

### Misremembering Olivier Bosson's REC (*Une formation du spectateur*)

*What follows are blurred memories of a presentation which took place in a gallery space at Raven Row, London on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2012; the initial 'souvenirs' were subsequently added to and altered as I watched the same presentation again, as recorded through the lens of a video camera.*

When I was asked to tell the tale of Olivier Bosson's 'REC' I was a little afraid and embarrassed: his performance is a muddled memory for at least two reasons. The first was that his performance directly proceeded my own and, as I am sure is true of even the most experienced speakers, the moments before a presentation are a fretful combination of sticky palms and adrenalin-fuelled delirium. The second was that I was indirectly involved in the operation of Olivier's performance: charged as I was with extinguishing the lights at a crucial moment. These two factors combine to render my experience less than exact, somewhat scrambled, and yet there remain, I hope, sufficient fragments to help to piece together an impression of that event; which was itself a re-, a re-performance of the piece initially performed live some years earlier in Lyon.

What I do remember is the self-assured, heavily accented, voice of Olivier who talked directly to the audience through a hand-held microphone, addressing us as 'spectators'. I remember he had been keen to know if this word worked in translation and I had reassured him of its equivalence in English, hoping the overtones of Guy Debord wouldn't interfere with his intentions. They didn't. The staging of the spectacle was carefully choreographed with a keen use of lighting and a plethora of equipment. Conventional gallery spaces struggle to accommodate alternative forms of presentation: the theatrical or performative stretch audio-visual resources and heighten the visibility of their operations through the exposed trail of leads and cables. Olivier's presentation had an excess of recording devices – it was being filmed for documentation but also being filmed as part of the presentation, and eventually the presentation became a visualisation of its own documentation. But first there was training and an experiment. It was time to act: to turn the lights off I had to walk up a small flight of stairs, enter another gallery, open a secreted lighting box and remember the correct configuration of switches to press. On returning to the performance space my heart sank to find a single spot light still shining obstinately: complete darkness would be needed for the experiment to work. In the moments that followed anxiety filled my head and I failed to concentrate on Olivier's instructions. No shiny after-image of the circular red disc of the 'record' button for me, no reminder of the Japanese flag and their technical prowess in recording technology, but it worked for others. They had the red circle burnt into their retina. They had the red circle of REC. They revelled in their somatic plugging-into the effects of recording technology, for this was where the presentation was heading – no longer listening to Olivier's instructions but watching him interview (live) one of the audience members, an individual spectator. Olivier was behind the camera now, perhaps recording new material for a future project, with the audience left to watch on the big screen the shifting pixels which Olivier recorded through the camera's lens.

So what was Olivier's REC about? Training the spectator, asking them (us) to see differently through technology. There was, I remember, a recreation of a digital game involving a tunnel down which we were optically travelling, we were a red disc in this tube, leaning to left and right and then emerging into the daylight. I found myself thinking of the footage which accompanied the news reports of Princess Diana's car crash and subsequent death – and the headline 'Diana was alive in the hours before her death'; such is the inconsequential mental clutter which arises unprompted when commanded to concentrate - and I was trying not to be distracted. The serious tone of Olivier's voice called me back, to the red spot on the screen at which we were commanded to stare. The central moment of darkness was to follow; I knew a retinal image was the intention, I knew the significance of the red spot on the 'rec' button, on the Japanese flag and I knew (from the rehearsal) that Olivier's gesture – a downward swipe of the arm – must be accompanied by the final shutting off of the light from the projector to create the effect; and I also knew that having failed to extinguish the final spot the effect would be compromised and that Fabien's anxious awareness of this fact exacerbated the tension and I also knew (more selfishly) that this obstinate light would subsequently compromise the

**Comment [k1]:** Not to worry, there is a video recording of the performance so I can watch that to refresh my memory.

**Comment [k2]:** No, it was a radio mic – the hand-held one came later.

**Comment [k3]:** A message sent by the Japanese people to the whole world: meaning 'we have been given something so inhuman that everybody has to remember it'.

**Comment [k4]:** They had the reminder revealed to them: the everyday overlooked significance of the little red 'rec' button; that I, too, seven months later have failed to record. Not overlooked but unexpressed.

**Comment [k5]:** It was Fabien, one of the organisers, and clearly pre-planned – not a plant, pre-planned. He was asked four times to respond to the little film he'd been shown as though it was a record of a girl's dreams. Olivier continued the audience training here as well, though with Fabien as the principal recipient, urging him to speak louder, with more sincerity. Throughout the performance we were being trained to be an audience: in our need to 'resist' the message (in order for it to have some affect) and now Fabien was to emulate such affectivity, as a spectator acting sincerity.

**Comment [k6]:** The animation of the tunnel was demonstrating the extent to which the message must touch the sides (the recipient), not pass straight through. The message must create resistance in the recipient, create some stimulation, some affectivity in order that it have some effect. This is our responsibility as an audience: to decide whether or not we allow the message to leave a trace. Can we practice 'indifference'? Lyotard's distinction between passibility (active) and passivity (inactive) would be useful here.

**Comment [k7]:** Of course it was blue...in order to then render a red after-image.

element of my own performance which relied on semi-darkness. And yet when the moment came the near-darkness seemed to be sufficient for the spectators' staring to yield a retinal image – the red circle of the record button beloved of the video camera. I don't think i'd concentrated hard enough to get this reward myself but the fact that it had worked for others was sufficient. The order of the different elements – the lessons they were called – is not clear to me, writing this seven months later; but I do remember the final(?) sequence which was an intimate inter-play between Olivier and one of the spectators who was asked to talk of his own experiences whilst Olivier recorded his response on a hand-held camera. And now we were not the privileged spectators but the secondary audience, watching the filming of a sequence which I presumed at the time to would be fed into a future work. Whether we were told this at the time I can't recall but I do remember strongly a sense of a change of pace and sense that we were released from the test and sidelined for the duration of the exercise. And then it was over and my time was come, faced with a group of spectators trained to resist the message.

**Comment [k8]:** See comment 3 above. I am repeating myself here but allow it to remain as it is my pervasive memory – failing to see the after-image coupled with the anxiety of being responsible for others' failing to see it, and subsequently also failing to correctly record its message. Failed (raté).

**Comment [k9]:** The video reveals how bright the offending spot light was, but as the only source of light this is, of course, artificially increased.