

Jake and Dinos Chapman: *Movements*



Movements is a tool designed by **DHC/ART – Education** to encourage in-depth explorations of key concepts evoked by the works presented in the exhibition *Come and See*. By highlighting these points of conceptual departure through the document *Movements*, the **DHC/ART** educators intend to inspire dialogue about the exhibition and to encourage visitors to elaborate on the proposed themes with their personal interpretations and reflections. Over time, these *travelling concepts*¹ are subsequently enriched as they inform new contributions to our evolving conversations about art.

Movements also serves as a reminder that an aesthetic experience engages the body - its senses and its movements - as much as the intellect. The body's physical, emotional, and perceptive gestures are intimately linked as we move through the exhibition space and our senses are awakened. The rhythm of our trajectories and changing perspectives also mobilize our vision; images take shape as our memory and imagination are touched by the emerging aesthetic landscape. *Movements* is thus an invitation for the visitor to become immersed - mind and body - into **DHC/ART** exhibitions, thereby developing a rich and dynamic understanding of the works.

¹ Please note that the on-line series titled *Travelling Concepts* is a complementary reflection to the themes introduced in *Movements*: <http://dhcart.tumblr.com/>

Context Reification



Jake and Dinos Chapman. *When the world ends there'll be no more air that's why it's important to pollute the air now before it's too late. (...) Free Willy.* Detail. 2011-2012. Courtesy of White Cube.

To reify means to substitute an abstract concept, an idea or a feeling with a concrete object: for example, to use the figure of "Mother Nature" to refer to weather or to say that "the road is calling you" when you want to travel. Timothy Bewes defines reification as "the moment [when] a process or relation is generalized into an abstraction, and thereby turned into a 'thing'.¹" Reification can also mean to transform any kind of relation between people into "real" objects, a process that effectively hides the cultural and social structure that is at play when we interact with these objects. When you buy an item of clothing in a store, the presence of the commodity substitutes (and neutralizes, in a way) the amount and the conditions of labor needed and technology deployed to create said object: this is a prime example of reification. Georg Lukács describes the effect of reification as a kind of "phantom objectivity", "an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people".² Reification is a useful concept to consider the current economic system's reliance on commodities to instill desire in consumers and to install hierarchies between its actors. To be conscious of reification is to make visible the social relations between humans that are at play when we produce, buy or consume any product.

In an artistic context, reification can be used to ponder the various structures through which a work of art comes to public consciousness. It offers a probing metaphor of the act of creation itself, where a concept or an idea is transformed – made real, in a sense – with the help of a medium (and an artist) into an object.

It can help us put objects back into their general context and consider them as parts of systems, rather than as finalities in themselves. By countering the "phantom objectivity" effect of reification, we can consider works of art through their circulation in museums and galleries, their participation in a market-driven economic structure, their place in the narrative

of recent art history and their interpretation by the general public, by critics and by art historians. That is to say that any art object, including the works of the Chapmans, cannot be considered solely as objects; always in flux, works of art crystallize and materialize power dynamics in the art world, in the production of knowledge and in the global economy. Keeping in mind the process of reification behind any object is a good example of critical thinking, an important skill to develop as visitors of an art exhibition (and as citizens, in general).

Can you think of ways in which the Chapmans "reify" something through their artistic process? If so, what do they reify? How do they do it? What references or what materials are used to do so? What is the structure (or the abstract thought) hidden behind that process of reification?

Reification is a key concept to consider the effects and implications of capitalism in our societies, especially in regards to our relationship to objects. In your opinion, do the Chapmans offer a critical stance on capitalism through their work, or do they celebrate it? Does the work of the Chapmans make you reconsider your own relationship to consumption (or to capitalism)?

¹ BEWES, Timothy (2002). *Reification, or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism*. New York : Verso, p. 3.

² LUKÁCS, Georg (1972 [1923]). "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat". *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. Cambridge: MIT Press. Online. http://www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/books/Reification_Consciousness_Lukacs.pdf. Consulted February 27 2014.

Content Grotesque / Carnival



Jake and Dinos Chapman. *Kontamination* examination of the significant material related to human eXistenZ on earth. Detail. 2009. Courtesy of White Cube.

The term 'grotesque' comes from the Italian *grotta*, meaning 'grotto'. It is first and foremost a decorative arts style from the time of the Renaissance. At its origin are the strange and extravagant patterns found in the ruins of the *Domus Aurea*, an ancient Roman palace constructed by Nérón. An abundance of decoration, a tendency towards excess, metamorphosis, and a proliferation of images presenting fantastic creatures in the form of animal-human-plant hybrids are all characteristic of Grotesque style.

In this context, 'carnival', or *carnavalesque*, refers to the social manifestation of the grotesque. According to literary critic Mikhail Bakhtine, the carnival in the Middle Ages was much more than a festive occasion; it was an opportunity for the population to express themselves - loudly and clearly - and to temporarily overthrow both the established order and power, as well as the guiding principles of the social and material world. Carnival goers thus transform their identity through costumes and masks, and indulge in sensual pleasures in the public sphere: food, drink, even sexual display or play.¹ The vulgarity of the body takes precedence over the disembodiment of the spirit, crude expression interrupts refined conversation, delirium reigns, and reason is derailed. These various phenomena – all tied to basic instincts, excess, and the materiality of the body and the things that surround it – are carriers, for the duration of the festivities, of ripe fertility and abundance.

The spirit of the grotesque and the carnival is alive and well in contemporary art, and is present more than ever in the artistic practice of Jake and Dinos Chapman. A visit to *Come and See* is a carnivalesque experience *par excellence*, in all its intensity, vertigo, confusion, and ambivalence. In *Come and See*, we are constantly pulled between light and uncomfortable laughter, joyful excitement and paralysing fear, enchantment and disgust, the tragic and the comical.

Bakhtine states that "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people". It is also, according to him, a temporary escape from ordinary life.² In your opinion, in what ways are we, as visitors, pulled into the carnival as we wander through the exhibition *Come and See*?

The series of paintings One Day You Will No Longer Be Loved is the Chapmans' appropriation of 19th century portraits that were originally commissioned by individuals in the upper middle class. Describe the ways in which this gesture constitutes a grotesque transgression.

Jake and Dinos Chapman created a series entitled Shitrospective in order to design their own amusing and irreverent retrospective of their works to date. In what ways does Shitrospective subvert the norms and usual characteristics of this type of exhibition?

¹ DUBÉ, Peter (2007). "Serpents with birds, and lambs with tigers joined: On the passage of one word and an idea through a culture". *La tête au ventre*. Montréal: Galerie Leonard and Bina Ellen.

² BAKHTINE, Mikhail (1982). *L'œuvre de François Rabelais et la culture populaire au Moyen Age et sous la Renaissance*. Paris: Gallimard.

Composition Baroque



Jake and Dinos Chapman. *The Sum of All Evil*. Detail. 2012-2013. Courtesy of White Cube.

Intensity. Dramatic emotion. Tension. These and other elements of the Baroque are recalled in the works of Jake and Dinos Chapman. In their extravagance and by “[c]ombining horror, humour, and careful craftsmanship with social commentary, [the Chapmans’] provocative work incorporates the essence of the seventeenth century Baroque.”¹ Theirs is an aesthetic of excess and confrontation with regard to subject matter and approach, of course, but also materials and scale.

Bronze, wood, wool and digital technologies, not to mention cardboard and paint, are just a few of the materials with which the Chapman brothers experiment. Their approach to using these materials is either exquisitely precise and meticulous, or intentionally and excruciatingly juvenile. In *Shitrospective*, the Chapmans recreated a selection of their work from over the past twenty years by using simple materials that are fragile and vulnerable at best, and pathetic and vulgar at worst. In what is perhaps one of their most humorous pieces, works that are quite potent in their original form are transformed into innocent cardboard cutouts.

In *Sum of All Evil*, colossal atrocities and violence are shrunk down into miniature figurines. A scale that one would normally associate with innocence and playfulness is in effect a gory and cyclical game of death and torture. Viewers peer over the repulsive figures and morose scenes with a privileged bird’s eye view. We are removed from their glass encasings; we are not a part of their misery and torment. And yet to really see the works, we have no choice but to approach and have (if only spatially) an intimate interaction. Once in close contact, we are thrown off our guard yet again as we are confronted by gigantic, hairy, repulsive legs (God’s legs, allegedly); two gargantuan columns towering over the minuscule scene. Confrontational and eccentric on all accounts, the ‘contemporary Baroque’ is present and thriving in the excessive worlds created by Jake and Dinos Chapman.

The term ‘Baroque’ derives from Spanish “barroco,” meaning “imperfect pearl.” What is the significance of this term? In what ways could this expression be used to describe the Chapmans’ work?

Many of the Chapmans’ works in Come and See present a thought-provoking relationship between material and subject matter. Little Death Machine (castrated, ossified), for example, is a sculpture that is made of bronze, and then painted. Why do you think the Chapmans covered the bronze sculpture with paint? What other works create a particular kind of dialogue because of the materials used?

¹ BALDISSERA, Lisa and Lee HENDERSON (2009). *Peculiar Culture: The Contemporary Baroque*, Luanne Martineau, Jake and Dinos Chapman. Victoria: Art Gallery of Greater Victoria.

Consideration Collaboration



Jake and Dinos Chapman. *The Sum of All Evil (North)*. Detail. 2012-2013. Courtesy of White Cube.

Artist and assistant, technical teams, interdisciplinary collectives, and participatory art projects: artistic collaborations take a myriad of forms, and have so for centuries. Motivation for such collaborations includes the practical, conceptual, and the ideological. In the social sphere, the latter often implies a quest for new ways of working and/or the articulation of previously unheard voices. In this context, progressive management of power and relational dynamics "leads potentially to personal transformation and subversive political agency."¹

The Chapmans, however, reject a humanist reading of either their process or their work. Rather, their approach seems more in keeping with the critical-yet-playful spirit of Dada gestures. It also recalls the darkness, mutations, and distortions of the Surrealists. Through the act of creating an exquisite corpse, for example, "to fold was to hide and to reveal at once—to hide the body of work that the next participant might automatically wish for, and to reveal, in the few lines pressing over the fold, the possibilities of a ludic experience that becomes simultaneously both singular and collective."² Chapman collaborations are numerous and distinct, including: one another, studio assistants, technicians, curators, fashion houses, Goya, and unnamed 19th century portrait painters.

Their own collaboration dates back two decades, and appears from the outside to reflect both a sense of humour and an engagement with the comforts and contradictions that are inherent to their partnership. Their relationship to their assistants is transparent in the tradition of the old masters, but seemingly less mentoring in spirit. Jake states: "I think it's incredibly patronising to get involved in supervising their artistic development. Those philanthropic, paternal gestures are completely alien to us."³ The series *One Day You'll No Longer*

Be Loved (described at various points as iconoclast, 'reworked and improved', and a posthumous collaboration) comprises anonymous 19th century portraits over which the artists have skilfully and meticulously painted over the subjects to create grotesque, scarred and decaying versions of former selves. In *Insult to Injury*, the Chapman brothers add another layer to Goya's *Disasters of War*. While the original series is understood as an indictment of war, the Chapmans treat the prints with humour, if not enjoyment—sentiments that mirror the elaborate detail with which Goya depicted such painful atrocities.⁴

The Chapmans reject the "reductive" notion that a work of art "is in itself the belief of one person." This, according to Will Self, allows them to engage with "ethically raw subject matter" – "after all, if your work is some other person's, in what sense are you responsible for the outrage it causes?"⁵ How do you respond to this reflection?

What is the relationship between creative input, ownership, and authorship?

Is collaboration as simple as a practice that involves multiple contributors or does it require dialogue in a more literal sense, involving a back and forth exchange between participants in real time, as equal and consenting partners? Is any and all art making collaborative on some level? How do you define collaboration or collaborative art practices?

¹ NEUMARK, Devora and Johanne CHAGNON (2011). "The Unsettling Powers of Collective Creativity". *Affirming collaboration: community and humanist activist art in Quebec and elsewhere*. Montreal and Calgary: Brush Education.

² KOCHHAR-LINDGREN, Kanta, Davis SCHNEIDERMAN and Tom DENLINGER (2009). "The Algorhythms of the Exquisite Corpse". *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

³ JEFFRIES, Stuart (2013). "The Chapman Brothers on life as artists' assistants: 'We did our daily penance'". *The Guardian*. Online. <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2013/mar/23/artists-assistants-chapman-brothers>. Consulted March 15, 2014.

⁴ For an in-depth discussion about the Chapmans' work in relation to Goya and the concept of collaboration, consult BAKER, Simon (2005). *Jake & Dinos Chapman: Like a dog returns to its vomit*. London: Jay Jopling/White Cube.

⁵ SELF, Will (2014). "The Sixth Reich". Jake and Dinos Chapman: *The End of Fun*. London: White Cube.



DHC/ART Foundation for Contemporary Art
451 & 465, Saint-Jean Street (angle Notre-Dame, Old-Montreal)
Montreal (Quebec) H2Y 2R5 Canada

Business hours:

Wednesday to Friday from noon to 7:00 p.m.
Saturday and Sunday from 11:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Contact:

education@dhc-art.org | (514) 866-6767 (4219)

Information

(514) 849-3742 | info@dhc-art.org
www.dhc-art.org | [facebook @dhcart](#) | [dhcart.tumblr.com](#)