

Burns, A.K and K.R.M. Mooney, *Fear of Commitment: A.K. Burns in Conversation with K.R.M. Mooney*, n/a Oakland, September 2014, online.

n/a

## fear of commitment a.k. burns in conversation with k.r.m. mooney

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“when is a broken off limb just a part o-f the environment and when is it offspring?” — karen barad

**krm m** \_ this quote taken from karen barad seems important as an initial framework or inquiry, what forms or ideas are oriented around this process of questioning?

**ak b** \_ this quote cracks me up. karen is referring to the brittle star, an organism she uses as an example of what she has termed ‘intra-action’ and whose limbs, when broken off, become new brittle star. out of context (and she poses this question as something to consider within our larger world view) i like how the first thing you think of is, whose limb? a tree? a human? in the case of the tree you can imagine the limb falling and being a branch on the ground but also the branch spawning new seedlings as it merges with the dirt. in the case of a human, i imagine the horror of glancing down at your recently departed limb as it has suddenly become a loss; the repulsion in it becoming other and rotting away. and anyone who would treat this limb as an offspring would be sent to the psyche ward. yet decay is a process of generating life for millions of organisms, and that leads to questioning what one considers offspring and reproduction.



as humans we are deeply invested in exceptionalism as an excuse for biological dominance and difference. we rarely humble ourselves to look at how limited, deficient and dangerous we become when we perceive ourselves through the eye, i, ego, and as distinctly separate from everything else in the world. how we perceive what is and isn't, how we term and organize the world, are essential to my sense of being as well as to how i approach my practice.

**krm m** \_ there are a few ways that theory works for me — it gives me language and gives me life, and i'm able to better perceive and understand the way i experience space and my position as a subject. we framed your current exhibition as a series of potentials, something still actualizing or in the process of arriving: conceptual frameworks that de-prioritize totality and cohesion of self. How do you see some of these ideas taking physical form?

**ak b** \_ i arrived in oakland with an urge to continue working on projects that i knew i couldn't finish in the time i had here, so this show is a stopping point in my process. i like the idea that a show can be a position to test and learn from, not just of finality and display. also, i've been feeling more pressure to produce at the speed of the art world not at the speed of art, so i'm always looking for space and tactics for sharing my work while giving it the time it needs to evolve.

because i arrived ambivalent about finitude, the pop-psychoanalytic term “fear of commitment” came to mind. i'm interested in this phrase, both as a potentially productive space and as a critique on the cultural of political apathy. “fear of commitment” implies that commitment is a kind of anxiety laden trap. but when are non-committal strategies useful? and if commitment is a confirmation of being in a position, can that position be transitional?

*no*, the work in the bathroom, is the most literal manifestation of this question of commitment. *no* is an illuminated sign of negation; it's definitive and nonnegotiable. but you could also just unplug it, as it relies on a power source.

i have also been exploring how to use process as a directive to discover the content in my work. with the metal shirts, *discard (t-shirt)*, the work emerged through working in the foundry. as i learned the process, i was seeking a subject/form to articulate in that medium, and i felt very conscious of the physicality of my own body: the dirt and sweat caked in my clothing, which for practical reasons, was blue collar drag: button down, t-shirt, jeans. being in the heat and dirt you can't wait to remove your clothes. the works became a series of mono-print reliefs of discarded or folded clothing. i see them as indexes of laboring bodies; their form is haunted with the absence of the body, so they act as a kind of homage to the industrial laborer and the loss produced by the shift towards immaterial and affective labor. that is also why i used aluminum, a newer hybrid metal, lighter weight, silvery cold: a material that is the product of technological advancement, the very thing that has moved bodies away from the physical and toward the digital.

**krm m** \_ within theories of materiality, specifically queer and trans embodiment, there has been a interest in de-centering the human within economies of desire and reproduction and expand our thinking of how materiality matters. i'm interested in how difference is more present than ever within human and non-human bodies: intersex fish or flowers as interspecies cyborgs. how do you navigate materiality, and relate to the objects you generate in your practice as material bodies. where do you as a human subject with a body and history come in?

can you walk me through the works in your exhibition?

**ak b** \_ i've already touched on two works, but as you enter n/a you run into *poetry slam (broke binary)* on the floor. this is a loose reference to a favorite work; cady nolads' *celebrity trash spill*. i've been interested in flowers both as bad clichés and as you point out inter-sexed, inter-species pro-creators so they keep showing up recent work. and do the screws and plastic knives need explaining? this is the one piece that is a total experiment and i think is going to lead to a series of 'slams' that are like the content of a broken bag—a cast of symbols, objects and materials—that offer humorous poetic narratives. the slam is about matter in a kind of relational chaos. that objects and materials are a lexicon and visa versa.

in *chain linked*, i wanted to treat canvas, the most traditional art ground as what it is. in any other context it's a piece of fabric. i've been experimenting with dying techniques and that lead me to working with batik, a method of wax resist used in creating patterned fabrics. i wanted to create an image or 'painting' that was repetitive like a pattern. a chain-link fence is essentially a squiggly line (a simplistic art mark) in repetition from edge to edge. but this pattern is non-repetitive because i hand drew every line. both dye and wax are liquid processes that i lack the skills to control well at this scale, so the fence blurs, thins, and almost disappears at points. i imagine there being several more of these, and that they may or may not be erected as paintings. i'm interested in continuing to explore the idea that this fence is a large cloth that could be worn, draped, rolled up or otherwise. for this installation i wanted to play with the obscene scale of monumental painting and it's symbolic qualities, by positioning it as a kind of obstacle jammed into the architecture. i'm interested in how meaning and abstraction are embedded in our cultural relationship to material and formal choices.

i think the video *a smeary spot* feels like a culmination of these textual and linguistic relationships to the body that are emerging in the other work. this work started as screen tests for a larger long term work i'm in the midst of, that is about mining the sci-fi genre. that forthcoming project is an excuse to explore socio-political interests through a fantastical filter, in particular how a bodies relationship to land/site/territory generates ecology, economy and culture.

typically the purpose of a screen test is to discover who should play what part and who should not, so what if the screen test is structurally against discovering the individual character. a character of multiple positions and qualities of execution. mastery is relative.

i made a script compiled from various text that have been generative for my thinking in the sci-fi project. each reader was offered one of three domestic sites at n/a. the kitchen, bed, or bathroom and asked to perform a related domestic tasks. i was curious about the supposed mind-body gap; when is a text embodied and when is it not? and how political speech is often more about affect than content.

because i was living in n/a while i made the work i became obsessed with the austere experience of living in a space that is constructed for display. there is something inhospitable about a gallery setting; it's a negative space. a space without, so that it can be reformed in each iteration of exhibition. a good chunk of the sci-fi takes place in the deserts of utah. there is a kind of lack (that is total potential) in that site as well that interests me.

also this work is also full of affect and effects, because those are qualities i want to use and challenge in the science-fiction project. i think ultimately this piece will end up with allot less effects, with a subtler approach to looking at how the displacement effect is created. ultimately i want to walk the line between cinematic spectacle and document.