

Arini Byng
*Talking to the back of your
head*

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Arini Byng
*Talking to the back
of your head*
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A crevice to slip through, not unnoticed.

A body cuts a path through the milling onlookers while a tableaux illuminated on a screen mimics unfolding action. Participants' hands wander in a restrained pas de deux: fingers mingle, grapple with resistant structures, wander tentatively through space.

Within Arini Byng's broader practice, which sits at the intersection of installation, relational exercise and delegated performance, separate temporalities unravel concurrently. Her most recent projects *The sound in the form of a word* and *Before taking any action* are comprised of sculptural arrangements, still images, video and live performance. The presentation of performances alongside constructed objects and documentation of past performances creates a startling sense of an expanded temporality: past and present folded against one another in a complex concertina until, for an observer, all distinguishing markers of time have collapsed.

For the earlier projects, an infinite number of experiences is possible; one might notice a serpentine revolution here, an amusing reaction from a fellow participant there- fleeting moments noticed by some, but not others. For this new work, Byng pares back these elements, these potential configurations. Instead, the lens of the camera orients us: a furtive glance as a spine of corrugated plastic is passed from one hand to another, the glide of sneakers on a mottled concrete floor. The film has been slowed to a sedated pace, a cinematic vision realised through languid zooms and a sweeping photographic gaze: creating a sense that time has become swollen. There is something quietly ritualistic within Byng's projects, with their ponderous cadence: a rejection of chronological linear time in preference of a primordial experiential time-keeping. For the duration of the video, time is not marked by the tick of a metronome or

lurching hands on a clock but the arch of a body, an object punctuating space.

The parameters of Byng's projects are not static and the cyclical nature of her methods of production expands the work into a more vast entity: The process of creation *becomes* the work itself, as the devising of the work and the playful investigative 'rehearsals' converge with public presentations. Like all of Byng's projects the video is largely informed by happenstance with the work unfolding as both Byng and participants surrender to the agency of one another, to the objects they handle, to the space they inhabit. The haptic qualities of each object gently guide each participant's actions. Movement is improvised, but not inconsequential. Byng investigates the causal nature of the perils of chance, the effects of which ripple out in concentric circles, lingering from moment to moment. The content of Byng's video exists as a closed temporal loop: there is no linear narrative, one action leads to another, which in turn initiates the first-mentioned action. Yet a point of origin cannot be determined. A door has been flung open and we are adrift in an ocean of abstract gesture.

Some participants in this video have performance backgrounds and others do not which creates a divergence of energies, as some extend their limbs with a frantic dynamism while others move with a faltering hesitance. Whilst directed, movement is never choreographed allowing for the tension of clumsy movement and

the crescendo of failure. The video allows for the peculiarities of each performer. At times a scene unfolds tightly around one performer, in other moments we seem to witness an eradication of ego as the performers begin to move as one.

The title *Talking to the back of your head* implies a certain removal or distancing. Byng's practice, like the title, speaks to a movement away from verbal language as a rubric for understanding and articulating the world. Instead, Byng investigates the communicative potential of touch, of sight, of gesture: a taxonomy of movement. Narrative is resisted and rendered artificial: a system of knowledge that needs no verbal language within which to exist, with which to be quantified. The video depicts evasive scenarios, as if whilst presenting themselves, the performers simultaneously retreat backwards. One can't get a footing on slippery ground.

Having witnessed several of Byng's projects, I am aware of a self-reflective element: Byng herself documents each performance from amongst the onlookers. The spectacle of an artist taking on the role of onlooker is striking. Her reflective self-surveillance is a possible form of 'talking to the back of your head', speaking with her past self, communicating across time.

But the title may in fact be deceptive as Byng's work does not warrant a distancing between subject and observer, but instead asks viewers to become grounded in the present, bringing

us closer a reality we so often do not engage with. The narrow gallery space becomes an enclave for movement: a portal through which to be absorbed in other peoples' present. Stepping out of the space, it is as if my bodily chronology has been meddled with, reversed in its circuitry, or at least slowed down, until I am painfully aware of the gesticulating passerby as he murmurs into his mobile, the mesmerising sway of a sign in the wind, a car gliding to a halt: the dance of daily life revealed.

Katie Paine



Talking to the back of your head explores the interaction between the human body, architecture and objects whilst questioning how this interplay shapes and determines our material and immaterial environment.

Byng investigates the 'active' presence of the performer - drawn from the emphasis of their body as spectacle; their physicality. The performer is displayed as an active image that does not necessarily need dialogue or discourse to explain or make sense of them. Her practice endeavours to illustrate a haptic or tactile phenomenology of the body as it encounters the physical world – a felt or lived experience of corporeality.

Arini Byng works with the affective qualities of materials, gestures and settings - undertaking exercises in image, movement and form to negotiate political scenes. Byng (born 1987) holds a B. Fine Art from NAS and B. Fine Art (Honours) from VCA in 2013. Her work has been exhibited across Australia and internationally including c3 Contemporary Art Space, Hobiennale, Bus Projects, Slopes, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Perimeter Presents, ACCA, CCP, MoMA PS1 and The Geffen Contemporary at MOCA; selected works published by Perimeter Editions, Higher Arc, Le Roy and Photofile; and with work held in publication collections of V&A, MoMA, Tate Modern, MONA and NLA. Byng lives and works in Naarm Melbourne on the unceded sovereign land of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation.

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