Digital Visions –  
Computers and  
Art*, 1987, p. 41

**Nicholas Negroponte with the MIT Architecture Machine Group, *SEEK*, 1969-1970**

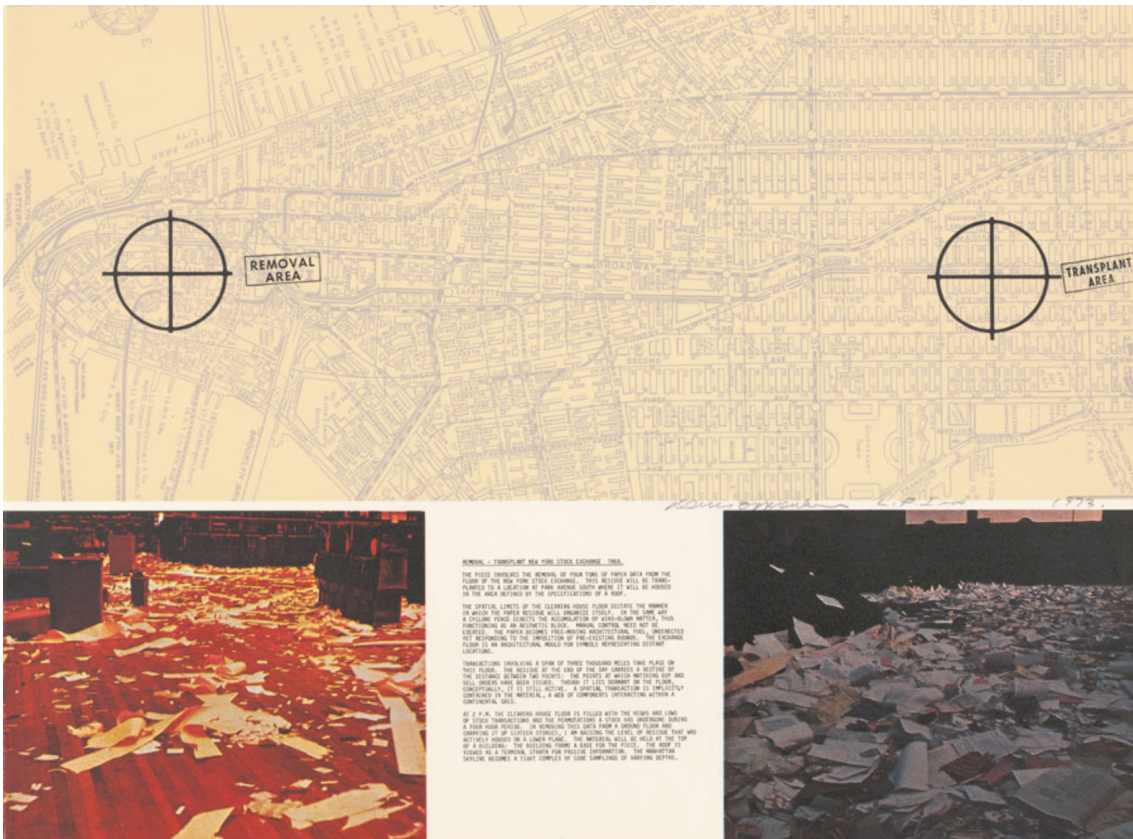
Growing up near MIT, having absorbed endless accounts of pneumatic sheep robots and intelligent slime, I was somewhat shocked when I came across *Seek* recently in Felicity D. Scott's excellent study *Outlaw Territories*, as it was a project I was unfamiliar with. Shown in the famous 'Software' (1970) exhibition at the Jewish Museum, this early experiment in smart environments presented a micro-world of 500 two-inch blocks populated with a group of Mongolian desert gerbils. A computer-guided robotic arm would detect the displaced blocks and constantly rearrange them according to the rodents' patterns of movement, attempting to probabilistically engineer the habitat to their preferences.

The whole cybernetic system ran horribly amok, as the inhabitants confused the sensors, the robotic arm broke down and the gerbils got sick. It was remade in 2009 by Lutz Dammbeck, then turned into a short film in which you can observe the gerbils wisely skirting the perimeter of the block-towers, occasionally gnawing at them but mostly avoiding the traumatic restructuring of their 'intelligent' world.



### Musee des égouts de Paris

A history of the city from within its bowels, staged as total immersion edutainment/infrastructural sublime. The lengthy narrative of Paris's tandem growth with it's sewer system is suspended on steel grating above an active channel of runoff, which is fascinating if you can put up with the smell. Hovering between past and putrid present, my favourite section discusses the 'hydrological ouroboros' and all of the agricultural uses of urban waste. It details a sort of prosumer circulation involving a stream called the 'Foul Burn', which fertilized outlying fields that yielded unprecedentedly large vegetables which then returned to city markets to start the whole cycle again.



Dennis Oppenheim, *Removal - Transplant New York Stock Exchange*, 1968, digital image. Courtesy: © Dennis Oppenheim, Digital Image © The Museum of Modern Art/SCALA / Art Resource, NY

**Dennis Oppenheim, *Removal - Transplant New York Stock Exchange*, 1968**

Before Oppenheim began to stage gory exchanges of bio-matter – such as peeling off a fingernail in a floorboard and ‘swapping’ it for a splinter, or cupping a biting mosquito on the arm and then designating it an ‘aerial displacement’ of blood in *Material Interchange for Joe Stranard* (1970) – he experimented with exchanges of information. For *Removal - Transplant New York Stock Exchange* (1968), four tons of transaction paper tickets that were left on the trading floor of the New York Stock Exchange were (supposedly) hauled to a roof uptown where they were left to blow in the wind.

It’s too easy to over-editorialize this work or treat it as a polemic, but I almost fault the documentation of this, as it teases us by withholding the details of the actual event. The weaponized map of Manhattan, the cryptic geological proposal and the photos of the two stagnant masses of paper almost add up to some cinematic montage of world financial markets cycloning around the city, but these bites of description stop short of cohering. If this schlep to Park Ave. South even took place, I imagine that it was on an airless day, with nothing to stir that pile of bureaucracy back to life.

*Lead image: Software, Information Technology: its new meaning for art, 1970, scan of catalogue cover*

**COOPER JACOBY**

Cooper Jacoby (b.1989, Princeton) is an artist based in Los Angeles, USA. Recently, he has had solo exhibitions at Mathew, Berlin, and High Art, Paris, and has been included in group shows at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin; Neuer Aachener Kunstverein, Aachen; Freedman Fitzpatrick, Los Angeles; and White Flag Projects, St. Louis. His solo exhibition 'Matte Wetter' at 45cbm Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden, Baden, is on view until 9 October.