

On Sundrun

Mathew Paul Jinks

December 8, 2009 - January 16, 2010

With *On Sundrun* Mathew Paul Jinks set out to explore postcolonial identity as formed by rituals and memories. Initially, the intent was to make a documentary series of works involving Indian and Pakistani cricket teams that compete in public parks throughout the Chicago and Midwest area. Jinks, as an expatriate Englishman, was fascinated that cricket, which he identifies as the most English of sports, exists primarily in the U.S. within Indian and Pakistani communities. However, as the project developed he grew increasingly engaged by the space of discussion rather than the specifics of cricket clubs. The result is *On Sundrun*, a project that includes a large-scale sculpture, an opening night choral performance that will generate a sound work, a set of costumes, and a feature-length video.

Sport remains the base for this project. The sculpture is made from a batting cage net; in the states we use this netting for baseball training, in the United Kingdom they use it for cricket practice. This sculpture slinking amongst the columns of the gallery reminds not so much of cricket or baseball as of a topography or terrain. A spindly empty arena complete with 'X' markings locating standing positions for the ones that got (or went) away. More importantly though, the video documents an afternoon (not an happening or a performance) when Jinks gathered together five men, two Pakistanis and three Indians, divided in to two teams, and slowly—with much delay—invented and played a game. All are amateurs. The game they invent is everything but coherent and stable. At start it's one on one. Then two on two, and three on three, and then... well... "How can you change the rules in the middle of the game?" asks one of the performers amidst play.

This game may be a far cry from cricket—it resembles a bastard mash-up of capture the flag and lacrosse—but relates to cricket in one important manner: as a simple bat-and-ball game. In some studies this type of sport is also known as a "safe haven" game. Features of safe haven games include a split between batting and fielding, with the goal to get ins and outs, correspondingly. Rather than play by the clock, play is governed by turns, with each team having equal opportunity at both roles while protecting or advancing movement between safe haven bases. As documented, with little guidance and no referees, it is hard to tell in this game who is batting and who is fielding. All told, the team comprised of the more athletic members appears to come out resoundingly victorious.

In sports the greatest sin is to fix the results of competition. Is the fix on? The presence of Jinks on the winning team, the team that also happen to have the sharper costumes, implies yes. What would it mean to work to fix a game that is invented on the spot, and is a hodgepodge of half-considered rules and goals set into motion for the sole purpose of staging a conversation on colonialism in a postcolonial place? "Keep your flag alive," as one of the competitors says during a match, in which silent Indian and Pakistani identities churn around the silent Englishman at the pivot point.

Sorting through this question the formal qualities of Jinks' working methods lead the way. As in his past works technologies stand in for, or take over, flesh and bone. Tailoring emphasizes stylization over individual stance. Sound equipment stands in place of performers. Subtitles recast rambling catch-as-catch-can discussion as quixotic, nonlinear text.

For most the 95 minutes of the video nobody has voice. Brief introductory chitchat is visible, the players casually change from street clothes and don their custom outfits one-by-one. The patchwork subtitles unmoor speakers and their spoken words, fragmenting already fragmentary exchange. The sporadic sounds retained are a starting whistle, followed by the whooping and chikita chikita, clap, slap, chop of masculine competition. Restoring diegetic sound for the length of the video might allow trains of thought to be navigated, it might also reveal that nothing particularly revealing or earth shaking is divulged through the conversations. The tactility, rather than the content, of exchange is what Jinks emphasizes. Why?

Through silence, the steady-cam guides. It approaches the players, stops too close to document events objectively, then steps back into another space, catches frustrating glimpses of any number of details. And steps forward again, jittery, unable to find a viewpoint of privilege. Displaced and frustrated, the restless camera is an outsider trying to get in, cloyingly. For guidance the camera often returns to Jinks. It captures Jinks listening with a dutiful veneer of concentration on his face.

Among the works in the gallery the sound work does not relate to sport, but establishes the presence of a third space as the most persistent voicing in the gallery. A one-time a cappella opening night performance of liturgical compositions is captured in total—ambient crowd noise, readying interjections, everything. The displaced interruption of the occasional sporting sounds of the combined Indian, Pakistani and British masculinities in the video reveals less about the Indians or Pakistanis than it does Jinks. In conversation, Jinks remarked, “Reservation and repression are traits of the English: they acknowledge the history of their country but do not readily address it.” The Pakistani and Indian participants report that parents and grandparents do not discuss the colonial past. Is repression an equal presence for the Pakistanis and Indians? Possibly. What can be asserted with certainty is the location of the United States combined with the technological hollowing out of distinct identities that offers Jinks a “safe haven” to listen beyond assumptions; the overreaching silence of the video becomes his absent address. *On Sundrun* exists as an elaborate soundspace in which Jinks works to “keep his flag alive” in his adopted homeland.

The space of inheritance can be quite resistant to representation. Inheritance is a commitment rather than a form. Jinks assembled the pieces of *On Sundrun* to find ties to a past analogous to his own. Instead he found incongruous fragments. Where now? In the essay “Prevision. Should the Future Help the Past?”, Liam Gillick writes “as I have pointed out before, those who think about the future affect the future as much as thinking about the past changes what has already taken place.” I’ve taken this statement grossly out of its context because it shares that thinking, and discussing, both future and past are of equal importance and equally transformative. What is more, there is the subtle implication that it is important to work in both temporal directions at once. It is the delay, the off-centered balance, the typecasting and splits at which past and future happen simultaneously that will determine where the present is. It is to this end that Jinks replaces bodies with technologies. Maybe the Indians and Pakistanis need not discuss the colonial past; the fact that Indian and Pakistani teams with some regularity beat the Brits at cricket is all they need to say. Jinks, in his postcolonial silence can’t stop looking backward, his assembled players look forward to future matches. Technologically speaking, it’s their game now.

—Anthony Elms

Mathew Paul Jinks has an undergraduate degree from The Glasgow School of Art in Scotland, U.K. He completed his MFA as a University Fellow at the University of Illinois at Chicago in 2008. Jinks has exhibited both in the U.K and the U.S., most recently at the Green Lantern Gallery and the Hyde Park Art Center, both in Chicago.

Related Events:

Artist Talk: Saturday, December 12, 2:00 pm

Film and Video Screening, curated by Ben Russell, UIC faculty: Wednesday, January 13, 7:00 pm

Costume design and production: Sarah Newman

Location co-production and still photography: Brita Pagels

Director of Photography, steady-cam operator and sound: Warren Cockerham

Video participants: Amjad Akhtar, Anand Bhat, Mathew Paul Jinks, Adil Mansoor, Parveer Singh, Vamsi Vasireddy

A cappella performance: My Damn Butterfly

On Sundrun is partially supported by a Community Arts Assistance Program grant from the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and the Illinois Arts Council, a state agency. Generous support for the project was provided by Fullers Home and Hardware, and Bean Products Inc. Many thanks to Elaine Pagels at Source One Realty and Phil Ross at the UIC Athletics Department for their contributions.



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