

*Curator's
Talk*

FRANCES BARRETT



We, Frances and Ella, would like to acknowledge the peoples of the Eora Nation, the Kaurua people and the peoples of the Kulin Nations as sovereign custodians of the lands where *Curator's Talk* was developed. We would like to extend our respect to the ancestors and Elders past, present and future, and to all First Nations people.

Curator's Talk

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For A.C.
Aunty and radical.
(1948 – 2006)

This publication is the documentation of a performance. Understand it as a document, a script, a score, a voice, a body. Read it out loud. Bring our voices to touch.

This is *Curator's Talk*.
I will not speak directly
to the compositions of
Del Lumanta, Sione
Teumohenga, or Nina
Buchanan. I will not speak
for the work you can hear
in Gallery 1, developed by
Hayley Forward, Brian Fuata
and myself. This is not the
moment where the curator
provides you, the audience,
with an explication or ex-
position. This is *Curator's
Talk*. Where I am speaking as
both an artist and a curator,
speaking with two mouths.
Where I am speaking as one
voice of a monstrous chorus.
Where I am poking holes.

Where in this moment I reach out to touch you. This is *Curator's Talk*. It is neither a narrative nor an essay. It is a wormhole. Where passage by passage this script, this talk, my mouths collapse in on each other. And as the title, *Meatus*, suggests, it is an internal logic. It is my meat logic. *And there are holes in my logic*. A meatus is an opening or passage that leads into the interior of the body such as the ear canal, the urethra and the nasal passages. Neither bound to the human nor to a particular sex, the meatus is juncture between the outside and the

inside where the body opens itself to the world. This project, *Meatus*, begins with the external acoustic meatus – the ear – to consider the attendant and expanded possibilities for a body. Without the ability to shut, clench, weep or blink, the ear remains open to the outside world. Seth Kim-Cohen describes the ear as an open entity with an unblinking temporality: ‘From birth to death, the ear never closes.’¹ This openness to the world renders the ear, as audiologist Myriam Westcott describes, as an ‘open wound.’² From these wounded, unblinking

holes in the side of my head
my curatorial work begins.
I have not been loyal to the
proper medical definition
of meatus. The meatus leads
me into any bodily opening.
From the ear I wormed my
way to imagine buccal, anal
and stoma potentialities.
My understanding of meatus
collapses any distinctions
between the holes, passages
and incisions of the ear, the
mouth, the anus, the vagina,
the stoma and the wound.
The meatus of our bodies
bleeding and leaking into
each other, creating new
passages for imagining the
body, creating new passages

between bodies, creating new
passages across space and
time. I collapse all meatus
as a form of queer political
imagining. As a way to imag-
ine a queer body as a body of
potential, as a porous body,
as a worm body, as a body
in flight. *Meatus can be un-
derstood as concrete flesh, raw
speculation and a hole poetic.*
*Meatus is the passaging of the
body: from organism to the
speculative. From the viscera
to sonic force. From flesh to
space-time vermiculation.* I
began to think about how a
body can be represented out-
side of visual representation,
beyond any optic, beyond the

viscera. There was one way that I recognised this leaking body cum ear cum mouth cum anus cum cunt could be encountered. I needed to invoke this body as a sonic force and intensity. For the body to be transmitted as sonic waves wiggling like worms across space and time. Listening, therefore, becomes a way to encounter and feel this body. I looked to ACCA and noticed the two open doors that lie at the entrance of the galleries. I saw the two open ears that lie at ACCA's beginning. The two open mouths that lie at ACCA's beginning. I decided

I would reimagine ACCA as a meatus into which an audience enters, to be swallowed (w)hole and to become the listener. Into this meatus the audience penetrates and, reciprocally, the sound waves penetrate their meatus. *You fuck my (w)hole a passage.*³ To draw attention to the practice of listening is to attune ourselves to how our bodies function, how we inhabit our bodies and what we choose to do with them. *Meatus* proposes a porous listening practice: a listening that diffuses across the entire body to decentre the ear by

animating all of our meatus. Which in turn, is a way of being in the world that is open and sensate. This porous listening is a practice that critically addresses the somatic fictions inhabiting our body.⁴ Through creating holes, incisions and nicks, porous listening seeks to dishabituate and unlearn the institutional forces that have metastasised in our sinew. We need to unlearn the practices that keep us apart and isolated. We need to re-establish practices that bring us together and to listen to the many voices that are otherwise silenced in

the anguishing din of the present moment. *Meatus* proposes listening as a stoma-like reparative action. The Oxford English Dictionary gives two definitions of stoma: an artificial opening made in an organ of the body and a small opening like a mouth in some animals.⁵ The stoma brings together reparative wounds with the mouth. Through porous listening we are creating new wounded holes that extract those institutional forces by forging more intimate, collective and caring modes of being. The organism hacked. Bodies made anew.

In the context of *Meatus* not only is the stoma a little slice in the side of a body, it can also be a nick in time.⁶ The stoma is a wormhole: a wounding mouth suctioned onto the present moment as a portal of temporal disorientation. A wormhole is a speculative connective tunnel between two points in space-time. Wormhole theory speculates that if gravity entangled space-time densely enough then two different space-time points could share the same physical location. If this situation could be kept stable and the two locations kept distinct,

then a wormhole could become a possible passage between these two points. A wormhole is not necessarily the most direct path between these two points, but a variable outside of normal space-time travel. Wormholes are thought to be unstable and on the precipice of collapse.⁷ Some physicists visualise wormholes as containing two ‘mouths’ connected by a ‘throat.’⁸ These mouths suction to two space-time points and the throat is the path or passage between these two mouths. *Like the wormhole, listening takes time.* It forces

us to stop, to open up and give ourselves over. As Del has suggested, listening creates a space where we can complete our thoughts.⁹ This creates a tension against the acceleration and productivity demanded of us. Listening creates a fissure in chrononormativity opening up a space between us for new intimacies. Thinking of the two mouths that lie at the wormholes' beginnings led me to Anne Carson. In "The Gender of Sound," Carson explains that an axiom of ancient Greek and Roman medical theory is that a woman has two

mouths which creates a 'confusing and embarrassing' *kakophony*.¹⁰ The collapsing of the distinction between the vagina and the mouth links the 'unspeakable' and becomes a metaphor for the unregulated voice. The woman with two mouths becomes an uncontrollable force under the patriarchy, her sounds associated with 'monstrosity, disorder and death.'¹¹ As such, the woman's voice sits outside of social order and rationality. The understanding that genitals and gender does not equate reveals the fact that having a vagina does not necessitate being a woman, or

that binary gender is the only way to organise social relations. To meet Carson's image of the woman with two mouths I want to invoke the body of meatus. A body eluding the delimitations of the biological body with infinite openings each holding the potential to make and receive sounds. What I draw from Carson is how voices that sit outside of the 'rational' male subject are a destabilising force to the necessary hierarchies substantiating the patriarchy. These vocalities put the inside on the outside, projecting and exposing what should otherwise be kept in.¹²

These vocalities create a body without boundaries flooding space with affective, unbounded force. Brian, Hayley, Del, Sione, Nina and my sounds leak and bleed together. This sonic blur and collapse signals the emergence of meatus – a difficult and beautiful kakophony.

The mouth is a crossing our voices pass to enter into the world.¹³ This threshold brings us into being with others. Adriana Cavarero states that the voice is always *for* the ear, meaning that the voice is always relational. Cavarero goes on to say that the voice 'is never as relational

as it is in the first cry of the infant – an invoking life that unknowingly entrusts itself to a voice that responds.’¹⁴

The infant wails to find and bind with its mother. But I want us to hear another cry and imagine another relationality beyond the mother and child. I want to unbind the biological umbilical call and open up towards new encounters with new kin. I want to queer this cry. We need to imagine new forms of relation to each other if we want to survive. Our kakophony needs to be a force that shakes matter.¹⁵

When we call to each other

we touch each other. Each idiosyncrasy of the voice is a texture – what Roland Barthes calls the ‘grain’ – that offers an intimate somatic knowledge to the listener.¹⁶ The textures of timbre is where Yvon Bonenfant draws the haptic registers of sound with touch together. Bonenfant says that when we listen to a voice we feel these timbral textures and in turn, feel a body without flesh. We feel a vocalic body.¹⁷ What Sione describes as our ‘imprint’ in sound.¹⁸ Martin Welton similarly aligns listening with touch saying that ‘to listen

for and to pay attention to the bodily rhythms of another is also to feel the subtle movements of their viscera through your own flesh.¹⁹ We are momentarily inhabited by these vocalic bodies. Through our vocalisations we reach out towards a subject we hope to touch, to hold, to care for.²⁰ But in *Meatus* it is not the mother's arms reaching out. This is a queer groping, a haptic mode driven by an erotically charged curiosity.²¹ It is a sense of touch that takes pleasure in the unknown and indeterminate bodies that we can hear. This timbral touch

is what draws us together.

For Donna Haraway "The task is to make kin in lines of inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present."²² This thickness, is a hot compost of temporalities, of being with others, of response-abilities.²³ Like the wormhole, this thick present is a time of beginnings. Drawing from Haraway, I understand my role as a curator is to forge sites for new kinship and to create a thick present. *And into the dirt we go, to the composted anal space where my worm is born.* Worm parasites

enter the body through the mouth to inhabit and gestate. Worms infest my meatus. The worm, like the wormhole, is a creature of passaging. Where lies the wormhole's throat lies the worm's concertinaed body. Rather than two mouths, at either end of the worm's tiny body are its mouth and anus. As the worm inches forward, its open mouth consumes material which then is metabolised and excreted to become a rich compost. Compost is where the mouth and anus meet. Mouth decomposing and anus recomposing: fused together

in an endless cycle that breaks down matter. As the mouth gnaws into the future, the anus forges a thick present. This thick present is where matter breaks down and edges become porous. Compost is where the integrity of the body *dissolves* process and outcome *dissolve* exteriority and interiority *dissolve* self and other *dissolve* future and no future *dissolve*. *Schlupp Schlupp Schlupp*. The worm forges new kinships between materials, between bodies, between meatus. I consider that together Brian, Del, Hayley, Nina, Sione and I

have forged a thick present. Together we are worms. Together we produce this thick anal space (This improvised, transient and emotive compost, says Brian).²⁴ As worms we forge a composted common on which we converge. *Schlupp Schlupp Schlupp*. *The call of the worm*. In his novel *Queer* William Burroughs describes the homosexual desire that one character has for another as a ‘blind worm hunger.’ Burroughs writes: ‘Lee could feel his body pull towards Allerton, an amoeboid protoplasmic projection, straining with a blind worm hunger

to enter the other’s body, to breathe with his lungs, see with his eyes, learn the feel of his viscera and genitals.’²⁵ Burroughs conceives of homosexual sex as protoplasmic fusion and total ingestion. From this passage we understand the worm is the hunger of yearning, unmet queer desire. To refer to this form of desire Burroughs coined the term *schlupping*. *Schlupp* is a neologism that is indicative of the tumescent body. It is where, as Douglas Kahn describes, ‘the body’s interior [makes] its needs conspicuously known within the world.’²⁶

Further into *Queer* Burroughs refers to the disembowelling of a 'a wise old queen' called Bobo, whose innards were sucked out of his body through his anus with a sickening *schlupp* sound.

Schlupping therefore becomes an ejaculation of homoerotic desire, and simultaneously, the abortive force of the eviscerated body evacuated of all its organs. Burroughs summons the desires and drives of the queer body through this vocalic projection. When spoken out loud, *schlupp* draws us to the tension between the institution of language and

its violent insurgent. *Schlupp* is a vocal force that splits open language to initiate new disturbing sounds with the body. In the context of *Meatus*, the queer vocalic body is a cry and tearing that drives new meaning. 'The queer vocalic body decomposes language into 'noisy, alimentary, and excremental bits.'²⁷

Organisms break down, decompose, and bodies without organs take flight.

Schlupping is the sound of the worm. Its deep dirt gurgles. Its parthenogenic calling. The worm, ambivalent to its own demise,

schlups from its wounded
holes in a state of edging
towards both climax and
death. *Schlupp Schlupp
Schlupp*. This vermiculated
script is a collapsing of
holes, openings and passages.
It is not an explication or
exposition but a series of
wounded beginnings. This is
*Curator's Talk. My mouth cum
wormhole*. Where the body
is expelled as sonic force.
Where I reach out through
time and space to touch
you, hold you, kiss you.

Thank you for listening.

1	Kim-Cohen, Seth. <i>In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a non-cochlear sonic art</i> , Continuum: New York and London, 2009, P xviii	10	where Del Lumanta is in conversation with the other artists contributing to the project
2	Kate Cole-Adams quoting Myriam Westcot in “When sound becomes pain,” In <i>The Monthly</i> , May 2018. Accessed 22 August 2019 https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2018/may/1525096800/kate-cole-adams/when-sound-becomes-pain	11	Carson, Anne. “The Gender of Sound.” In <i>Glass, Irony and God</i> . New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1995. PP 131–135
3	Brian Fuata, Hayley Forward and Frances Barrett, <i>worm divination (segmented realities)</i> , 2020, immersive sound installation, 32:30 mins	12	Carson, Anne. “The Gender of Sound,” P 121
4	For more on ideas of somatic facts and fictions see Paul B. Preciado, Athena Vrettos and Elizabeth Freeman	13	Carson, Anne. “The Gender of Sound,” P 129
5	“Stoma,” In <i>Oxford Learner’s Dictionaries</i> , Oxford University Press, Accessed 6 March 2020. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/stoma?q=stoma	14	Preciado, Paul B. <i>An Apartment on Uranus</i> . Translated by Charlotte Mandell. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020. PP 42-43
6	My ideas of times are informed by writers such as: Elizabeth Grosz, <i>The Nick of Time: Politics, Evolution and the Untimely</i> , 2004; J. Jack Halberstam, <i>In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives</i> , 2005; Elizabeth Freeman, <i>Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories</i> , 2010; Renate Lorenz, <i>Queer Art: A Freak Theory</i> , 2012; and Sam McBean, <i>Feminism’s Queer Temporalities</i> , 2016	15	Cavarero, Adriana. <i>For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression</i> . ProQuest Book Central: Stanford University Press, 2005. Accessed 31 July 2019. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/monash/detail.action?docID=3037509 . P 169
7	Redd, Nola Taylor. “What Is Wormhole Theory.” In <i>Space</i> , 21 October 2017. Accessed 7 October 2019. https://www.space.com/20881-wormholes.html	16	Here I imagine the beautiful kakophony of Sara Ahmed’s <i>chip chip chip</i> in her article “An Affinity of Hammers.” In <i>Trap Door: Trans Cultural Production and the Politics of Visibility</i> , edited by Reina Gossett, Eric A. Stanley, and Johanna Burton, Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2017. PP 221–34
8	“Follow Up: What Exactly Is a ‘Wormhole’? Have Wormholes Been Proven to Exist or Are They Still Theoretical?” In <i>Scientific American</i> , 15 September 1997. Accessed 7 October 2019. https://www.scientificamerican.com/page/about-scientific-american/	17	Barthes, Roland. “The Grain of the Voice.” In <i>Image Music Text</i> . London: Fontana Press, 1977. PP 179–189
9	See the forthcoming exhibition catalogue of <i>Meatus</i> (Published by ACCA, Melbourne, 2020)	18	Bonenfant, Yvon. “Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres.” <i>Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts</i> 15, No. 3: On Listening (2010). P 76
		19	See the forthcoming exhibition catalogue of <i>Meatus</i> (Published by ACCA, Melbourne, 2020) where Sione Teumohenga is in conversation with the other artists contributing to the project
			Welton, Martin. “Listening-as-Touch: Paying Attention to Rosemary Lee’s Common Dance.” <i>Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts</i> 15, No. 3: On Listening, 2010. P 49

- 20 Bonenfant, Yvon. "Queer Listening to Queer Vocal Timbres." P 76
- 21 Steinbock, Eliza. "Groping Theory: Haptic Cinema and Trans-Curiosity in Hans Scheirl's Dandy Dust." In *The Transgender Studies Reader*, edited by Susan Stryker and Aren Z. Aizura, vol 2, New York and London: Routledge, 2013. P 112. Although Grope Theory is applied to the cinematic experience, Steinbock has inspired me to think of groping, reaching, touching, feeling in relation to the sonic experience and the practice of listening
- 22 Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Experimental Futures: Technological Lives, Scientific Arts, Anthropological Voices, edited by Michael M. J. Fischer and Joseph Dumit. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016. P 1
- 23 Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. P 2
- 24 See the forthcoming exhibition catalogue of *Meatus* (Published by ACCA, Melbourne, 2020) where Brian Fuata is in conversation with the other artists contributing to the project
- 25 Burroughs, William. *Queer*, New York: Viking Penguin, 1985, P 36
- 26 I am indebted to Douglas Kahn and his writing on Burrough's **schlupp** in *Noise Water Meat: A History of Sound in the Arts* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 2001). Kahn describes **schlupp** in this compelling paragraph on page 301: "**Schlupp**, the word and what it describes, licks its chops and becomes the most pronounced moment of all ingestion. It is an appropriate sound for the unhewn hungers of junk or sex, for it is the body's interior making its needs conspicuously known within the world – all organs, all-organisms finding itself in speech."
- 27 Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*, edited by Constantin Boundas, London: The Athalone Press, 1990, P 88. For more on the body without organs read: Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. "6. November 28, 1947: How do you make yourself a body without organs?" In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987. PP 149–166

The voice is both the subtlest and
the most perfidious form of the flesh.

Mladen Dolar
A Voice and Nothing More, 2006

Frances Barrett is an artist cum curator who lives and works on Gadigal land, Sydney. Much of her recent projects pivot around the modalities of listening and touch: *Meatus*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2020; *All Ears: A listening party*, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, 2018; *Into My Arms*, Ace Open, Adelaide, 2018; and *Handle*, CCS Bard Hessel Museum of Art, Annandale-on-Hudson, 2018. She is one member of the collective Barbara Cleveland and is currently a PhD candidate in Curatorial Practice at Monash Art Design and Architecture, under the supervision of Dr Tara McDowell and Dr Helen Hughes.

Ella Sutherland is an artist and graphic designer whose practice is concerned with the relationship between printed matter, typography and social histories, with a focus on a queering of mechanical reproduction. Experimenting with forms of publishing, her books, prints, posters and installations draw from systems of reading and navigation operating both within the built environment and print media to displace habitual ways of understanding language, space and information.

Hayley Forward primarily works as a sound engineer, sound designer, artist and creative technician, often traversing between the worlds of music, performance, art, and theatre. Currently Hayley works full time at Sydney Theatre Company as Sound Supervisor. Her recent sound design credits include: *Too Close to the Sun's At The End of The Land*, (part of Participant, CultureLAB, 2019, Artshouse Melbourne) and *The Third Ear (All Ears: A listening party, 2019, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney)* a podcast developed with Kate Britton.

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