

CHELSEA space

"SHOULD I STAY OR SHOULD I GO?"

A question rehearsed by RUN

A text by *David Gothard*

In the seventies when I first came to London there was a whiff of what was called 'Performance Art' in the air, directed from the visual arts but a thousand miles away from its apparent relative, theatre. The doyenne of Performance, returning in these days to check out the London scene after a resurrection of the subject in New York is Roselee Goldberg, a then friendly scurrer between the Architects Association, the RCA and colleges and later the Riverside Studios as curator. The architects played their role as AA students of the ilk of Rem Koolhaas opted Performance into their 'university'. Richard Rogers, Will Alsop, Cedric Price and others opted into Riverside activities as Bruce McLean moved in longterm such that his 'Masterwork' launched a series of ambitious performance achievements gathering dance and music from the likes of Gavin Bryars and Michael Nyman into the performance team. When Will then moved into the studio next door the roots in so much painting and sculpture became clear.

Ironically so much had come out of sculpture at St. Martins as the generation taught by Anthony Caro launched into theatre games at college that led to living together (Gilbert and George), walking (Richard Long), and an outright attention to the posed performance on the plinth by Bruce. The definitions were opening wide and cross fertilizing with film and photography closely in the wings. Also at Riverside, the itinerant architect of performance was John Latham, resident for a decade. As a daily philosopher he provoked from the Artists Placement Group run with Barbara Steveni, leading to performances there by Ian Breakwell and Stuart Brisley.

Happily the old Dr. Who studios, Riverside, were re-opened with Tadeusz Kantor's 'The Dead Class' with a furore and popularity rarely seen since for an event that was primarily to do with the history of art somewhere between Alan Kaprow's Happenings in New Jersey and paintings of the Cracow Group and Polish Constructivists who were rooted in creative defiance behind blackened windows under Nazi occupation, performance as a life or death matter. The threads were legion from Riverside including Michael Clark's team work with the likes of Leigh Bowery, Cerith Wyn Iwan and Laibach.

Five years ago, Bruce felt that research as a living performance was needed to focus the debris of performance work as students in the colleges continued to rumble and he, the professor himself, came openly under the provocation of a talented music student in Fine Art, Sam Belinfante, and the notion of opera emerged which continues its exploration through this birthday celebration. Sam and Neil Luck from the Royal College of Music gave the Slade, a night of glory in commemorating John Cage's visual volume of manuscripts, 'Notations,' as visual artist and musician collaborated in the most serious manner through the old Slade department. This was forty years after Cage's launch of the book and twenty years after his Events at Riverside.

Across town, Donald Smith was opening the Chelsea Space with a superb wooden installation by Gary Woodley in which Paul Carr and others musically intervened to brilliant choral effect. The Chelsea Space under Donald's beady eye, took off as a meeting point guided by its unique director with empirical vision. The road to the Tate Britain or to the artists' studio changed forever. The inclusion in the programme this month of artists such as the painter **Rob Sherwood**, currently having a solo exhibition in Rome at **Federica Schiavo Gallery**, and Joc, Jon and Joschi, graduates of the brilliant Motion Graphics MA, is essential. David Barnett's relationship with that course and his film role here in the collaboration with McLean, gives a clear example of Chelsea Space casting. To quote Joc, 'the Space exists for being more in touch with what all of us are doing, why we do it and where we are coming from. That is, it is a real meeting place.'

Performance in this particular week overlaps with music and film in the month, but assumes a close relationship with the other curators. Performance is still part of the exploratory method of an AA student and the three artists/architects participating are from Kuwait, the Ukraine and Greece. Hessa al Bader, Oleg Bilenchuk and Evangelos Gerogiannis grip performance into the twentieth century as a tool that has to go far and explode. In their work here they confront inversion, gender, the city with all the colour and intellect of Oldenburg. The living ghosts of Land Art, Smithson, Christo and Matta-Clark have painfully dug performance in the ribs, partly thanks to the proximity of Dan Graham who added Popular and New Music to the feast; At Riverside, Glenn Branca, Laurie Anderson, Sonic Youth and others arrived smashing open the sound of space as radical as in the history of Venice and Byzantium where the architectural heritage of Monteverdi for sound is resurrected by Luigi Nono, sometimes in partnership with Renzo Piano. In term, they share the space negotiated a hundred years before by Schoenberg and Kandinsky in their correspondence and practice. Without Bauhaus there would be no Black Mountain College as we know it. The whole lot beg a future for opening the doors to the globe's music.

It remains to be seen whether the return of the Henry Moore to the Chelsea campus will live as with the former friendliness and warmth of the old school building in Manresa Road. From The Dead Class to the work of Joc, Jon, and Joschi, creative protest and celebration will out. As one of them expressed it: 'I remember that when J and I were at school we used to lock ourselves in one of the 8 by 3 feet rooms next to the Abbey. We'd throw our arms and legs violently at the walls, scream animal noises and beat with our fists. I didn't know why we did it at the time but creatively needed to.'

Such can be and should be Performance through Bruce, Stuart, Marina and others at their best. The mutilation and endurance tests of Marina Abramovic are fashionably feted but perpetuate the scream of the world, its campus nature and its need for the gallery as mouth piece, down the road from the Balkans.

BoyleANDshaw are neighbours. They are around. Apart from the ubiquitous success of their performance and installation work, Adrian

Shaw, artist, is heavily involved in the curating of Late at Tate. It has a revolutionary noise that erupts on monthly Friday evenings illuminating the likes of RB Kitaj, William Tucker (former master sculptor to the young Bruce) and Harold Cohen (painter and digital guru) as they pass through as living or lamented giants fighting for their territory still. It provokes a the whole question of the life of the Museum as fresh as if it were New York's MOMA, without the stifling fashionability. Their present project is developed between the Tate Modern, the Chelsea Space and The National Theatre Studio. As appropriate visual hooligans they explore the respected text of Tennessee Williams on DH Lawrence; "I Rise in Flame, Cried the Phoenix". The feared, abused world of theatre is their oyster and is opted in as a necessary, key reference point for Performance as if it were worthy of the invitation.

In short, this essay is meant to focus my participation with Bruce Mclean in this celebration, inviting others and beyond to join in on the points and the history through the website or participation in the event.

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RUN Gallery with Bruce Mclean, David Gothard, Lisa Le Feuvre, Teresa Gleadowe, Jo Melvin, Mick Jones, and guests

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