

## Reading at Chelsea Arts Club, in memory of John Jones

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I first met John in 1968, and it must have been before Christmas in my first term at the art school, then Leeds Polytechnic, because he gave a lecture in the Jacob Kramer building and we moved into the Polytechnic space in the New Year. He played us extracts from interviews with two artists who couldn't have been more opposite – Ed Kienholz and Ad Reinhardt. I was pretty obsessed by American art at the time and went up to him at the end of the talk and asked who else he had on tape. He said 'who do you want'? I reeled off a few names and he had most of them – not Stella, he was too busy, not Rothko – but I think there were about 100 in all. I thought it was utterly extraordinary that not long after that, John kindly arranged for me to go up to the University on a Friday morning, and he'd set up a reel to reel tape deck and bring in a couple of tapes for me to listen to. So here I was, a 1<sup>st</sup> year student on the Fine Art course down the road, being given this wonderful opportunity by one of the lecturers from the Fine Art course up the road.

John explained that he'd had a grant to interview American artists, ostensibly on the basis of asking them about their relationship with European art, which had emerged as a dubious bone of contention, but really it just seemed a good excuse to interview them. Steve mentioned that it was 1965 and a fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies. I'm not sure if he received money from another source but he did extend the interviews into 1966, because believe it or not I still have one of the two notebooks I used to write down some quotes. It's an extraordinary archive, because it was a great time to land in New York. Some of the New York School artists were still alive – Reinhardt, Barnett Newman – but also older artists like MacDonald Wright, who'd taken part in the first Armory show in 1913, plus the then current generation of Pop artists like Dine and Lichtenstein and the colour field painters like Noland. I'm pretty sure he had Duchamp – he certainly had Rauschenberg and Johns. He'd also select some I hadn't asked for, like David Hare, because he was informative about the background in New York in the 50's. By coincidence, I'm reading 'Talking Art', about 70 artists' interviews published in Art Monthly from 1977 to 2007, which kind of adds to the frustration that this wonderful project of John's never came to fruition.

John explained that although he'd had a contract with a publisher, he'd lost interest in the project. Some transcripts had been made of the tapes, which he said weren't very good. I offered at least three times to listen to the tapes and correct the transcripts, but I think the moment had just gone for him, and in any case his real love, I think, was film, and that had taken over. I think through Kate I attended the sessions where we'd watch films like *L'Avventura* and *Brief Encounter* and the audience was invited to debate what they'd seen. What I particularly remember is that John was brilliant in involving everybody in the open discussion by being both passionate and completely non-judgemental, so you felt comfortable in expressing your views. The point was that we'd learn something from each other, so all opinions were valid.

I suppose what I really want to emphasise is that when you're a young person going to art school, they really are formative years, and the people you meet lay down some of the core principles by which you hope to live your life. Steve used the term 'generosity of spirit' and I can't better that. John believed in sharing his knowledge and passions and it's something I've tried to carry through in my own teaching. He was a great example and it was a great privilege to have met him. A lovely man.

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