

André Stitt

Talkback : NRLA, Tramway, Glasgow, Feb. 2007

Early morning at Tramway: Jamie McMurry is sitting beside me, his cell phone stuck to his head, shades, coffee, tattoos, cowboy boots, his tiny caffeine fuelled shake like a kind of palsy. He comes off the phone, it becomes suddenly quiet, except for the cleaners rattling cleaner things around downstairs. We're talking shop. We've known each other for more than a decade, more time than I care to remember this morning. Met in Mexico City, took sacraments together, gnawed chair legs, Maya bloodletting...

This is the first time we've made performances at the NRLA. Not strictly true for me though, as I did a platform event way back in 1982 at NRLA in Nottingham. But that was a lifetime ago and I can't remember it, so it doesn't count. Funny, after all this time I guess you could say we're making our debut. Talk turns to how we started making this type of thing, this performance 'watchamacallit'. Turns out it was all Joseph Beuys' doing. Him with his tricky beeswax celtic shaman style coyote excavation, and felt-foot social consciousness. Old Joe put the hex on us. Fersure.

After quitting the US Marines in the early nineties Jamie McMurry and his friend Lee Gilliam ran an art space on main street, Yakima, at a skid row hotel called the Savoy Apartments. Yakima is in Washington State in the Pacific North West. Small town life. They ran exhibitions and performance art events, and had some studio space for local artists. They also organised noise and experimental music shows in a parking lot behind the Savoy. Too weird for Yakima, the authorities closed it down after a year on the pretence that the gallery was being used for prostitution. It was also here, while attending theatre classes at Yakima College that they discovered Joseph Beuys, and that really put the zap on them.

Flashback : Smithfield Market, Belfast, 1974

Me and my mates Ossie and Benny have beaked off school again and are hanging out at the second hand record stalls in Smithfield Market, downtown Belfast. Smithfield is a warren of cobbled alleyways with stalls spewing out everything into narrow thoroughfares. There are boxes of books and records everywhere. This was where I bought my first Seeds album, and a whole collection of discarded American imports with thick card sleeves that no one wanted. LP's by The Femine Complex, 13th Floor Elevators, Velvets... I love the smell of this place. Smithfield is Fenian but also kinda neutral, in between, but not quite, you just have to watch yourself.

Although we're only sixteen we can get served at Kelly's Cellars where we down a few pints of Guinness. As we leave there's a bit of a scene going on across the street at a veg shop. There's a film crew and a crowd of people. This is a typical scene; usually some foreign news team trying to get some kind of insight into the human tragedy that is Northern Ireland. For us it's a bit of laugh and we take the micky.

There's this big guy in a big fur coat wearing a funny old fashioned hat. He is talking in a German accent. He looks really weird. Benny shouts, 'Hey Mister ar'ye a fruit?' Benny's being a bit of an eejit. You would never get a bloke wearing a fur coat round here unless he was queer, or so he supposes. Never mind that we are all into Bowie and the New York Dolls.

The crew seem to be following him and filming him as he makes his way up the street. He is now talking to some of the women [aul'dolls] at the fruit stall. He is signing bananas and the aul'dolls are telling him and his crew to fuck off back to where they came from. 'Youse are always comin roun'here an'tellin us wat till do. Way on an'mine yer own bizness... a way on'wi youse back till wer' ye came from!'

The fur coat and hat guy is talking away and signing his name on bananas with a big felt marker. I don't know why but he makes me smile. Eventually he takes off; him and his film crew. Ossie and Benny decide to go get some more drink in the bar and I take off after Mr Fur Coat. I feel like something very important is taking place so I follow him down York Street to the big office building which is the art school. There's a big crowd outside and as he makes his way toward the entrance they part like the old Red Sea waves. I follow the crowd into the bulding and Mr. Fur Coat proceeds to deliver this really mesmerising talk in a wild and expressive German accent. He is chalking all over blackboards, he is getting really intense, the big crowd inside are hanging on his every word and action. I don't know what the hell he is on about, but I am captivated by it; there is a presence, there is an excitement, and an intensity to what is happening that I have only ever felt listening to music. Something in my head clicks; I hear it clicking, it's like an electric switch being flicked. I am thinking, '*This is it, this is what I want to do*'.

I found out a few years later when I started attending Belfast College of Art that I had seen the famous German artist Joseph Beuys. Of course by then I knew who he was and by then I also knew exactly what I wanted to do with my life. It still makes me smile. Who'd have thought it. Old Joe Beuys signing bananas in Smithfield Market. By the time I went to the Art School Smithfield Market was gone, it had been blown up by paramilitaries and destroyed by fire.

Feedback : Eternal Network, Eternal Now

Jamie had made some performances in Belfast at FIX in 2004. When in Belfast he met Matt Cook and took a road trip around Ireland. In 2006 all three of us visited Yakima when on tour as The Panacea Society. And, here we are this morning in Glasgow, at the NRLA in Tramway, getting ready for another show. Jamie doing his solo state fair hay bales and Yakima popcorn abortion and me working with Matt Cook as Panacea. High and wide doses of uncut Generation Zero whatcore; or so they tell me. The feedback loop, the eternal network. Eternal now. Light years away from Joe Beuys, Yakima and Belfast, and right back where we began.