

Catalogue

Bus Projects

Anna McDermott

‘What is this if it is not touch?’



Anna McDermott,
'What is this if it is not touch?'

I would like to acknowledge the land upon which I live, create, and where this text was written, the traditional land of the Larrakia people. I pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded.

As it often does, it happens quickly. An urgent dispelling of sorts: orgasmic - almost (as if these two words should ever sit by each others side) - don't bring me to the edge and hold me there.¹ The quicker I do it, the less I might think. A dedication to resisting the cerebral; surrendering the body to an impulse to repel the gaze of its own reflection. Concealing the exhaustive reminder of to whom I am unwillingly wed. I search for other bodies which may allow me to be unfaithful, whilst presenting them with an image that is curated with disintegrating patches. Oh but this performance is far more familiar than I care to acknowledge. Like the drying glue of a cheap roll of masking tape, we cannot hold this up forever.

1 Olivia Mròz, Instagram messenger conversation, June 3, 2020.

I think of touch without skin; encountering a memory of encountering. An electric caressing, without being held. Punctuating in its sways - the outside spills inside: “isn’t desire always the same, whether the object is present or absent?”² But doesn’t absence make the heart grow fonder? Even presence, at times, may be met with an intimate detachment; moving through the motions of moving through the motions. A “choreography of breath”³ a sequence of utterances that vibrate; slithering through porous edges: “as if each breath, being incomplete, sought to mingle with the other,”⁴ revealing myself in them and themselves in me.

A disembodied voice, anchored to no physicality; yet finding its’ place in the body of she who listens. Tones and pitches entering the cavity of an earlobe; shifting and spilling in acrobatic movements. Some squeezing through a clogged filter, others finding a home without permission. Words mark and indent me only to surface at a future moment - a finger flirts with a trigger. Spiralling under the skin and across its surface is a reverb that cannot be lowered. And what is this if it is not touch? Exterior mixing with interior, boundaries intermingling - pulsating unevenly in frustration. I am told, “language must give way to silence.”⁵

2 Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments* (London: Vintage Classics, 2018), 15.

3 Margaret Cameron, *I Shudder To Think: Performance as Philosophy* (Brisbane: Ladyfinger Press, 2016), 39.

4 Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse*, 15.

5 Cameron, *I Shudder To Think*, 39.

It is within this so called silence that the affect of language can be understood as one that always exceeds itself.

Space now shallow and restricted. Orchestrated. Measured. Controlled. A novel experience for those posited with the unearned privilege of free movement; to which I am privy. Whilst familiar to those who have rested upon this land long before my ancestor's arrival. Space extends and contracts, folding and unfolding itself, supporting some but not all. The virus has not caused cracks, these wounds had long been disguised by a precarious veil: "collapsing the future into the present,"⁶ or revisiting the past with better trained eyes. What to do in these moments of collision? How may the screen be used to reconfigure the choreographic commands to which bodies seek comfort. Grosz writes that technology is "both the condition of power and a possibility for its subversion, depending on how it is used, by whom, and with what effects."⁷ Glancing through various windows, we are met with glitchy facades of intimacy.

Can one ever be named a passive observer when we know stillness to be fraught with motion? My eyes dance over a post-it-note, not stepping into the space at the gig, a memory of stillness tattooed: bodies collaboratively

6 Jake Chapman, "Four Weddings and a Mass Grave." In *The Quarantine Files*, ed. Tom Lutz (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Review of Books, 2020), 15.

7 Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001) 19.

organising themselves into a semi-circular formation on the periphery of stage lighting - reluctant to sway with the shadows of others adjacent to them. How might we rupture the moulds to which we arrange ourselves; leaning our weight from the supports a space provides. Supports which mark our positions not with tape or any similar object that can be determined within our ocular capacities. Nether-the-less obedient, performing with the skins of sociality just as Butler expected.⁸ So we “succumb to the adjacency of being”⁹ with no clarity as to which way we slip. With closed eyes we loosen our grips on the objects we couldn’t feel we were touching.

- 8 Judith Butler, “Performativity,” In *Terms of Performance*, accessed June 2, 2020, <http://intermsofperformance.site/keywords/performativity/judith-butler>
- 9 Chapman, “Four Weddings and a Mass Grave,” 16.

Anna McDermott is a multidisciplinary artist from Naarm (Melbourne) who is currently working and creating on the unceded land of the Larrakia people (Darwin, Northern Territory). Her installation and performative-based practice employs photographic, filmic, sound and sculptural mediums to choreograph spaces for viewers to navigate. Anna completed a BFA (Honours) at RMIT University in 2016. In the following year, Anna was awarded the Nillumbik Prize for Contemporary Works of Excellence and was accepted as an Artist in Residence at Takt AIR Berlin, Germany.

Anna has exhibited in various art spaces in Australia including: Kings ARI (Melbourne), Sawtooth ARI (Launceston), 107 Projects (Sydney), Alternating Current Art Space (Melbourne), 45 Downstairs (Melbourne) and has an upcoming online exhibition at CoVa. In 2021 Anna will be presenting a collaborative public program with Luigi Vescio at Bus Projects. This year she is being commissioned by the Nillumbik Shire Council as a part of the upcoming exhibition 'Art in the time of COVID-19.' Towards the end of 2020, Anna will have completed a Masters of Contemporary Art at the Victorian College of the Arts.

Bus Projects acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we operate: the Wurundjeri people and Elders past and present of the Kulin nations.

Bus Projects is supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body. Bus Projects' 2017–19 Program is supported by the City of Yarra.



35 JOHNSTON ST,
COLLINGWOOD
VIC 3066 AUST.

OPENING HOURS
12-6PM TUE-FRI
10AM-4PM SAT