

# THE BLIND OBSERVER

Michael Victor Jackson

Printed as a handout to accompany the exhibition, Critical Decor: What Works...

23 January- 2 March 2014

# PART 1

## THE MATRIMONY OF GOOD AND EVIL VIA OBSERVATION

One's consumption of information and ability to reflect on and respond to that information, makes one subject to and indirectly responsible for the invariable behavioural expressions unfolding around oneself. One is a billboard inhaling cultural air and exhaling one's interpreted contribution. Being confined to the dictatorship of culture one can not but contribute accordingly and appropriately. Via the assortment of colloquially prepared role plays one eventually loses touch with one's naked self. Consequently, as the raw authentic is systematic domesticated and one becomes a socialised repressed player of society, what was once a rude and hostile truth becomes an unquestionable polite lie.

The capitalist culture is arguably as far from any naked truth as any culture could possibly be. In order to examine how polite or rude the members of JCHP are in contrast to the culture they have both been submerged in most if not their entire lives. I – a life long citizen of the capitalist culture – offer a critique designed to recognised the often subtle differences between well dressed nudity and authentic nakedness. Note that polite nudity is always in support of the conservative status quo, from which one finds

comfort through familiarity.

Be it lofty or inconspicuous, individualism mimics the behaviour or the expression of the larger system it is subject to. Thus, the autonomy of individual expression is bound to and regulated by cultural expression. One opposes the system the way the system demands being opposed. Hence the revolution that overturns the system has already been anticipated and regulated by that same system. The system is all encompassing. Furthermore, resignation to the cultural pull is necessary before any communication can occur. Thus, as opposition also recognises the ally in the enemy (a dependency signifying common ground that reconciles all opposites) it follows that JCHP also acknowledge, be it possibly unconsciously, the necessity of its own amalgamation and advocacy to the state of that which it enthusiastically reproaches.

#### **EMPLOYER VERSES EMPLOYEE**

JCHP's support of the contractually bonding marriage between, what they might consider as being, the good of art content and the evil of art career, is witnessed in their approval of Lanchester Gallery Projects' (LGP's) offer to me of a £X incentive/wage to contribute towards JCHP's exhibition "CRITICAL DECOR : WHAT WORKS!". It is thus suggested that JCHP and LGP are in agreement that the amount of £X *should* be sufficient to remove any

doubts I might otherwise have had in contributing. That a voluntary contribution was not suggested by either JCHP or LGP indicates that both, if not necessarily in favour of, do not adamantly disapprove of the concept of the financial incentive which eventually distinguish the employer from the employee.

#### **PRE-EXHIBITION**

In keeping with JCHP's pre-exhibition inquiry whereby they find "...no good reason cherry picking the material and no reason not to include the physical workings of this exploration in the exhibition itself." and the care they take to avoid losing something of potential importance, (which if I understand their concern correctly, is in regards to the prioritisation of careerist distribution over content) while expecting a positive answer, which I did indeed receive, prior to the exhibition I asked for JCHP's permission to quote any email dialogue between themselves and myself. Before examining this very short e-dialogue, for the sake of contextual clarification, it is worth noting a possible contradiction between the high value JCHP attach to all pre-exhibition inquiry having potential importance and the pre-exhibition inquiry also being junk: "*Excuse 1: The inclusion of all this junk in exhibition might help to suggest to an audience a lack of, and a disregard for any distinctions between the relations of production and the relations of dis-*

*tribution, admittedly only by dumb outward signs, but at least an indication of a position becomes explicit.”* Although JCHP suggest being adverse to the priority arthood gives to the relations of distribution over the relations of production, if junk is at all reflective of the potential importance of a pre-exhibition inquiry (production), JCHP must either be subordinating their pre-exhibition inquiry below the status of the exhibition (distribution) or lowering the status of exhibition to that of being junk.

## PRE-EXHIBITION DIALOGUE

As well as offering me payment for my contribution, the initial idea was for LGP to cover my travel costs to and from the exhibition plus an overnight stay. The reason for me being present at the exhibition was to give some sort of lecture. However, after I informed JCHP that I would be travelling from outside England, they made me aware that it would not be possible for LGP to cover such costs. I thought it necessary then to ask JCHP how much LGP would be willing to pay for a text contribution only:

MJ: *Let me know what the gallery is willing to pay. I'm considering a crit' of three to four pages.*

JCHP: *That sounds good. Let's stick with £"X" particularly as it sounds like you're putting some thorough effort in.*

Although it is was not made clear via our pre-exhibition

correspondence as to whose decision it was (JCHP's or LGP's?) to stick with the original payment of £X, it was JCHP's justification that followed the decision that interested me: *“particularly as it sounds like you're putting some thorough effort in.”* The entire statement exemplifies the if clause attached to reward based production so characteristic of a power based hierarchy, in which only the employer (superior) determines the outcome. How the justification of the unequal distribution of influence is perceived is very much determined by how the propaganda or, if you prefer, the Public Relations team present it. In many cases the difference between dictatorship and democracy simply depends on the packaging.

Until one is consciously aware of the language one practises – be it spoken, written, artistic or otherwise – which only happens when one has some objective distance to the language – the less the language is going to pass one by unquestioned. Moreover, the more correct the distance is the more consistent the messages one desires communicating will be with the messages one is actually communicating. Vague messages inevitably compromise one's position with a real danger of ending up both supporting and propelling that which one *believes* one is opposing.

Regarding the electronic dialogue between JCHP and myself, I too appropriately play my (natural?) part of being a potential bottom rank employee by clearly recognising that

the final decision does indeed lie in the hands of primarily LGP and – if at all – secondarily JCHP. Both are in the position, however, to pull the plug on my accessibility to contribute if either choose to. If they do not decide to pull the plug and so present me with the opportunity to speculate on the potential future career opportunities this platform may bring about for me – would me considering JCHP as a stepping stone be befitting to *their* occasion? Such an incentive for which to offer this contribution would inevitably turn myself and JCHP into indigent rivals. Would we not find ourselves at war with each other – in a competition typical of a capitalistic system founded on scarcity value – in a pyramidal hierarchy designed to produce so many losers and so few winners? And if I were to consider my career over my interest in JCHP, would I not desire offering the next curator, institution or individual a more career friendly proposal than JCHP could? Would I not be grateful to the next merciful superior (Stockholm syndrome), be them small mercies? And what are small mercies but superfluous offering from those who have to those who have not? Bearing in mind JCHP know full well that the Stockholm syndrome is founded on subordination and deprivation, are they not then encouraging the same values they contest being against? And if so, should not my and JCHP's interest in the parade cease at desiring their/their own undoing?

But with all that said, JCHP seem to be resistant to these claims. Thus, if I desire the £X, I have little choice but to

play along with their mindfulness. Nevertheless, as they have failed to do, I will pull out as many tricks as I can to conjure up an offer of euthanasia, if required, in order to help JCHP overthrow their own venture. The best tricks are, of course, the most subtle? And so am I now their friend or foe? I *promise* you, my insecure, sceptical and distrustful fellow citizen of the capitalist culture, I am indeed their friend!

Nevertheless, although they may need to surrender their right to denounce us *others* (NON-JCHP members) who are contributing to (JCHP's?) sumptuous exposition, from being opportunists, it should be noted that JCHP most *clearly* recognise in Gustave Courbet's *The Stone Breakers*, the intention to expose the overwhelming deprivation inflicted on the lowest social stratum as a consequence of such a power based hierarchy from which only few can ever materialistically benefit. Any ambiguities in their messages therefore, should not be mistaken for irony – the stuff that often makes up the back bone of much of contemporary art. JCHP are serious – one finds no gimmicks and no one liners here.

# PART 2

## AN APPROPRIATE FORM OF EXHIBITION?

*“An appropriate form of exhibition would have to be one that avoided presenting objects in a way that made them soar above ordinary objects and a way of exhibiting that doesn’t perpetuate the market such as a brand of validation that prioritizes a connection between the individual and her/his production. The logic of: your art amounts to a temple, your audience is in a state of awe, your productions are divine, and so on... ..Once the exhibition begins the content must become available to be activated rather than being held in high regard; the art object’s over-determined, honorific status. Rather than produce an exhibition that takes stock of career we’ll relatively carefully take stock of the contents.”*

JEFFREY CHARLES HENRY PEACOCK  
NOVEMBER (2) 2013

Recorded history consists of historical milestones considered worthy of preservation. This means that most events in history – those which are considered disposable – are left to fall into obscurity. What is recorded inevitably has very little to do with reality, is invariably biased, heavily distorted and particularly biased. History books present the immortalised minority, the ruling decision makers, while disposing of the mundane masses. Cities and wars are built, won and lost by individuals rather than the many whose blood is spilt in order to keep the propaganda ink flowing. If I understand JCHP correctly, they are presenting an ethical pilgrimage in remembrance of those who have truly suffered and died (symbolised through The Stone Breakers) for the sake of sustaining nothing more than the farcical recording of the *civilised* world. In order to contextualised the history books in accordance with JCHP *being* artists, JCHP highlight the biases of contemporary art towards sensationalism over content. However, how appropriate translating (squeezing) a subject, which is arguably broad enough to demand an anthropological examination, into an artistic sardine can be questionable.

With that said, regardless of if an art context is appropriate or not, the fact that JCHP exclude certain lines of inquiry so that they can express a more refined JCHP style line of inquiry does seem to highlight similarities between their *ethical* actions and the *unethical* biases of art.

Of course JCHP are not alone in this process of filtering information. Similarly to how time stopped everything happening at once, or how the spaces between words provide access to the content, selection and separation throughout culture are necessary if any form of communication is to take place. For this reason I argue that prioritising, soaring some objects, concepts etc. above others, to be a natural process. A true recording of history, one that records everything without, be it prioritisation or discrimination, is impossible. To truly capture history would mean having to make and record history simultaneously. One has to firstly do something or order to record it. Even in the video era someone has to turn on the first recorder and so be left out of recorded history. Who would that person be? Who is qualified to judge? So for nothing other than practical reasons the recording of history is always going to fall ever shorter of the true unfolding of history.

(What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine

just persons, which need no repentance.)

Luke 15:4 – 15:7 King James Bible

Although it would seem that JCHP are expressing interest in the concept of egalitarianism, it is worth noting that they also show interest in expanding the size of their distribution, thus audience and name. They applied for the 2014 EVA International Biennial, for which they were subsequently successful in being selected. Part of their proposition to Bassam Al-Baroni (curator) read: *“Having decided at some point in 2008 not to exhibit or display publicly in anyway the drawings that we have been engaged in producing day-in, day-out, we’re here committed absolutely to do so. By accepting this invitation we also have to accept their removal from their own relations of production.*

*We have reneged on our steadfast principle to restrict the potential of the work’s distribution from becoming involved in exhibitionism and arthood. However our aim to guard against the work becoming reified under the standard template of art-like things in an institution remains.”*

While above we witness JCHP take a conceptual change in direction – offering arguably a more realistic appeal now against all objects, events and people being regarded as equal, they also seem to have recognised a more pragmatically based ethical approach by advocating a more balanced agreement between career and contents. Moments in history, be them widely or locally influential, can only be recognised because they relate primarily to

human behaviour, human culture. Hence it would seem reasonable for the principle people about whom history is written, should be, even if it is for historical reference (only?), recognised.

With JCHP readdressing (compromising?) the relationship between career and content it may well be the case that their updated reformation may itself need regular re-assessment before a final balance, if one is at all possible, can be agreed on. Moreover, in order to reflect the relative states between career and content accordingly, the vocabulary they chose to express their previous decisiveness such as, *“committed”, “absolutely”* and *“steadfast”*, will also require being revised.

With JCHP now slightly disorientated they have an opportunity to go with the flow for a while, so to write, before getting back on track. This time they seem to have avoided the trap of defending eroded arguments built on romantic ideologies.

Art, being a subject that upholds expansive ambiguity, offers JCHP a familiar place where they can temporarily take up abode. Familiarity, however, does not come without its dangers. They will need to stay aware that the illusiveness of creativity can be so seductive that its safety net, which prevents decisiveness, also prevents truth. Hence where there is only approximation and nothing is

locatable pointlessness reigns: game over. If part of their concept, however, is to use illusiveness as a safeguarding – preventing any possibility of a justifiable demonstration demanding their resignation – then there is no productive discourse taking place.

## JCHP

As a logo “JCHP” has the similar catchy marketable flavour to many well known abbreviated brand names: D&G, BBC, BP, CBS, IBM... JCHP is self-designated, distinguishable, and has an extremely selective membership of only two, who are both artists. This is a *JCHP* exhibition. One does not become a member of JCHP over night. With just two members to share the credit between, JCHP not only implies being a highly specialist manufacturing team but also maximises the potential of establishing a JCHP lead milestone. I can imagine the letters “JCHP” boldly printed on a whole bunch of memorabilia.

## THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

*“The perpetrator sustains the victim and exploits their desperation to reproduce their relations of production, which is now only achievable through the relations of distribution that the perpetrator controls. While the perpetrator retains capability*

*the victim complies and endures rather than risk losing out. The victim begins to view the perpetrator as showing a degree of fairness, consideration, kindness etc which serve as the cornerstone of stockholm syndrome. The condition will not emerge if the victim does not perceive the perpetrator as exhibiting some level of kindness. The victim often misinterprets a lack of overt abuse as kindness and may go on to develop feelings of appreciation for this perceived benevolence.”*

Critical Decor: What Works. Jeffrey Charles Henry Peacock. A Short Organum for Exhibition.

The true beneficiaries of capitalism who, if I understand JCHP correctly, are the perpetrators, have a supreme invested interest in their consumers (victims) despising the thought of having an active and independent life of their own. The hostages dependency on their captors is essential. To safeguard customer loyalty it is vital for the captors to make sure that the products they offer: empty ideologies, dreams and aspirations, are mass-producible. With the backbone of successful propaganda/public relation stunts being about repetition, the consumer quickly loses any pre-hostage memory and becomes the consumed. The artificial becomes the authentic. Eventually the consumer loses the ability to recognise any other alternative lifestyle outside of the comfortable orderliness of the façade. So much so that any proposal of there being one is often a declaration of war against popularised demand. When the Stockholm syndrome overwhelms the masses – the delud-

ed dependent are ready to die for the next must have one liner and gimmick.

Since the concept of perpetrator and victim/master and slave is entrenched deep inside the psyche of society as a whole, it is not viable to consider the distinction as distant and exclusive. The fact that the employer, employee, consumer three-way system is cyclical means that everyone gets the opportunity to not only play all three roles, be it in the work place or in the privacy of the domestic arena, but also has the ability to accept this phenomenon as being innate in humans. Since it is also a system based on scarcity – be it an artificial scarcity – each and every individual is materialistically fighting for survival. Society becomes a polite menace to itself and woe betide brute that disagrees. Moreover, the distrust that grows out of the (necessity?) to bond people through contractual (financial) agreements, which, if broken, have the potential to ruin a person's life, only strengthen the state of indifference the community is in. The employer, employee and consumer therefore primarily fight not for other fellow employers, employees and consumers, rather, only to stay employed and keep consuming. To this extent, the scarcity factor treats any consideration for the well being of the fellow person as secondary.

The Stockholm syndrome is a type of psychology that grows out of such a power based system. The principal

usage of money acts as a principle measuring rod that provides reason for human interaction. Everyone is governed by a system which is inanimate and mechanical. Only the purchasing of goods comes with an automated corrupt politeness. Everyone, for the right price, qualifies for a *customer guaranteed smile or your money back*. The world is a check out counter at which we all stand. The Stockholm syndrome recognises the inevitable human deprivation that grows from such an indifferent system and expresses itself empathetically and sympathetically.

# PART 3

## TEACHERS

If JCHP are suggesting a reassessment of the present status quo of arthood they are also proposing an end to the eternal inconclusiveness of creativity, in which many believe they find both deep meaning and identity. JCHP will therefore have to first stop being creative in order to change the direction of the system. The reshaping of a cultural norm is then no light feat. Since prior to the change old and stifled ideologies must first be destroyed. In the process of reformation, be it individual or cultural, little to no difference is recognised between the saviour and the Anti-saviour.

At this stage, before the light of hindsight brings forth understanding, a dark blanket of ignorance first falls upon mankind. During this crises, when all that seemed to have been true crumbles, when order is driven out by chaos, one takes a *natural* leap of faith into the indefinable in order to reorientate oneself. If this is what JCHP is expressing in their criticism regarding arthood or otherwise, they are announcing their desire to hold up a mirror that reflects the darkness of ignorance that resides in every human being. They are being teachers. With that said, if stagnation is the only state of the absolute (the fire must first burn the trees of established

knowledge to prepare a clearing of ignorance from which a richer knowledge and understanding can sprout) before their proposal can be seen to carry any weight it must first be ridiculed and condemned. In other words JCHP must be recognised as fools by today's experts before being honoured tomorrow. Hence foolishness today is controversial tomorrow and progression next week (ad infinitum?) And so how tight is JCHP's straight-jacket of orderly resolution and in what state will it leave the expansive quality of the chaotic creativity to come?

## **CREATIVITY VERSUS CONSCIOUSNESS**

In order to understand what art is one must consider the tools available with which judgement is made. Firstly, therefore, consider that from which rationality and meaning are born: consciousness. The only function consciousness has is to obtain the belief that one has an understanding. That which eludes consciousness by falling through its net lands in the unconscious. Being conscious means being aware and having a functional rational mind. Rationality equals understanding. One can not understand the message of this sentence before reading it to its end, thus, it follows that only after the act of reading is complete does one realise if one has either become aware/conscious of the message or not. If the message is unclear one is likewise not conscious of what the message

is. However, if this happens all is not lost. Even if the message eludes the reader, the reader may still be aware of not having understood it. Yet again, there is, however, the third possibility that the reader completes the sentence, misses the point, and still goes away with the belief that an understanding has been gained. Regardless of if the the information has been correctly understood or not, the essential and only function consciousness has is to obtain information and turn it into the belief that one has an understanding.

As soon as the rational conscious mind arrives it grows though gaining an responding to the world in which it exists. The rational conscious mind quickly realises that not everything is the same and that the world is full of variety. It is through a process of separating (chaos) and categorisation (reconstruction through recognising patterns: order) that one starts to make sense of things. The very nature of being conscious is to look to make sense of things. Consciousness does not recognise order in chaos, it is order in chaos. In other words you, the reader, can do nothing else but find meaning and understanding in these words and beyond. It is not possible for your rational mind to do otherwise since that would mean you unlearning and reversing the nature of the learning process. Consciousness is a one way street that opposes chaos.

Chaos, being in opposition to order and rationality can

not be consciously experienced. While the function of order is to define by bringing to a conclusive halt, the function of chaos is to expand make vague, disorientate and elude. Chaos is wild and free from the chains of consciousness knowledge and understanding. Creativity, being chaotic, opposes consciousness and so happens unconsciously. Only when creativity is temporarily stopped through the orderly means of reflection can its existence be assumed. Consciousness responds to the invisible. It is reflection and so occurs after creativity. One is witness only to the manifestation of creativity. Although consciousness is heavy and dictatorial, creativity is able to disturb its weighty orderliness. Hence both, when working correctly, enable an evolution to happen. *Art* is the orderly phrase given to the manifestation of a particular language of creativity. However, creativity is not bound to being simply an expression through art, rather, it touches upon every aspect of life.

## CAREER VIA PRODUCTION

Like the full stop that brings about both the end – the death – of the sentence while defining its content, so too does the guillotine of an exhibition define art production. It is not uncommon for artists to feel as if their work is more alive during production. As death is the affirmation of life so too is the inevitability of the career that arises

through exhibiting production. Thus, here I again suggest the inseparability of the production and career JCHP propose as being distinct from each other.

## SISYPHUS

*“What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me--that is what I understand. And these two certainties--my appetite for the absolute and for unity and the impossibility of reducing this world to a rational and reasonable principle--I also know that I cannot reconcile them. What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope which I lack and which means nothing within the limits of my condition?”*

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*

Since the condition of duality creates a dependency between opposites – that only through the existence of evil can good be considered etc. there is always going to be deprivation and scarcity where there is privilege and abundance. The goal for the gambler is to neither always lose or always win – only then does he sustain his identity. Without opposition the singularity of non-identity reigns. Thus, a peace treaty only ever means time out to reload the gun while death is but the affirmation of life. From belief in an almighty God to a call for resolution of dai-

ly misunderstandings, although one is innately drawn to the orderliness of resolution, (the ending of arguments) which is exactly all consciousness is about, duality will *irrefutably* keep such conclusiveness out of reach. And so consciousness, being born out of duality, becomes a *journey* unto itself – without true destination and without true affirmative meaning. Such meaninglessness is noted – although arguably not consciously – in the United States Declaration of Independence: “Life, Liberty and the *pursuit* (not the attainment) of Happiness”. A journey of life lacking destination – lacking the opposition of death – is absurd within the understanding of duality. Again, only in the light of conclusive knowledge (in the light of death) can life *temporarily* (until permanent death falls upon all who are conscious) have meaning. While the contributors towards the preservation of eternal life, happiness... sustain only the pursuit, the theory, the lifelessness, and with the temporal eventually coming to an end, (the *attainment* of knowledge, although seemingly progressive, is itself philosophical suicide) opposites, which only arises in duality, end up being synonymous in their eventual meaninglessness.

So the tragedy of Sisyphus finding himself between the devil and the deep blue sea, is not that he has to *live* an eternal life in the absurdity of meaninglessness rather, that even if he were to escape he would only find himself eventually re-entering the same absurd meaninglessness. The

true nihilistic horror of being in this state of limbo is not that one finds no meaning in life – as one could simply end the frustration by killing oneself – rather – that one also finds no meaning in death.

## THINKING VERSUS DOING

For the same reason one can not be happy while contemplating happiness, neither can one be creative when being an artist. One either thinks or does but never simultaneously. Creativity simply happens while one is witness only to one's own prejudice consciousness. And so to discuss art or anything else for that matter, one can only express the crises of a consciousness that is always stagnantly resolute. The crises of consciousness is the crises of a death that has never been aware of it having lived – it is non-existence: I think therefore I am not.

Like a fish that has no awareness of being submerged in water, one is too close to the present to recognise it. It is as if the elusive *anticipates* being expressed.

## THE NERVES OF ARTISTS

Considering oneself as an artist – reiterating that which artists have learned to reiterate – is but to make some or-

derly sense out of being in a occupation that is thought to dwell in the epicentre of creativity. Of course, this is not the case as it is the orderliness of familiarity – of recognition – that comes about through repetition. There are therefore only experts in art and not in creativity. An expert, like any other identity label, automatically attaches itself to definition, to art. Hence to answer the question: What is art? is possible, even if it is as unspectacular as being: art is one of many manifestations of creativity.

Knowledge is order and order is power through the feeling of being safe, being on one's own territory. Consciousness is thus a dictator that tames and brings the beast of the creative foreign under control. Consciousness is a welcome colonialist. Where there is control there is nothing to fear. Where, however, there is little control, or desire to share one's life with the beast, one hopes. One hopes to regain control. It is therefore only when JCHP are being artists and not being creative that they feel safe and defined and conscious and redundant.

## **BEYOND**

*“The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.”* Albert Camus.

Finally, consciously and conclusively, which is one to choose: to mortally and meaninglessly die at the journey's

destination or to immortally and meaninglessly live forever?

Or might there be a third option?

Michael Victor Jackson

15.01.2014