
HUO: The question is where to start, because with both of you working together, there are at least eleven dimensions, like in superstring theory; there are so many aspects to your work.

JC: Yes, you can wander round the studio and ask us questions. You’re in the domain of our madness, but we’ll try to make sense of it.

HUO: Could you start by telling us about these works here?

JC: These are sculptures from the White Cube show Jake or Dinos Chapman. They’re titled Somewhere Between Tennis Elbow and Wanker’s Cramp. They’re dystopian, modernist sculptures that memorialise the death of modernity. The idea was to produce things that made a virtue of impoverishment – the idea being that these erstwhile ideologically perfect shapes, had become dented and damaged and dusty and dirty over time, and the hopefulness and aspirations of a futuristic world have become eroded by the entropy of time and depression.

DC: They’re made from cardboard - the material normally used to protect the sculptures.

JC: Exactly, yes. And we thought that what we’d like to do for the Serpentine show is to enlarge them, so we’re making them very, very big. We’re going to make eight and we’re going to select the ones that work – because there’s no guarantee that they’ll all work. And so they’ll be big, big, big, big made out of plywood.

DC: Yes, nine feet tall. We’re also going to provide an indigenous audience of spectators for the work, who are going to be dressed in Ku Klux Klan robes.
JPJ: Could you explain a little bit more about the idea of modernism in these works?

JC: Well, high modernist sculpture tended towards the idea that it could achieve poetic meaning through reduction rather than over-complication. With these sculptures, we've imagined a fictive artist pursuing the utopian dream, but the sculptures have faded, and perhaps the instinct to make art has somehow caught up with being depressed and overdosed on Prozac or something. We're interested in the temporal, calamitous collapse of things. It's an interesting paradox to think of modernity as an archaic remnant, when our presumption about modernity is that it is concerned with the notion of the future - the avant-garde and the futuristic.

HUO: It's a kind of ruin.

JC: It's a ruin, yes, and we're interested in what that means in terms of the trajectory of human thinking and the trajectory of human civilisation. What does it mean for modernity to be something that we can be nostalgic about? It suggests a temporal disjunction between the idea of the past, the future and the present. If we can mourn the passing of our concept of the future – this is also like a superstring theory – where are we? What happens if we have overshot the model of perfection, or passed by the model of futuristic utopia?

DC: So yes, we try to live in the future but the only way we can live in the future is by making the objects of the future ancient and raggedy.

JPJ: Yes, and also very handmade.

JC: We're interested in strange trajectories. If you take McDonald's as a motif: McDonald's started life as an extremely utopian proposition – cheap food, meat for all – people didn't have to get out of their cars to eat; they could drive-in, get their food and accelerate away down
the motorway. McDonald’s emerged in the age of velocity, the age of acceleration. Speed was liberating – fast-food was liberating. McDonald’s embodied a whole new criteria for embracing the future: it was fantastically bright, colourful, anti-entropic, absolutely super-conductive; it embodied the space age, the future of pure kinetic movement without friction or gravity. But literal resources could not support such levels of extreme consumption, the parabolic curve of industrialised idealism shallows – the utopian clown begins to lose his sense of humour. The backlash begins - McDonald’s is vilified and the pariah clown starts to become more and more litigious. The suicidal consumption slows - the only solution to stem the destructive trajectory of one nihilism is to replace it with another - to adopt recycling, to paint its restaurants mother nature green and mourn the end of the world.

**JPJ:** Nihilism has been the subject matter of your work for a long time – from the beginning really.

**DC:** Joyful nihilism.

**HUO:** Very Nick Land.

**JC:** Very Nick Land, yes.

[laughter]

**HUO:** Besides those sculptures, there are also these machines, like this one here, which are relatively new. Could you talk a little bit about this other aspect that you’ve been working on?

**JC:** Well, instead of being machines that are the accretion of human purpose, the point of reference of these machines is more biological. Rather than being objects that serve a distinct purpose for us, they’re more mimetic - they have and do things that look vaguely familiar physiologically. They’re crude approximations of human metaphysics,
or human essence. They began life when we produced a machine called *Little Death Machine* (1992), which was a kind of motor. It was built absolutely empirically; we had no skill in making machines.

**DC:**

It was first shown at the ICA. What happened was we built the thing on a table. It had a fan belt that turned this mechanism, which made a hammer lift up, hit a brain, and inside the brain there was a pump that went through another upturned brain. And when the hammer hit the brain, it drew liquid from a reservoir of hand soap – it was the closest approximation to semen we could find – and it fired through a penis. So it produced a libidinous cycle.

What first happened was that, through the process of the hammer whacking the brain, the table began to shift. So it started to adopt this slight limp as it began to move, and then a knock-on effect was that the hammer would hit the brain harder, so then the penis would shoot past the upturned vaginal brain, so then we'd have to adjust it. It became this cascade of problems to which we had to find solutions. And so the sculpture started to build itself; it became more complex and more absurd. And what was interesting about it was that in terms of how the thing looked, it wasn't an approximation of the act of male ejaculation; the only thing which was like ejaculation was the space between the end of the plastic penis and the brain itself. So that was uncannily like the human action, but everything else was uncannily unlike it, so that in terms of being a cybernetic model of human action, it didn't look like a human and yet it acted like one. Interestingly, through the duration of its first exhibition it smashed itself to pieces, and so in some senses not only did it approximate human action, but it actually exceeded it by becoming more human than human.

So we had to decommission it, which essentially meant castrating the electrical lead, winding the lead up and then saying, 'OK,' and then for
the next, I think, five years it lived in the corner of the studio in
disgrace; it was exiled to the corner of the studio and it gathered
dust. Then we looked at it one day and realised that actually ...

**JC:** It had actually become the thing that it was supposed to be. It had
actually died; it had committed suicide.

**DC:** The machine was doing exactly what it was supposed to do; it's just
that we couldn't anticipate that smashing itself to pieces was the
most human thing about it. It was almost like it had this will to
destroy itself.

**JC:** It was a perfect model of a dissipative system. Anything that has an
input and an output tends towards obliteration. It essentially
rendered itself extinct, a perfect model of a biological system.

**JPJ:** This one is clearly cast.

**JC:** Yes.

**JPJ:** But this one isn't. It's made from found materials.

**DC:** This is cast from found materials. This is a kind of distant cousin to
that.

**JPJ:** So how do you decide which you cast?

**JC:** It's about kinetic motion being petrified. It goes through the process
of being cast into wax, and then cast from wax into bronze, and then
welded together. So while it might look like it embodies the idea of
motion, it actually embodies the notion of petrification. It's become a
glacial object; it's completely frozen.

**DC:** And also purposeless. At no point would this machine ever have
achieved anything that we'd recognise as useful. It might only be
useful to itself.
JPJ: So you wouldn’t say that it belonged in the zone of, say, Heath Robinson?

DC: No because his things worked, while these are accumulations of disaster and misdirection. There’s a narrative in here, but the narrative becomes self-reflexive and pointless.

HUO: In the exhibition, we’ll show all the dimensions of your work, we’ll have your poetry, books and movies. I think everybody knows a little bit about these, but perhaps not all of it is known to everyone, so it would be interesting if you could talk about these different facets. What are you doing right now with film, literature and music?

DC: Well, neither of us sleeps so we have double the amount of time to play with things.

JC: We’ve been making music, we’ve been writing and doing stuff for years, but we’ve never really made this public. We started making art because it had all sorts of other possibilities; it leads to other things.

DC: We’re very diverse; we’re interested in everything.

JC: We’re interested in the slippages. Two people working together, as you said at the beginning, it multiplies the agencies involved in producing the work. And so the peripheral interests, the things that sheer away, and the gaps between, become equally as important as the work. I guess also the idea of taking people like Goya hostage, or working on other artists’ work, is another way of encouraging the notion that the work isn’t at all autobiographical. There are no claims over identity or authenticity, or a symbiotic relationship between the two of us; it’s much more to do with a determination to have the work exist in the world rather than reflect our position in the world.

FWC: And is one of you more inspired about, say, film or music than the other?
DC: No, we take it in turns.

HUO: But one of you writes more and one of you makes more music?

DC: At the moment, yes.

FWC: Which one?

DC: Well, I can't tell you that. It doesn't matter; it really doesn't actually matter.

FWC: OK, but it's so interesting to have two people who are equally interested in the same things.

DC: Yes, I think the idea of a lone genius only existed for a very short time.

FWC: Yes, but that doesn't really matter. What's interesting is the fact that the two of you can be equally inspired by the same sorts of things. It's more complicated than being a lone genius. No?

DC: For us, it's easier.

FWC: But if you're by yourself then you can plough your own furrow and nobody says, 'No, I don't think that's a good idea.'

DC: No, but you can't test your ideas, because you're always going to agree with yourself, aren't you?


JPJ: You'd be worried about whether the answer you get is the right one.

DC: Well it's always the wrong one, isn't it? Because you're not going to make things difficult for yourself, or generally you're not, are you?

JPJ: Would you say that there's a starting point, for example drawing, for all of your work?
DC: There is a starting point, but it's a conversation, and it expresses itself in many forms. I mean, you can't draw the music. No, the conversation is where it starts, but it's a conversation that's been going round and round in circles endlessly. We don't sit down and have an idea ...

JC: We don't take drawing as being a beginning; drawings can be an end point. Most of the drawings are more diagrammatic and end up scattered around the studio floor and then in the bin.

HUO: Can we see some drawings? Last time we saw some early drawings.

JC: Yes, we haven't got any better. [laughs] There's no improvement in our drawing, it's still as bad as it ever was. Here we have our drawings.

HUO: Do they have titles?

DC: They will have.

HUO: Do you find the titles at the end?

DC: Sometimes.

JC: I just grabbed these. This is just an example. See, you'd like that one, that's proper string theory. And this is quite an interesting one, look.

This is called *The War of Similarity and Difference*; it's a snowball fight between nuns and penguins.

[laughter]

HUO: So that's a mix of recent drawings and older drawings? What are these watercolour-like things? Are these recent?

JC: No, these are really old. In this room we're just reviewing some stuff from a million years ago. There's some really old stuff. This is from ...

DC: I don't know, 1979, something like that.
**HUO:** So these are the real beginnings?

**DC:** 1980.

**JC:** 1980. That's 1983. So these are from when we were students really.

**HUO:** And that's before you co-signed?

**JC:** Yes, oh yes.

**HUO:** What's the first work you ever co-signed?

**JC:** I think it was the small Goya soldiers, the chopped up soldiers, the little tableaux. Yes, that was the first thing we made together.

**DC:** We made a film. Did you see *The Organ Grinder's Monkey*? So this is the penultimate scene. It's a short film we made that's a pilot for a general release movie. It's loosely based on Hancock's *The Rebel*; it plots the trajectory of an artist. I don't know if you know of this film, *The Rebel*?

**HUO:** No, you should tell us about it.

**JC:** Well, it's a Tony Hancock film - it's a very polite attack on bourgeois art. Hancock is an unhappy accountant in ... Where is he?

**DC:** Basingstoke.

**JC:** Cheam.

**DC:** Cheam, yes.

**JC:** He wants to be an artist, and of course his understanding of what it is to be an artist is lamentably misguided. He travels to Paris and buys a beret. He moves into a garret with an authentic tortured artist, and by degrees of slapstick the real artist is overlooked in favour of Hancock's naïve buffoonery – illustrating how the art-world can't tell its art from its elbow when it comes to judging 'talent'.
HUO: And can you tell us about your new film * Fucking Hell* (2013), which you're working on right now?

DC: Our new film is a fractured montage of all the films and snippets of films that we've made over the years, and it's going to be like the moment just before you die when everything flashes in front of you. This is what it might look like for us.

JPJ: That's exciting.

DC: But it won't flash, it'll just kind of drag by, painfully slowly.

HUO: And you're editing it now?

JC: Yes, we're working on it right now, yes.

JPJ: Good, I look forward to seeing it. We haven't talked much about the vitrines, and that's been such an important part of your work for a very long period. What was the conversation that led to the first vitrine?

DC: We wanted to make the worst representation we possibly could of...

JC: Everything.

DC: Everything. It's like saying, how can you possibly approach such a subject and expect to be able to do it any justice? So instead of doing that, you do exactly the opposite. You say, 'OK, we're going to make it really small and really pathetic, and there's going to be a lot of it.' And we'll never finish it.

JC: We are also wondering what the job or the task of an artist is. Is it to fiddle around with the provincial localities of your own desires, like you make a painting about an apple because you're hungry? Or is the
job of the artist to deal with the magnitude of existence, the circumstances we find ourselves in, the conditions of our experience? Or is this one and the same thing? We could set ourselves the task, ‘Let’s make a work of art about what it’s like to be cold, or what it is like to be in England or London on a rainy day.’ But we wanted to ask, ‘How do we make any kind of work of art?’

**DC:** Or, ‘How do we produce a work of art that seems to be full of everything and yet filled with nothing?’ In a sense, it’s the idea of saying, ‘What’s the thing that seems to draw the most magnitude of awe for us?’ Well you could say it’s the idea of this moment in the twentieth century when the world seemed to achieve a point of irreversible obscenity. And so we thought it would be a perfect starting point to make our big mistake. That should be the point. And we should aim that high, with the intention of missing it.

**JC:** We missed it miserably, and that’s the point. Proximity not mimicry. The idea of verging upon something obliquely, to achieve proximity to this ‘thing’ that betrays representation in order to try to ‘under’ represent it and thereby failing.

**DC:** Grand failure.

**JC:** To make the grand narrative into a grand failure.

**JPJ:** But then you made one grand failure ...

**DC:** After another.

**JC:** Yes.

**DC:** Well the thing is you can’t finish, can you? Every time you do something you can think of something worse, so you have to make that thing, and when you’re making that thing you can think of something even worse. So if we do nothing else, we could employ
ourselves until we die, and then we could hand it onto our
descendants, and they could carry it on.

**JC:** But it's also important to do things that don't deserve to be done.
Because the rewards for doing something gives you a sense that
there's a point to doing it, but if your reward is its pointlessness, and
even more pointlessness, and you subordinate yourself to the task
tirelessly, you can become a kind of a superhuman idiot; you can
aspire to the excesses of being absolutely idiotic, but tirelessly, and I
think that's what we've aimed to do.

When our *Hell* burned and someone asked 'Is it true that *Hells* on
fire?' Dinos said, Yes, of course it's on fire!

**DC:** It's always on fire. [laughs]

**JC:** 'When has it not been on fire? And they said, 'Well, what are you going
to do?' And Dinos decided, 'Well, we'll make three of them.' So instead
of collapsing into this self-sorry state of thinking that this was some
terrible event, it became an incitement to reproduce the thing three
times.

**HUO:** One thing that came to my mind on the way here is that when I
visited you for the first time about twenty years ago your unrealised
project was to do a Stephen Hawking monument. I was wondering
now, twenty years later, what are your unrealised projects?

**JC:** A holiday.

[laughter]

**DC:** A little bit of sleep.

**JC:** Maybe some dreams.

**DC:** Dreams would be nice.
JC: No, oh God, we've got...

HUO: You've got tonnes of ideas?

JC: Yes, too numerous. We've always wanted to make a huge, huge, huge, metal tower-like sculpture and then run a Stannah chair lift through it. It would be the slowest theme park, and at the point at upside down spirals you'd be moving at less than one mile per hour, so that as you went round you could feel your weight dropping.

DC: Yes, it could have a tea stop every so often, but with no toilets.

JC: Gombrich's History of Art would be whispering in your ear as you went through, so by the time that you were near the end, you'd completely hate art; you'd never want to see another sculpture in your life. But that's unrealized...

JPJ: Excellent. Humour seems to be the epicentre of everything you do.

DC: Knock, knock.