

Vaclav's Workshop – Lewis Gesner, Tainan City, and Kaohsiung City, Taiwan, 2012

In 2007, I had the pleasure of attending and presenting creative work at the "Festival Forfest International Festival of Contemporary Arts with Spiritual Orientation." It is held in Kromeriz, in the Czech Republic. As information may be gathered on the festival and location easily on the internet and on their website, I will not go into that here. Neither will I go into my own past work, which may also be found elsewhere. But I will say, setting had a lot to do with the rendering of a performance and sound piece, which I called "Vaclav's Workshop."

Vaclav Vaculovic, along with his wife Zdenka are both the organizers and founders of the Festival Forfest organization and events. Both are also musicians and artists. I have over the period of years developed a way of working I call Instrumentism. It involves drawing all aspects of a creative effort into a field in which these aspects may function interchangeably in regards to qualitative value and dominance/ expression. Meaning, qualities of the instrument may be mapped onto any materials or circumstance, as situations may always become the "instrument" of expression. Energy is object, as objects are circumstance -.

I had planned to present several pieces at the Festival Forfest in 2007 which drew from Instrumentism principles. One used what I called "Pull Tos" as the method of performing and sounding. Still objects in a place or situation have strings tied to them. The strings lead to a central location, like, a chair in the middle of a room. The performer sits in the chair when all of the chosen objects have been strung. The performer chooses again, an order, by preparation (a score) or, improvised, at the time of performance. Then, he follows that order, pulling the strings, causing the objects to move from their locations, sometimes just jiggling or rattling (if attached where they rest) or, pulling completely to the central location, the chair. This prepared idea was rendered perfectly in Vaclav's workshop.

Situated near the back part of their Chateau, Vaclav's workshop is a working environment for storing pieces of wood, working on or sawing things, hammering, holding things in a vice, and, hanging many tools on the wall on hooks. In American, I would have called that a "shed." It is fairly small, and the walls are close together. It is a perfect size for a Pull To performance, which I dubbed "Vaclav's Workshop." There were hundreds of objects, tools, materials and building supplies. The act of pulling them in harmonies and series creates a sound/ clutter composition, which attempts at a kind of aural ordering present in the passive state, but not iterated. Stringing the workshop took several hours in a morning. I performed for a group of composers and artists in the afternoon. As I imagined, the qualities of sound were quite unique to a workshop. Metal scraping, tinkling, wood resonance, and the sound of tools. Each performance in a different space has its own signature, determined by the setting/ environment and object there. A kitchen, with its spoons, knives plates and cooking objects gives its own unique performance, a bathroom, a living or bedroom, and so forth. Vaclav took some photographs, but, I do not always record performances. I did not record this one. I think, for the piece, that was a good random determiner. It was one of the most exciting pieces for me. And I had only some photographic records of it. So, it began to live, and grow, in my imagination. I examined the idea of familiar things, made animated. What would that mean for Vaclav, who owned these things, to see them made somehow alive, by someone else? I am still thinking about these things, about how familiar things rest around us in a kind of suspending sleep – maybe, aware, but only on the event of their individual (or, perhaps several objects used, a harmonic) use in their real world application – what would it mean, for them to sing in this way, uselessly, for art sake? Vaclav's Workshop was the first version of the "Pull To" idea I rendered, but it became the last also. I mean, any subsequent performances using the idea, I would call "Vaclav's Workshop." Because, all of the real and unanswered questions I had came from that first performance.

I performed this in 2010 in Taipei, Taiwan. In the performance space, there were few variety of objects to characterize the nearly empty space. So, I pulled the chairs. It was very characteristic, and, in terms of tonal variation, minimal. So that was the space. A professional performance space, a rather cold, distant presentation from life. In the two years to the present that followed, I didn't perform the piece. Yet it remained in my thoughts. And, its parameters changed. Those structures, the distinctions that defined the pieces before, like, the act of pulling, became less important to me. Rather, as I remembered the original piece, and how it became characterized in my mind, I realized it was more about the life of things, the working nature of things, and how they might be when compelled to song or art, free from their function, and what it would mean to their human familiars, who share with their life through use -. The act of pulling becomes one in a body of many ways to activate. It was the essence of the circumstance that would determine whether a piece was a "Vaclav's Workshop" or not.

With a current residency at the Old House in Tainan City, Tainan, Taiwan, I have decided to use the month or more residency to explore, through prepared scores, what Vaclav's Workshop might be about, beyond what I think. Using time given me here, I should transpose the IDEA of the workshop, and link the familiarity of domesticity and work through art (animating through expression and projection) to place, from Kromeriz, which is also linked with the workshop, to Tainan, and link the Old House, which is an old railway station house on the edge of the city, to Vaclav and Zdenka's Chateau and attached workshop. This I can do in a small, aesthetic way, serving as that string, harnessing things, and weather, wind and the personalized resonance of matter.

To date, the residency at the Old House in Tainan, Taiwan after one month is finished. The entirety of the time was spent in the drawing/ composing and preparing of visual scores, each with the title of "Vaclav's Workshop," in all, a set of twenty drawings/ scores. As now other parts of life and commitment resume, I should plan my opportunities to perform these pieces, in both public and more private venues, being careful to plan for keeping sound and visual record of each. Additionally, there is another intermediary stage. While the first performance of "Vaclav's Workshop" was precise and distinct, the variation I allowed myself in developing the scores here meant a reconsideration of the interpretive process. My score making became an abstract project, both conceptually and visually. So, the actions they will account for will take on many other shades, and completely different mechanisms. I prepare too for this challenge, keeping in mind the first and remaining distinction is the place itself, where the idea was born, the mental and visual image of Vaclav's Workshop as it exists in my mind, a place of work, of potential, and future creation. This is the essence of the plan for me, a consistently regenerative intention to explore the newness of the creative act, and the preparation of composition. So then, onward, I should attempt to make documents of these pieces available as performed. And, here is a flickr site, containing the twenty "Vaclav's Workshop" drawings/ score:

http://www.flickr.com/photos/79461286@N06/?uploaded=19&magic_cookie=a4e515085a8a124df757dca761f44cb7

Related past, current and future video documentation may be found at
<http://www.youtube.com/user/LewisGesner?feature=mhee>

And my relevant book "In the Shadow of the Still Hosts" available from Whitesky Books may be found at
<http://www.lulu.com/shop/lewis-gesner/in-the-shadow-of-the-still-hosts/paperback/product-18840296.html>