

Writing mail, writing class: 'The big east'

It was kind of an [awkward week](#) or so.

At the opening for Simon Zoric's exhibition *What I can and can't do and what I will and won't do*, after being kind of startled by his carved wooden effigy, I was walking away from one of his works where Zoric had basically cut out the wall from his teenage bedroom because it contained the beloved Nirvana poster that needed to be shown. I was walking and thinking, 'is it really from his bedroom?', 'how's that '70s blue paint', 'what's with Nirvana?', 'it's the '90s again', 'Fuck, Kurt committed suicide', 'shit, I hope Zoric doesn't die'.

At the precise moment of that last thought, I kicked the silicone cast of his *Cock & balls*. Zoric's self-deprecating humor, quite obviously contagious.

On Saturday just past, I went to see Christos Tsiolkas talk about Class and Culture at Trades Hall in Carlton. I guess, other than being called a hipster, my question about class and its invisibility or slipperiness re-emerged—does the approach to definition un-render representation?

[Kiron Robinson](#)'s 8-minute video *When I write I write for you* begins with a sniff and ends with awkward laughter. It's an 8-minute close-up of a tightly framed face. Reminiscent of [John Cassavetes](#)'s 1968 film *Faces*.

The [Le Tigre](#) song 'What's your take on Cassavetes' begins with a kind of drawling voice:

*we've talked about it in letters
and we've talked about it on the phone,*

*but how you really feel about it,
I don't really know.*

Which, however obtuse, seems relevant here.

Robinson's short film, mini-doc, foray into a kind of cinéma vérité aesthetic straddles a monologue about family relations, siblings, age gaps and role models,

footy, responsibilities, time and scale issues, pornography, masculinity, hierarchies and the need for an inability to take sides.

Robinson exhibited the work in an exhibition he organised called [*The big east*](#), which involved seven artists exhibiting in two Scout halls in Heathmont on Sunday June 9 between 10 am and 5 pm.

I asked Kiron some questions, the first being, could I ask him some questions:

LR: OK. I'm gonna start really simply. How did the idea for the show come about?

KR: About eighteen months ago I moved out here (outer eastern Melbourne). It is not my ideal location and resulted in odd sorts of pressures in my life. As a result, I decided to make some work out of being in the middle/outer suburbs. When I started looking around I noticed there were lots of psychologically interesting spaces in the suburbs that I had not noticed before. The Scout halls I used, are two that I pass by on a run. Over about eight months of running by them, an idea emerged of what I could do, so I decided to see if they were open to being used and it turned out they were. The rest just grew from there.

LR: What I found interesting about the project was the way in which it forced us out of the safety of the CBD. There is an inherent irony in this, especially if we consider all the 'danger, drunk' talk of the media, 'mayhem on the weekends' blah blah. You turned us into Sunday drivers without cars or something. All the obvious, by-chance visitors are kind of amazing as well. Having worked out there at one stage, I liked catching up with my old boss again and hanging out with his kids in his hood.

The Scout halls were these interesting spaces where 'contemporary' seemed irrelevant. I know we talked about the upturned coloured plastic cups; Daniel Belfield's *Map* easily blending in with the in-situ pin board; your film projected on a stand (can't remember the word for this thing!) as if ready for rope-knotting demonstration; Eliza Dyball's performance which could have been a team-building exercise; the Ryan sisters hiding from the world double-self-portrait-sculpture could have been real-kids playing real-games (albeit slightly sinister) and Cormick's dirt-bike dinks slip easily into hoon territory. How did you choose the artists for the exhibition? And did you specifically choose the Scout sites for these artists?

KR: Yes, it is nice to be out of the CBD. It changes things in terms of whatever our expectations or preconceptions of the suburbs are and alerts us to our conceptions of art. I am alerted to this every time I go home (as I live down the road from the Scout halls.)

I was really stunned when the first visitors came by. I think up until the point of someone arriving I had been unable to marry up these two parts of my life, art and where I live, and having people turn up acted as a catalyst or a clash which alerted me to my own awkwardness in relation to how I see my life.

The Scout halls came first. I chose them really thinking about my own works (selfish yes), but then invited the other artists because of a psychological aspect to their works which resonated with the sites. I knew of all their practices obviously and like them as people and so thought it would be a good combo.

LR: I am going to latch on to something there about 'liking the artists as people'. It is something I am interested in in terms of momentum and criticality. In some ways, it is traditionally opposed to the very notion of critical because its first encounter is recognising subjectivity and in some ways, the sentimental.

When you said 'I knew of all their practices obviously and like them as people and thought it would be a good combo', what is it about the combination of artists? I know there is a space of not-knowing that we are working in, or aim to work in, but what were you hoping to achieve through the exhibition and the relationship between the works?

KR: Mmm.

I have curated/organised a number of exhibitions. Basically it is about working with people I am interested in. I see it as an extension of my practice in that I do things and make work about things that I am interested in. I am not really into curating for the sake of curating. As such I feel no obligation to criticality. Rather, like my own work I just want to do something that interests me first and hope that others can also connect in their own way. It is the way most artists work I think. It is nice, as you kind of just put your subjectivity front and centre.

It is the psychological aspect of the Scout halls, which I think reflects a deeper psychology of the suburbs, what lies beneath, that I was really interested in and that I was hoping to draw out. There is an intrinsic anxiety within the suburban,

the anxiety of the aspirational and it leaks out in all sorts of ways. I think partly I recognise this within myself and moving back to the suburbs has really heightened it in me. Maybe for me it is not so much the aspirational but the settling. The giving up that I associate with a regression of returning to a suburban setting. I wanted to work with that. There is a romantic aspect to the suburban that I was interested in as well. The Sunday drive, the ideal that it sells. I just find them a very tense place.

Simon Zoric, [*What I can and can't do and what I will and won't do*](#), West Space, Melbourne, 21 June - 13 July 2013.

[*The big east*](#), 3rd Heathmont Scout Hall, Melbourne, 9 June 2013.



Screen shot, Google search for Cassevetes faces



Screen shot, YouTube, Le Tigre, 'What's your take on Cassevetes'



Simon Zoric, 'Nirvana', 2013,
poster, Blu-tac, bedroom wall



Simon Zoric, 'Cock & balls', 2013,
silicone and crepe hair



Lane Cormick, 'Only one way out of
here', 2007-13



Eliza Dyball, 'Conformation in three
parts', 2013



Eliza Dyball, 'Conformation in three parts', 2013



Eliza Dyball,
'Conformation in three
parts', 2013



Daniel Belfield, 'A blanket woven
from the laughter of my friends',
2012, cotton



Daniel Bellfield, 'Map',
2013



Kiron Robinson, 'When I write I
write for you', 2013, DVD



The cups in the 3rd Heathmont
Scout Hall cabinets



'Our Joey Scout Huturn Tree'
on the Scout Hall pinboard

Talk it out

The performance show I should've stayed in Sydney for was [Work out](#) at the MCA. What I stayed in the MCA for was William Eggleston's video work [Stranded in Canton](#), 1974—documentary photography turns absurd trip that held me far longer than *13 Rooms*. I shouldn't have been surprised that a packaged blockbuster of performance work was upsetting.

The *13 Rooms* problem that really stuck was substitution (there were a few others—see below). Substitution of the artist for another performer is problematic when the hinge of the original work was the artist's reclamation of agency over her own body. This hinge is almost completely reversed in the re-objectification of women's bodies through the replacement of a very particular body (subject) with any other hired female body (object).

When Abramovic pins herself to the wall, nude in a spot light, for indefinite periods of time she exerts agency. When a number of anonymous women are paid to do the job for her they become objects of a higher authority. About turn. It's just not the same thing to watch someone paid to suffer, as it is to watch someone who chooses to suffer.

Repeat re Joan Jonas's work.

The substitution problem isn't specific to *13 Rooms*, but put it in the mix with the contextless mist of that exhibition and the crux of the work is hard to find.

So, re-presentation of performance over time.

Tino Sehgal's *This is new*, 2013, was the only work that shirked the curatorial heavy hand. The invigilator who said 'O'Farrell comes out for gay marriage' was the single performer in the show not choked by the shuffling factory line.

I've been waiting a long time to be Sehgaled, so there was that too.

Sehgal, who doesn't allow documentation of his works and only verbal sales agreements, has got something in this no paperwork no photos please policy. Radical immaterialism. Radically visible evasiveness too.

Re-performance and controlled transmission were also rolled out at the [Trio A](#) workshop held recently at VCA. Yvonne Rainer has a very particular way of facilitating the ongoing life of her iconic 1966 dance work. I sat down with Ash Kilmartin and Eliza Dyball to talk about their involvement in a workshop run by one of Rainer's 'transmitters', Sarah Wookey. Eliza and Ash spoke of, and in, the language of Yvonne and Sarah—*check in, tune up, take away*.

Speech and the body. We talked about trying to close that gap—a gap that is wider for most of us than it is for a dancer. Eliza recalled an exercise where they each notated the dance and another participant then performed those instructions. The result was apparently often miles from the intention, which speaks of shift through the subjectivity of language.

Ash perceives in dance culture an acknowledgment that over time a work will change since it is passed down through the body and every body is different every day: 'you're not the same body two days in a row'. Sehgal and Rainer both transmit their work primarily through speech and both use the body and voice to either allow for or resist a shift in the work over time. Choreography expects another body to perform the work. And choreography acknowledges time. For those reasons Rainer's and Sehgal's works have a built-in protection against misrepresentation over time. Choreography not as a means (of instruction) but as a method (of making).

Sehgal controls the form, as Ash pointed out, and the content of the work is allowed to re-form each time it is performed. If the form of the other works in *13 Rooms* were preserved, the content was all talk.

Postscript

My rant about *13 Rooms* includes, and this is an architectural as well as communication hitch, that the lack of context given about the works meant we became voyeurs popping in and out of the 13 white boxes like it was a freak show. The poetic and political was lost to the spectacle.

Also, the 'coincidence' that when I visited the exhibition each of the works involving women had the performers passive—often nude—and in those involving men, the performers were active. I went to the catalogue—the last hope—to find essays by four men and no women's voices. But that was just a coincidence too so it's cool. Lazy curatorial non-decisions left a bad aftertaste.

And (last one, I promise) what a slap in the face that the opportunity to contextualise Australian performance practice in this canon of significant international works from the last thirty years was used to show work by the very early career Clark Beaumont duo (not that their work isn't strong and interesting—which is beside the point) rather than acknowledge the key works of this mode from recent Australian art history—Rrap, Parr, Stelarc ...

[13 Rooms](#), Kaldor Public Art Projects, Pier 2/3, Sydney, 11-21 April 2013.

[Work out](#), MCA, Sydney, 22-28 April 2013.

Thanks to Ash Kilmartin and Eliza Dyball.



William Eggleston, 'Stranded in Canton', 1973, video, 77 mins



Marina Abramovic, 'Luminosity',
1997, re-performed for Kaldor
Public Art Project 27: 13 Rooms,
11-21 April 2013



Sarah Wookey performing Yvonne
Rainer's 'Trio A' at Viva! Art Action,
Quebec, 2011