Going Nowhere

Daniel Mudie Cunningham & Stephen Allkins | Christopher Köller | Hannah Raisin

Curated by Simone Hine and Kyle Weise

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Each of the works in *Going Nowhere* broach the theme of the *Boxcopy Weekender Series*, politics and experience, in a way that is particularly suited to visual portrayals. In the absence of a clear linguistic message, each work evokes a contemporary site of political struggle, but approaches this in a way that is not designed to evoke change, but instead presents an investigation or documentation of a microcosm of a broader political struggle. Each work is defined by a personal experience that only becomes political when viewed within its broader context. And each work aims to evoke a response from the viewer that is not reducible to a linguistic decoding of the work.

Hannah Raisin's *Necklace #2* depicts a performance where the artist asked a stranger to give her a series of hickies that resulted in a necklace formation around her neck. The video presents, in a rudimentary time-lapse, only a detail of the stationary artist's neck. The male stranger has been edited out of the video. The marks appear sequentially on Raisin's neck revealing the necklace. In the absence of knowledge about the precise nature of the marks it is difficult to be certain about how the marks have occurred.

As an orchestrated event, *Necklace #2* has the clearest political agenda amongst the works presented in *Going Nowhere*. Yet Raisin appeals to our sense of lived experience. A kiss, a bruise, the feeling of a bulky necklace rubbing on the tender base of the neck, are all experiences the viewer must draw upon in order to feel the affect of the work. These experiences layer and confuse each other, but what is certain is that this is an uncomfortable event. This work evokes gender politics, but it is the experience that resonates.

Christopher Köller's work *Kujukuri* documents a cyclic movement of time. The work shows only an observation of the Japanese coastline, with a handful of surfers casually floating and riding the waves. The waves rise and fall across the two channels of the work, images recur, the video loop is almost imperceptible amongst the repetitions of image and action within the work. Against the regimentation of the mechanical clock, the surfers represent a subversive temporality without schedules, goals or progress.

Köller's video and photographic work is typically defined by a 'lo-fi' aesthetic and recent photographic series, for example, take classic picturesque and photogenic locations and transform these via the (mis) use of a forty-year old disposable plastic camera. The resulting large-scale prints draw attention to the artefacts of the technology. In the case of *Kujukuri*, a consumer grade, standard definition camcorder is employed. Handheld and grainy, the work eschews the sweeping high definition gloss of corporate culture and thus subtly aligns itself with the oppositional posturing of the surfers. The slow deliberate rhythms of the work, the play of horizon lines across the screens, the repeated imagery, all of this perceptually draws the viewer into the world of the surfers, without the spectacularisation typical of corporate-sponsored surf films.

The calm grace of the surfers and the cyclic temporality of their activity, moving ceaselessly from wave to wave, is a striking contrast to the rusting industrial hulks in the foreground; an almost post-apocalyptic landscape which evokes the history of industrialisation and also its inevitable decline. Indeed, first exhibited in 2007, *Kujukuri*, gathers new relevance in the aftermath of the

tsunami that struck Japan in 2011, as questions over the nuclear fallout and long-term effects of the meltdown at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant continue to inform environmental debates. The mysterious industrial structures that sit on the beach in *Kujukuri* now gather increasingly ominous and sinister overtones. The surfers' subtle acts of resistance against the temporal accountability of the corporate salaryman are transformed by this context into a staunch protest against the exploitation of the natural world and the potential horrors resulting from our synthetic remodelling of the Earth.

The rise of cultural studies within the humanities has instituted a shift from the analysis of cultural artefacts as self-contained texts, toward an interest in the viewer's role in constructing the text. Daniel Mudie Cunningham and Stephen Allkins's work, *Boytown*, literalises this concept, as the artists re-imagine popular music videos from their youth as an apparently contemporary music video (though one filled with subtle anachronisms, such as the bowling alley).

The distinction between consumer and producer is both blurred and undermined in *Boytown*. The soundtrack by DJ Stephen Allkins immediately cues us into the work as homage. Allkins's mix of various 1980s tracks is an archetypal example of the consumer as producer, and of the remix as the defining cultural form since the mass dissemination of home taping technologies in the 1970s (a form expanded by the internet and digitisation). *Boytown* combines Allkins's remix with original footage that references both specific music videos, but also the general sense of adolescent yearning that the music evokes, especially for viewers who grew up in the 1980s.

The central musical and visual reference here, and the source of the train motif, is the video clip for "Smalltown Boy" by Bronski Beat (1984), one of the first openly gay bands to have mainstream commercial success. The artists transpose the UK smalltown setting of the original clip for the suburbs of Western Sydney. And here, unlike "Smalltown Boy," we follow the protagonist once he leaves the train in search of acceptance and fulfilment. If the smalltown or suburban environment alienated the young protagonist, we soon discover that the bright lights of the city, specifically Kings Cross, to which the train has delivered him, are no more welcoming or fulfilling.

Intimately connected to our lives and embedded in our memories, popular music has the potential to have an instant impact, transporting us to our past, and to the emotional and physical stakes of the identity politics so often played out amongst its apparently innocent tunes. Yet, just as in the conclusion of *Boytown*, the aspirations and promises so often hinted at by popular culture remain ambiguous and unfulfilled.
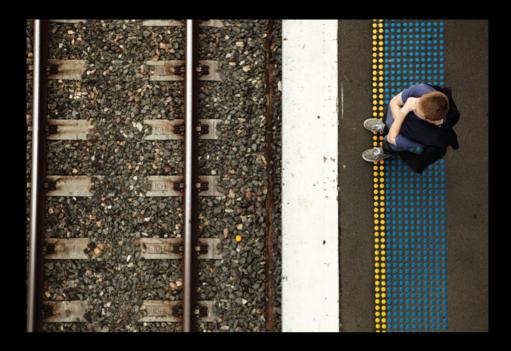
The three works in *Going Nowhere* depict a situation that is itself going nowhere. The surfers who spend day after day waiting for the perfect wave, the young man trying to find a sense of belonging in the city and the woman asking a stranger to give her a necklace of hickies. Just as these acts show the protagonists in situations that are not progressing, so the political struggle is not furthered by us having viewed their particular engagement. It is not political change that these works aim to produce, instead each artist asks us to share a particular experience that has occurred at the site of political struggle.
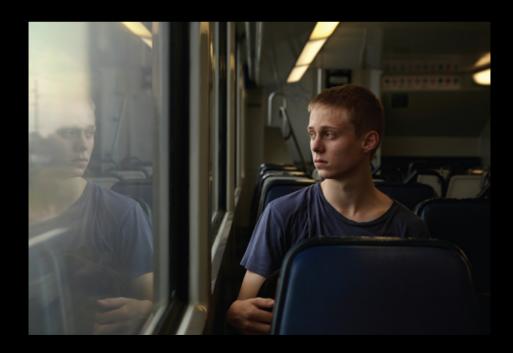
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Images:
(Left Top) Christopher Köller, *Kujukuri*, 2007, 2 channel video, colour, 4:3, 5 minutes. From the series *Floating Worlds* 2007.
(Left Bottom) Hannah Raisin, *Necklace #2*, 2011. HD single channel video, colour, 16:9, 5:13 minutes.
(Overleaf) Daniel Mudie Cunningham and Stephen Allkins, *Boytown*, 2012. HD single channel video, colour, 16:9, 5:20 minutes. Commissioned by Campbelltown Arts Centre. Production Stills: Susannah Wimberley.