

Das Platforms / Contemporary Art

Now he's out in public and everyone can see

by Robyn Stuart

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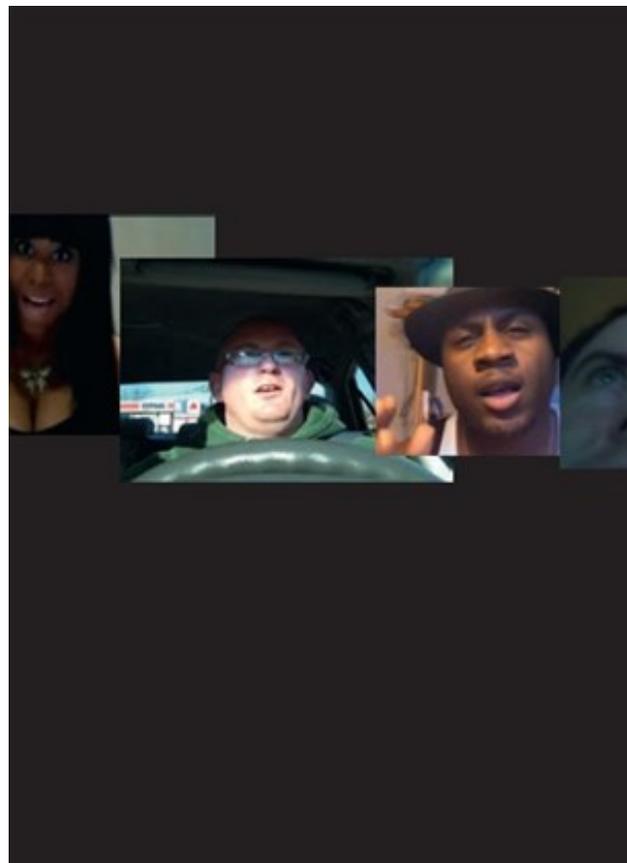
Now he's out in public and everyone can see

In the afternoon of 27 October 2002, Mr Christopher Harris was waiting on platform 7 at Sydney's Redfern station when a train arrived and a young man got off, accompanied by two women. The young man moved toward Mr Harris, saying: "What the fuck are you staring at?" Mr Harris got up and walked to the edge of the platform. He looked towards the city, presumably checking that there were no trains coming from that direction. He then jumped down onto the track. A train was in fact approaching platform 5 from the opposite direction, that is, travelling towards the city. He ran directly across the path of the train, attempting to reach the safety of platform 5. He managed to place his hands on the platform, but was unable to pull himself up before the train was upon him. He was struck by the train and died almost at once. From beginning to end, that is from the time the young man got off the train, until the time the train struck Mr Harris, twenty-eight seconds elapsed.

Most of the previous paragraph is taken from the judgment of Justice Kirby, who on the 24 February 2004 sentenced the young man to 3 years of

manslaughter. The judgment is largely devoid of any biographical data about man charged. He was 17. He had no previous convictions, a loving family, was well-regarded at school. He was drunk. He stated numerous times that he didn't intend to do any physical harm to Mr Harris, and didn't expect that Mr Harris would act the way he had.

I find this story very evocative. Perhaps because the only link I can find to it is to the actual judgment – presumably there was a lot of coverage in the media



*Now he's out in public and everyone can see, 2012
(installation view)*

at the time, but there's scant trace of it now, just this simple skeleton of facts.

It's hard to imagine how different this would be if it had happened just a couple of years later. Mr Harris died when the internet was still a child, at least when compared with the great sprawling behemoth series of tubes that it is now. There were blogs in 2002, of course (there were blogs in 1983), but it was just on the cusp of when video blogs were surfacing, and it was still 3 years until YouTube. For all the potential scandal that was involved here, the internet was silent about it.

Not so for Tiger Woods. In November 2009, Tiger Woods ran into a fire hydrant in his SUV, and his wife smashed a window with one of his golf clubs and pulled him out, bleeding and unconscious. And the internet talked about it. This is the very simple premise for Natalie Bookchin's work *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* (2012), which is showing as part of *Direct Democracy* at the Monash University Museum of Art. It's an installation in a darkened room, with screens hanging at different heights, some on, some off. People sit in their homes and speak to webcams. They're talking about a crime, or maybe several different crimes. It's hard to tell. There's mention of a golf club, there's frequent mention of race. Someone screeches that there's a "black man in the white house". Bookchin found that the "vloggers kept slipping – they'd be talking about Woods, then suddenly about Barack Obama." Sometimes all the screens turn on in unison, and there's a general cacophony shouting. Sometimes a young woman patiently explains that "they're just physically wired in a totally different way than we are".

The inclusion of Bookchin's work within *Direct Democracy* is interesting: it could be read as a curatorial statement about the value of opening up the process of story-telling as an internet free-for-all, as opposed to the relative autocracy of having a single judge being the only person whose comments are recorded. In showcasing the problematic American relationship with race, there might be a tendency for Australia visitors to feel superior, so it's fitting that upon emerging from the room Will French's *Black Jack* (a union Jack in black cloth) hangs from the wall. There's nothing resolved about

our relationship with race, unless it's the sentiment – repeated frequently by Bookchin's vloggers – that “I'm not a racist, but”.

Direct Democracy at the Monash University Museum of Art

www.monash.edu.au/muma/exhibitions/upcoming/direct-democracy.html April 26 - July 6 2013