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## **Five Bodies**

Live transcript

### **KEYWORDS**

body, nottingham, thinking, listening, words, thought, mother, feel, water, sound, home, practice, speaking

### **SPEAKERS**

Sofia Lemos, Nisha Ramayya, Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Bhanu Kapil, Sarah Jackson

**00:03**

**Sofia Lemos: Hi, everyone. Good evening. My name is Sofia Lemos. I'm the curator of Public Programmes and Research in Nottingham Contemporary. And it is my pleasure welcoming you today online to join us this evening. So for those of you tuning in for the first time asking questions and rehearsing answers with artists and collaborators is a vital part of what we do. We often work in collaboration with practitioners involved in the arts and in the academia, to reflect on how research and practice intertwine in contemporary art and visual cultures, as well as how we can actively practice our institution as a site of knowledge production. So our public programmes in Nottingham Contemporary aim to communally look at how melding perceiving, sensing feeling and knowing might support other ways of an other forms of world making practices. So with five bodies, our new year long monthly poetry reading series, we hope to expand these inquiries, and look at how practices of attention of invention of experimentation might help us develop new sensibilities. As such, the series welcomes unexpected pairings experimental drifts and multiple voices in communion with sensorial, our social and political bodies during these unprecedented times. So five bodies was imagined in conjunction with my colleague Sarah Jackson, at Nottingham Trent University, who has helmed the critical politics research group since 2015, exploring critical creative practice hybrid methodologies and experimental thinking before introducing her on screen. I'd like to take this opportunity to show our gratitude to Nisha Ramayya, to Bhanu Kapil, and Victoria Adukwei Bulley for sharing their visions, a word of thank**

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you to Nottingham Trent University and the University of Nottingham for generously and graciously supporting our events, as well as acknowledging my colleagues James Brouwer, and Ryan Kearney for the technical support this evening, as well as Olivia Aherne, and Jack Thacker for the commitment and contributions to this programme, and its sibling workshop series. So before passing on to Sarah, we invite your participation in the discussion for which you can use the chat box on YouTube to write your questions and comments. And in addition, we also incorporated an AI system to generate live captions for tonight's event. A link to the captions will be found on the YouTube chat, which will open a separate window on your browser. And there you can adjust the layout of the YouTube and the captions to suit your needs. So without further ado, I'd like to introduce Sarah Jackson, who is Associate Professor of English at Nottingham Trent University. Her publications include *Pelt* from 2012 and *Tactile Poetics: Touch and Contemporary writing* for 2015. An AHRC/BBC New Generation Thinker as well as AHRC Leadership Fellow. She's currently writing about literature and polyphony in collaboration with the Science Museum and the BT Archives. Thank you everyone for joining.

03:05

**Sarah Jackson:** Thank you, Sofia, and welcome to you all to Five Bodies this collaboration between Nottingham contemporary and the Critical Poetics research group. Before we begin, I'd like to speak very briefly about the context of this collaboration and just to say how pleased we are to be working with Nottingham Contemporary and with such fine poets. So as Sofia mentioned, Critical Poetics was established in 2015, as a way of bringing together writers, artists and researchers who are interested in exploring the relationship between creative and critical thought, and practice. So we're interested in challenging perceived disciplinary separations, and moving beyond the traditional craft based approaches to creative writing that are often embedded within academia. So instead, we want to promote ways into writing that are engendered by unconventional, unexpected and cross disciplinary approaches. So this means exploring alternative ways of thinking, feeling, reading, writing, and knowing about our contemporary world, its histories, as well as its possible futures. So it's been such an honour to work with Sofia and Olivia on this partnership, and we're really excited to share with you Five Bodies our monthly programme of readings and creative critical workshops. Although I'm sad, we can't be in the same room this evening. I'm looking forward to using this space to read, think and

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listen together. And now it's my pleasure to introduce the poets speaking at tonight's event. Rather than interrupting our listening, I'm going to introduce all three poets together now. So as Sofia may have mentioned, we are poets will each read for around 20 minutes each and then we'll take a short break and after that interval, and we'll invite those of you who are able to stay on to return to the conversation for a more intimate discussion of the work of our poets and the relationship between the conversation between contemporary poetry and the sensorial, social and political bodies. So now I'm absolutely delighted to introduce our poets for this evening. First, we have Victoria Adukwei Bulley, a poet, writer and filmmaker from London, winner of a 2018 Eric Gregory Award for promising British poets under 30. Victoria's work has appeared widely including in *The Chicago Review*, *The London Review of Books* and *The Poetry Review*. Her work has been featured on BBC Radio Four's *Women's Hour* she has held artistic residences internationally, in the US, Brazil and at V&A. She's a Complete Works Fellow, and had debut chapbook *Girl Be* forms part of the 2017 New Generation African Poets series. Victoria is also the director of *Mother Tongues*, a poetry translation and film project, exploring the indigenous language Heritage's of black and brown poets. She's currently a doctoral candidate at Royal Holloway, University of London. It's wonderful to have Victoria with us here this evening. After Victoria, we will hear from Bhanu Kapil, author of six critically acclaimed full length collections, including *The Vertical Interrogation of Strangers*, *Incubation: A Space for Monsters*, *Humanimal: A Project for Future Children*, *Schizophrene* and *Ban en Banlieue*. And most recently, of course, *How to Wash a Heart*, which was published by Liverpool University Press just this year. Bhanu has recently returned to the UK after many years of teaching and writing in the US. She's currently an artistic Fellow at Churchill College, Cambridge, spanning poetry, fiction and philosophy. Bhanu's practice has expanded to include performance art, improvisation, ritual photography, and her works include endnotes dependencies, and take the form of installations in order to explore the themes of mythology, the immigrants experience trauma, loss, displacement, and the body. Widely regarded as one of the most exciting and politically and ethically engaged writers working today. She was this year, the recipient of both the Windham-Campbell Prize and a Cholmondeley Award for poetry. We look forward to hearing from Bhanu later. Third poet this evening is Nisha Ramayya, who was born in Glasgow but now lives in London, where she teaches creative writing at Queen Mary University of London. A debut collection *States of the Body Produced by Love*

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was published in 2019 by Ignota Books. Other works include the essay notes on a means without end, which was published in Poetry Review this year. The pamphlets Notes on Sanskrit, Correspondences, and In me The Juncture and Threads a creative critical texts, co authored with Sandeep Parmar, and Bhanu Kapil published by Clinic in 2018. Nisha is a member of the Race and Poetry and Poetics in the UK research group, and is currently a poet in residence at John Hansard gallery in Southampton. She also opened our Five Bodies workshop series yesterday with an introduction to sound and song to oceanic feeling and deep listening. And I've been incredibly excited to listen to the sonic resonances of niches own practice. So welcome to Victoria, Bhanu and Nisha is an absolute privilege to share this space with you. Thank you.

09:09

Victoria Adukwei Bulley: It's a real pleasure to be here, and especially alongside such amazing practitioners. And yeah, I want to say thank you first and foremost, for offering the space. So, I will read some poems, but in terms of the semantics of, of this session, I think it it seems somehow quite apt for me to also read a bit of essay work that's recently been published because I think it fits quite well. So that wasn't what I had in mind initially, but actually, I think it would be a good a good thing to do. So. I'll read a few poems, and then I will read a little bit of an essay and that is about water. So let's start with the battery Teleology - There are dark thoughts and there are dark nights dark in the shadows under freight trains. And there are dark nights, there is a dark that grows itself winter dark and there are dark hours days. That is dark humour. And there is dark light. There is dark that moves dark matter, boundless and more dark still lovely and deep woods dark, there are dark waters, landless or there were once and will be again, again, again. That is when dark, dark moon dark and there are dark circles, cycles. And so it is. So it is always the outset matches the ending a dark snake with her Amiga in her mouth. And so it is always the dusk things the dark of its dream time. The dust of the end makes the clay of the star, a dark, malleable work are we aren't we there are dark hours days and there is dark light. And these are dark thoughts and these are dark circles, cycles. And still we are awake, my life. We are awake yet, and we will begin again about Anna. The trick is nobody knows how Ana Mendieta met her death. It would appear she was pushed some distance below. The doorman said he heard a woman out No. And then the sound as her body hit the top of the diner so hard her face left a mark like a

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postage stamp. In the photo, she is naked and feathered. She looks like the first woman like she doesn't know what a camera is. That somewhere in the world. It is believed that these things can still sell her arms out, as if to say you move them like this to fly like this. See her feet are apart. You can see the sphere of her hips, the delta between her legs. I look at her and think this is the true work of the body to adorn itself and to be comfortable. Unaware. I myself and board of fig leaves of shames that I did not choose whose name means honey. You are beautiful to me. You are beautiful to me. across the table we have arrived at in from the rain. No makeup on your face. But for this small frail thread of something on your right cheek that I would like to remove for you. You whose name means honey every time you are and still. It's that I would like to be the one who says Hold on. Come here. Let me one minute. Stay there. Almost. There we go. All done. Perfect. And when you look up and out is gone, swept absent mindedly off the face of the earth by your dark hair. Oh I am sad to have missed my chance. Leave taking summer in October and for sure now the summer in October and for sure now the world is ending a fruit that caught its mould from another too soon. All the same. The grass glows with our belongings. A Jade beach satin bright in the sun. With our shared Knights skins, and my palm, shading your eyes from the glare, a kindness, your hand at the fork of my body, this too affectionate, we have returned to the earth early, how it loves us for this, how it considers us family pulls it pulls us in, as its own. So in all about when we stand, the ground will keep its shape, such reverence that when we rise, the grass stays down and press and passes by will wonder what happened here, if we lived. So kind these things we do with and for and to one another. So standing to attention and generous, complicit, selfish and unspeakable, but pyjama hysteric imperative in the morning, midday in the 10th month of the year. I want to say the weather breaks my heart, but it doesn't. The plane overhead will circle back again. Like any old grief, we offer our bodies to it like art for the best view. Here we are gone. Finished. So scriptable beyond saving, here are we way out beyond the wash, and nobody coming. Here is where we admit what we won't say with our mouths. Say instead, tongue to opening thigh to fold to fold, how we know we aren't going to fix the world. And no one is coming. here how we cope 100 million of you flung out onto the lawn upon holistic offering no to the same. Our leave taking, we do what we can, the hedges are high enough, your neighbours long dead, we step out of our bodies and into the light. Oh, yeah, that's gone quickly. Okay, so now I will read a little bit of non poetry. Okay. So I'm going to read a few bits of a of an essay that was

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published recently in *The White Review* and the essay's called *On Water*. And it's sort of a long meditation on the symbolism of water, but also a way to use water as a vehicle for thinking about lineage, and as a container of history. And as a kind of, a symbol of, of something that we all need and can't live without, but something that connects us, to the earth and, and to, to history. And the irony is that this started out as a piece that I wanted to write thinking about microplastics, but there are no microplastics in this poem in this essay, but it speaks to the things on water. & we say to her what have you done with our kin that you swallowed? & she says that was ages ago, you've drunk them by now. — Danez Smith, 'dream where every black person is standing by the ocean' The atoms of those people who were thrown overboard are out there in the ocean even today — Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being of / water / rains & / dead* — M. NourbeSe Philip, *ZONG! The beaches of Benin are empty. From Cotonou to Ouidah. I have never seen beaches so empty before. From the windows of our minivan, the coastline is a wide expanse of sand beginning just beyond the road, on and on, and then water. Palm trees here and there, but emptiness, mostly. Nobody, no livestock, just sand. As for us, we are eight women and we have just arrived. Three of us – myself included – flew in from London, with the five others coming in from the States. All of us have flown in from winter. It is January, and on our first full day together, our bare skin re-colouring in the light, we ask the driver to take us to a restaurant for lunch. We are seeking the kind of seafood of which we are all so starved, and when our dishes arrive they don't disappoint. Each platter careens with fried plantain, grilled fish, yam, rice, and prawns so large they're not prawns any more but gambas, instead. Gambas or langoustines or crayfish or crawfish, depending on which of us is speaking, or who cares to know the difference. Whatever any of it is called, we resolve that we would like to return to eat it again, here, at this terraced balcony from which we watch the sea. The restaurant sits on a beach that is vacant as far as our sight can reach. There is a mutedness to the expanse of the sand, and though it looks no different now than it would at any other time, the staff tell us that yesterday a boy drowned nearby. The beaches of Benin are empty. At the table, Laurence, who is Beninise and has family living in the country, says it is because the people remember the history of what happened here. Berlin-drawn nation states aside, and though London is home as best I know it, I call myself Ghanaian. Relative to Benin, that's westward, two borders away. Aniké, also London-based, is from Nigeria, next door, to the east. It is my first time in Benin, but I've been to Nigeria; albeit too briefly, to Lagos. Between the*

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hotel in Ikoyi and the venue of the poetry festival that my friend Belinda and I took part in, we didn't catch much more than traffic. But on the final day, after events had finished, we took a boat ride to a secluded mainland spot. More on that boat ride, later. The place was somewhat out of the way, but the beach there had people on it, as expected. The coastlines of Ghana are likewise full – of people, and often plastic: the blight and detritus of global commerce. In abundance are bars and tourist spots, tin-roofed shacks, and beaten canoes that stay afloat nonetheless, still bringing a day's catch ashore, but by His grace – as is painted in cursive on their sides – or something like it. In Jamestown, Accra, the coast is the dwelling place of the fisherfolk I descend from. From here, in any direction, from Cape Coast to Ada, the beaches are populated. From here, too, along the same stretch of land are serial points of other kinds of departures, and the fortifications, dilapidated or preserved, that mark the scale of them. What happened in Ghana happened in Benin also. And in Nigeria, and in Senegal, and in Angola, and in Cameroon, and in Ivory Coast, and so on and so forth across the Atlantic, or if unluckier still, down, down, into the ocean's bottomless gut. The trade in human lives is old news across the West African coast. So old, perhaps, that if you didn't know what happened, and if you were not there – which you weren't – and if history spoke less about it than it already does, then you might walk its trails and marketplaces without knowing what occurred. And if it had nothing to do with the tourist economy from which they are driven by poverty to make a living, even locals might not tell you. The present has problems of its own, even if the root is shared. But in Benin, the past is loud. The land remembers and the sea does, too. On a trip to Cornwall with T, water is everywhere. We walk and walk, as we like to do, and everywhere we tread are hills and between them, in the furrows of the West Country's brow, streams and rivers, startling in their clarity. When we first arrive, I state an intention to myself that I would like to see some wells. I've only ever seen one before, and on our first day out walking we happen upon my second without looking. A holy one, at the foot of a hill across an open field, in a village called St Neot – for whom the well is named. It is walled away, behind a door that I want to open. I attempt to get closer, but I am wearing the wrong footwear. The grass in front of it is thick with water and my shoes sink up to their laces. I don't know what it is that makes a well holy, so I set about discovering. It is likely that there are as many answers to this as there are wells in the world, but here are two most applicable to the West. The typical plot is simple: some holy person called for water to spring forth in a particular place, and so it did. Sometimes the person

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was holy before it happened, which is why it worked. Other times, it was the birth of the spring that sealed the deal. In other cases, the well is discovered to have healing properties in search of which the beleaguered faithful will travel from near and far. A Guide to Building a Well. Freshwater. All need it, but not all have it. For reasons mostly not unpolitical. Let's say this time it's you that doesn't have any, and nobody's going to run a television commercial somewhere overseas asking for donations to furnish you with some. No sliding violins for you. If you have the tools – and if there are no leaky pipelines, lead leachings, or agricultural contaminants – you dig a well. Maybe you're at risk already but you dig a well anyway, because needs must and you'll die soon otherwise. Perhaps you find a forked twig of hazel to dowse with, first. There are people who can do that, even now. Either way, you dig. You dig (and dig, and dig) like your life depends upon it, because it does. It might be hard, but dying may be harder. You continue, you dig and dig (and dig, and dig) as the ground grows damp, then wet, then sodden, and you keep digging, still, until what you're bailing out is more water than clayed or chalky earth; until there's so much water that you couldn't keep digging even if you wanted to. Then you wait for the water to settle clear. You hope that it does. And I've got two minutes it's quite hard to decide which bits through next. Let me see if I can find a small section and allow a wrap up. Right. Okay. Okay, all right. Um, all right. What little Portuguese I do know, I know because of music. It was through drums that I understood first. The type you hear when you think of Brazilian carnival. The kind of rich, layered, wall-of-sound percussion you might think of when you hear the word samba or, if you are more familiar with the music, maracatú. The first time I heard this kind of drumming – the origins of which, through the enslaved, were imported from Africa – something in me said yes, deeply. I haven't had many deep yes moments in my life. I have resigned myself to the possibility that I am just not one of those lucky people who always knows what they want, whether to decline or accept, stay or go. Deep yeses don't come easily to me, but when they do, I know the past is present. I have a practised habit of asking about the past, a trait probably cultivated since I came into speech. I lost my place. Here we go. a trait probably cultivated since I came into speech. I liked to ask why a lot. Why, perhaps more than what, where, when, and even how, is always a question about the past. Questions of what and where risk fooling us into thinking that our answers can be clean and numerical. What happened? This. Where? It was there. When? Then. How? Like so. Why, though, is where things get muddy. It is where the human voice enters – and



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for some, that of God – or failing this, for lack of answers, it is where the arms fall helpless at one's sides. It is at why that the past frays and scatters, and I find myself writing to keep what I have of it close and whole. Things fall apart and, long before they do, they yellow at their edges – a gradual disappearance at play even when events are not willfully forgotten but instead brought purposefully to light. But that isn't all of it. I know I do not always need to keep the past because I know, too, that it is present in spite of me. It is here whether we like it or not. In bad times, the past is a party. In good times, it's the present that is, and the past is a stranger, gate-crashing. I'll stop there. Thank you so much.

**32:04**

**Bhanu Kapil: Hello, welcome to my kitchen. My name is Bhanu Kapil, and I'm going to be reading today from How to Wash a Heart from Pavillion poetry. I thought I could read from the note on the title and then maybe the whole thing and then read some poems themselves. Okay, I just have to tell you, I'm in the kitchen. And as you can see, there's the rabbit tea towel. But there's also a tap that releases water, and every 10 minutes, so that might happen. And also, I do live with my mother and she has been commanded to stay in the other room. But you know, who knows, at any moment. The space and the time we are in could, you know could be quite ruptured by a Punjabi elder, which will be fantastic. As actually in the acknowledgments. I think my mother, there we go. The very last sentence of the whole thing. The story of Bama was told to me by my mother, Burton, in a moment of caring and being cared for that was indistinguishable from creative pleasure. It's true. Are you a carer? I'm a carer. Yeah. And I'm looking at an amazing and strange drawing of a woodpecker that my mom did yesterday. So because I've written about creative pleasure in the book. Maybe I'll show you one second. Okay. Ah, which pecker? Okay. Great. All right. Let me read the note on the title. As we have 20 minutes together, of which two minutes have already passed, and I do have a coffee because I haven't had any breakfast today. And it is the kitchen. Excuse me. Delicious note on the title. But also, before I begin, prepare yourselves I went to love for university ages ago. And Nottingham just seemed like the most exciting place ever. After the Ashby Road and the Charnwood Forest. I remember seeing a Jane Seabury concert there so long ago and also an incredible exhibit on melodrama. Some memories there. Also, one day when I was catching the train from Loughborough, Nottingham and had a complete stranger who've been playing the piano They're not pro**

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piano in the street or on the platform. And I'm not sure how this happened, but he leapt on the train and trying to persuade me to I can't remember the whole thing. I just remember it was very embarrassing and dramatic. And so I did after that associate Nottingham with extreme events of all kinds. Like format chair, John Lucas poet, lives in Nottingham, I believe. And if it was a different time, I would already be there drinking cups of tea, I'd be at this fantastic event. And then I would meet John Lucas for half a lager Shandy. That was his preferred drink, I think, long ago in Loughborough, Nottingham. But Hello, John Lucas Wells. And if anybody knows John Lucas, could you tell him that I said hello. In my video in in the kitchen. Note on the title. One second, there's a lot of crinkling going on. It stopped. A heart appears in the air next to the body or bunched up on a T shirt in the snow in the film. One second. Mommy, ah, please, can you be quiet because I'm making a video but for Nottingham, Five Bodies. Okay, I don't think I should read the note on the title now because it's, you know, it's nearly five minutes. Okay, maybe it's enough to say that I've written about the relationship between a host and a guest. The host is resident has a stable status is a citizen. And the guest does not have a stable status. The guest is not a citizen. The guest is a migrant or an immigrant, depending on the language that people use in different places. The guest needs somewhere to stay and has been effort. The spare room how to wash your heart like this. It's outside and I'm wearing my knitted scarf like John Benjamin, poet of the British past. I like to go outside straight away and stand in the brisk air. Yesterday, you vanished into those snowflakes like the ragged beast you are. Perhaps I can write here again, a fleeting sense of possibility. Okay, keywords hospitalities stars, Jasmine privacy. You made a space for me in your home for my books and clothes. And I'll never forget that. When your adopted daughter, an Asian refugee, as you described her, came in with her coffee and perched on the end of my cart. I felt so happy and less like a hoax showed her how to drink water from the balls on the windows so I don't want to beautify our collective trauma. Your sexual brilliance resided I sometimes thought in your ability to say no matter the external circumstances. I am here from this place you gave them the this many desiccated facts about the future. Day by day you discovered what happiness is. As your guest I trained myself to beautify our collective trauma. When night fell at last I tanned with a sigh towards the darkness. I am about to squeeze out an egg you murmured as you've kissed me Good night. All the funeral for the imagination. I thought to my left is a turquoise door. And to my right a butcher's table above you is a heart beating in the snow. When I describe the set of my play and

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environment more vivid to me than the memory of my childhood home. Your face turned green What made you know something was over? The milk in your eyes scared me. In that moment, I understood that you were a wolf, capable of devouring my internal organs. If I expose them to view, sure enough, the image of a heart carved from the body appeared. In the next poem you wrote. There's a bright call of fire and cream as I write these words, stretching out these early spring or late winter mornings with coffee, and TV. I don't remember the underneath everything I will miss when I die. It's exhausting to be a guest in somebody else's house forever. Even though the host invites the guests to say whatever it is, they want to say. The guest knows that host logic is variable, prick me and I will cut off the energy to your life. How to wash your heart, remove it, animal or ice. The curators question reveals that power style. If power implies relationship, then here we are at the part where even if something goes wrong, that's exactly how it's meant to be. Your job is to understand what the feedback is. It's such a pleasure to spend time outside the house. There's no way to go with this except begin to plunge my forearms into the red eyes that is already melting in the box. My spiritual power was quickly depleted by living with you. Like an intrusive mother you cared for my needs, but also, I never knew when you might open my door leaving it open when you left. My identity as a writer was precarious during the time I lived with you. Once you locked me in an accident, my spine against a tree when I dreamed that night. Contact nature on all fours, said the counsellor slipping off her chair onto the floor helped me to repair what is broken and immortal. Is that the pin? I come from a country or line pink on the soggy map. destroy me my soul whispered eat me burns and all crushed me stopped me from walking out back door. The balloon deity I made from the condom on the floor was purgative revolting, brilliant. Her lips were purse. Doesn't matter that you made so many mistakes. She said. Violence rots the brain girl. I do not enjoy eating too much. It's so painful. The only remedy is the bitter herb that grows by a rushing Brook. oils, sugars, pearls, crushed diamonds, linens and songs. populate your crappy cabinets. Make a list of what you need it and I will get it You ungrateful cow. This is what I need. Light and the heat and the yesterday of my work a candle on the wonky table at dusk. How time migrates the chalky blue flowers. I need something that burns as slowly as that because living with someone who is in pain requires you to move in a different way. You bend the cup down by my sleepy head. That was the first section. This was some basil from a little bush that my friend Friends in Cambridge, a poet gave me one day on my birthday. Perhaps.

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45:17

**Bhanu Kapil: I will now read the second section. Don't forget me. I whispered to my father. Give me something to eat. I'm so hungry. I call out to my mother. But conditional care of even these imaginary parents excretes a hormonal load. Am I safe with you? All like a baby crawling on the bumpy carpet. Am I my own mother actually? Imagine a baby developing so rapidly that by nightfall, it has ripped through the pale blue smoke to evolve beyond the limits of the human eye. Remember how my mother woke me up so early? To look at the bloody stars? My grandfather fermented the yoghurt with rose petals and sugar then buried it in the roots of a mango tree. Come here he said. Extending the sweetest fruit I have ever tasted come June. On the far side of the orchard he grew saffron and the mangoes there were red and pink. In the dry well he planted a pomegranate tree. This is where they threw the bodies come August noon. Can you find your way home by smell? metallic be add tilts along the diagonal line. I smell the pollen of the flowers of the mango tree which once concealed a kill. For lunch my mother made okra with caramelised onions, the feet. The wet caps she's stuck to my forehead, cheeks and nose. grimacing as the gates of the school swung open. I was a joke. The children who had children like me fled. I was alone with the slime dripping down the neck of my red and white dress. nettle bites lucid on my shins, because I ran through the alleyways and not the streets to get here. A hot yard. Shame invites the sun to live in the anus, the creases of the throat. The priest brought my mother home my father fell over in the snow after drinking his guts out the world was falling down around my ears. When our neighbours said go we fled our hearts beating like a fish. Hello sang Lionel Richie on the taxis orange radio. My grandfather burned his notebooks then scrape the ash into all he could button up. Don't ask me to remember the word for zip. My secret is this that we lost all our possessions I felt strange relief to see my home explode in the rearview mirror. mana ratio we fetched up in the place without discreet racial categories. I have no longer felt like our hand no matter how long. We combed it with milk the messages we received. were as follows. You are a sexual object. I have a right to sexualize You are not an individual. You are here for my entertainment complain too much. Your sexual identity is not important. The way you talk about what happened to you is a catastrophic representation. Merry Christmas, little pig scream was heard a scream psychosis screams the air giving it a peculiar richness and depth. I dissolve a lozenge beneath my tongue for courage. But now we'll rent some in core Siebel and have fallen in love and I feel so much better. peel an**

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orange from the market. Remove it from a paper bag. The city like a thin piece of muslin stretched over the drain pipes steeples and B's a grey ribbon tied around the wrist. You can see it growing taught leaves here in the black and silver cafe now and it's wonderful Love the alien foliage in the bathroom. D is reading Madame Bovary in the translation by Lydia Davis. I first friend in this country is gorgeous, lanky, and blonde. How long have I been gone? I rarely think of the bright brown eyes of my childhood friends, the unreachable memories of foraging, the red and white toadstools in the forest, the outer conditions, xenophobic, I only want to bask in this exotic friendship. I was born feet first beneath 11 on cedar attend 20 3am on a November morning, so long ago, that many people who were alive that day, flinching from a sudden rain, no longer walk upon this, I am going to take you by surprise. I'm going to make you so proud of me. When you watch my plays, your heart will make a circuit from the dense shadow in the upper part of the atmosphere, the clouds will rain green frogs the size of fingernails, and we will scoop them up with our hands. Sometimes I lie on the earth face down to connect with its copper plate. You won't have to love me the very long. Well, there were more poems in that section, but it's coming to the end of the 20 minutes. And there are four other bodies so I'll say goodbye there. And thank you so much for hosting me. Hi, Mickey Cook, if you're watching this in Nottingham, bye.

52:01

Nisha Ramayya: So, um, thank you very much for having me here and for being here hearing quotation whitesville. So here, I thought that I would as Sarah mentioned, I we did a workshop on listening yesterday a critical aquatics workshop. And I thought I'd kind of kind of go back to some of the things we were talking about that and also the Sonic Continuum research slam that Sofia has been working on at Nottingham Contemporary. It's kind of a blend of some critical writing and some poetry. After writing a sequence of poems, in which I imagined crossing the rickety bridge alongside Alice Coltrane, I decided to keep walking and to compose a series of speculative sound walks. This decision was made in March 2020 in the context of a global pandemic and lockdown in the UK and frequent admonitions to stay in to keep others safe. If I couldn't walk outside, I could walk in poetry, in which case why stick to pavements pass fields and pools. Why not walk through spirals keys, divine ears, wormholes, Wilson vasculature. I didn't realise at the time, but lockdown enabled me to sidestep the usual issues of walking as a body, in particular, as a racialized and gendered body in the city or the countryside. To

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some extent, in these speculative sidewalks I leave my body behind. But lockdown or know many people cannot sidestep these issues and are denied the option of leaving their bodies behind. Working as a racialized and gendered body is a matter of life and death for many people. As Black Lives Matter mix explicit as sex sex workers resisting the so called walking wild trans ban in New York make explicit in her talk on militant care limits and horizons broadcast live on youtube in May 2020. Hannah Black outlines a vision of utopia that is a movement for homes centred around the question, how are we going to make the world a home? Like modifies how are we going to make the world a home that's a safer place for wondering. She references Marge Piercy's feminist sci fi novel *Woman on the Edge of Time* 1976, which depicts a future free from racism and patriarchy and violence, to the bewilderment of its protagonist, Connie, and quote from the novel, she imagined herself taking a walk at night under the stars. she imagined herself ambling down a country road and feeling only mild curiosity when she saw three men coming towards her in dictum and science fiction side Piercy analyses how a small detail in a novel, such as the ability to take a relaxing walk at night can signify the social and materialist relations of its world. A feminist utopia. The group exhibition, many voices, all of them loved curated by Sarah Hayden. At John Hansard gallery in Southampton earlier this year is another lesson in listening. The exhibition invited visitors to consider how our voices bring us into relation by listening to embodied and disembodied voices in the art gallery, challenging the authority of the acousmatic a commanding sound without visible source, and dwelling in the unintelligibility of the marginalised, non verbal and other than human. I'd like to mention two words from the exhibition before we can buy poems, Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *Conflicted Phonemes* and Willem de Rooji's *Ilulissat*. Hamdan's work depicts how claims made by Somali asylum seekers in the Netherlands are accepted and rejected on the basis of language analysis, which is a method used by immigration authorities across Europe. So person safety, their right to remain to make a home can hinge on their pronunciation of a single 40. As if the voice were an accurate, comprehensible record of where a person has lived and whom they have lived amongst, like a wax cylinder engraved by one's family, teachers and friends. Apparently, what asylum seekers see about their own lives is less reliable, less verifiable than how they sound when they say it. This notion extends to racialized and gendered speakers in testimonials of abuse in employment tribunals. In the noxious contemporary discourse around women's bathrooms. *Ilulissat* presents field recordings of thousands of sled

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dogs in a town in Greenland, arranged so that audiences can hear them called each other across the ice, bark and how together in strings and bursts in the exhibition knows, Hayden reminds us that they are working dogs whose environment is melting as we listen, she writes, what enables the dogs to pull together as a team. They are pack animals, after all, is the sociality made manifest in these spontaneous core voicings. There is no turn inuliat. Without these animals that for centuries have made life possible for its human cohabitants. Listening to the dogs in a darkened room of the art gallery, I felt privileged to be able to hear them without interrupting them, like a fly on the wing over the ice sheets. And yet there was a sense of intruding on the kinome community, of taking what's not mine through eavesdropping. I sometimes think of poems are safe spaces for exploring violent ideas and fantasies. These words in particular inspire me to write poems that listen and that make explicit there are risky or harmful contexts and processes of listening methodically and I hope with care. ascending the sound of the spiral, then the divine ear must be dissolved. divinity is the pond durability that compounds the inequitable and measures our breath in disposable cups. divinity is the missionaries boot the microbial Symphony on the soles of his boots. divinity is all those life forms without eyes and mouths that comb and branch inconceivable. Like we really feel whales because we can hear them because we can imitate their song and think that mimics we want to see them they help us focus and sleep. We want to save them they prosecute whiteness surfacing smile like whale massive birthing upon ERC cleaver brought to waxy pasture endures chemical cloud mould of audition number crunch, inner incinerator, screams or spirals disrupted a heap of eyelashes on the pavement. Crushed shells is the family drama and these schematized drawings and so maps is how I tried to describe it. are quoted Joyce's strand in twining cable of all flesh in a chat about navel gazing as contemplation of the Celestial placenta into which we are all plugged around the same time we walked around Time, Time Pass, we walked to ladywell and back giving way to dogs enjoying the pattern of Barrett's echo of paws on the spiral bridge like a group exhibition of atoms interim stars festoon sub fat flowers fill an opening out doors and doors and doors probe gallery closed sheets raised one not one not to bring it to bear spores grew beards to bear bring repeatedly up on piter bigger horn on Earth. Ah two grown in bits after the sesh loads I mind shuttering, its mortifies sediment me. Ha ha, ha ha, ha ha. letting loose affords for only for constellations turned upside the future filling balls brought against the waves sky is off eggshells, the firmament of boats, sillier

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sails or suckers or nodes departing. Since there's no help. Uh huh. Uh huh. Uh, huh. Shop for a field or its defender. The world as its own destruction, now ha, nah, nah, ha. Burn me action Aries but get it by your children's children in the gravitational field of your bow down your doors phonetical your doors transcribe double your doors, then trilok wise. do send sores detect art. poodles in face as body does regulate. This piece makes me skoosh this sled dog chorus placed just so macro concerns need submerge, to touch voice pours ovulate congenital self kissing entity. Scoop one one up. Keep busy the bench of appreciation. we squeeze re cornucopias the unknowability of loves scales, non barbarism Deliver us lightly. The beyond a teaching teacher voice. Teacher, you may begin some missionary. Why not then worship my boot? tantric metaphysis boot is Body Body is boat. Why not then sail through bliss? Why not then tune your body to the interruptions swimming below. The disruptions blowing above you pave paradise and walk on grinded some missionary? Why not then worship? my boots? tantric metaphysis sound is deathless, the gramophone of the universe is never at rest. Science must invoke the analytics one. Some missionary. Why not then worship my boot. tantric metaphysics teacher offstage from about two hours and 20 light years later, the tantric medic physicist is still alive and swimming strong. Sharks attracted by the smell of fresh blood flowering in water, gather event, examples over inside the long string instrument the by in a footnote to synthetic philosophy of contemporary mathematics, Fernando Zalamea writes the images of decantation transfusion and distillation that recurs throughout this work. Indicate those creative gestures by way of which, as we shall see, mathematical ideas or structures are poured, sometimes with the help of others as filters from one register to another, often leaving behind as a kind of sediment features previously thought to be integral. This footnote is the soul of this walk which is conducted by Ellen Feldman's performing lecture Constructing a Musical Phase from the Ground Up era to a magnetic shock marrying that mode of bumping to music whilst walking of riffing on polling machines antique wave licence universal all one has to do is dream will track each other over larger stunning quilts to aliens exploring ice sheets in concert mind speech travelling circles lunar creating spectacular, Lee finds fun under solidus most harmonic lattice lines filter beds read as music meander through these bars or movable nuts, granite tune in temperament whilst playing with them magic fingers free. Time is all about walking in the intervals covering each other skirts seems first Parks's make space is finding definition inside lines poetic your showboats spectrum in earnest. paths to



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enlightenment drawn in sight child holding a stick how many worlds may be seen in the desert? Arthur Avalon lets us pose he said holding for that man's body is a vessel filled with oil which is the passions child if centres proliferate what formula shows the blizzards role in the poetics of relation? Arthur Avalon if you simply empty it and do nothing more fresh oil will take its place issuing from the source of desire which you have left on destroyed. Child if the beach is burning, what off the adulterous woman's name either Avalon If however, into the vessel there is dropped by smooth degrees, the water of knowledge Geneina it will as being behaviour that oil descend to the bottom of the vessel and will then expel an equal quantity of oil child who confers innocence to the potting mix him Oculus to repossess it's shipped Arthur Avalon. In this way all the oil of passion is gradually expelled and no more can be entered for the water of Juliana will then have wholly taken its place. Child what is so on abolish above all about hierarchy confinement destitution death, Arthur Avalon. As the lesson said, If you attempt to expel nature with a pitchfork, it will come back again. Child What if there is no more nature, either because it's over. Because everything is as well as six spaces I sometimes think of poems as carrier bags after Ursula K. Le Guin, where I can collect and catalogue things I've read, heard and wished to remember or discuss with friends. In collecting and cataloguing these things be the interesting words or artworks or scientific theories or social situations, I might start to understand them. Or, as is often the case poetic licence inadvertently enables fictionalisation mystification and quackery. The piece of information that I include to ground the poem sends me free wheeling, for example, from telecommunication cables, to a submarine, dinner party, or from sound waves to the Far Out Theory of Mind quantum, which are subtle particles of mind stuff that would enable telegraphy If only we could channel them. As Ganley I tells extraversion and liquids the Left Hand of Darkness, quote, except in the case of the born sensitive, the capacity for mind speech, though it has a physiological basis is a psychological one, a product of culture, a side effect of the use of the mind. My eagerness to consider the politics of listening historically and scientifically threatens to take me into a dream of relation, a vision of utopia in an intense engagement with everything whose title references Fred Moten, Patrick Farmer reflects on listening in terms of elected affinity thinking, this is like that This corresponds to that this is equivalent to that this is that vibration. I'm not talking about similarity but about sending and a feeling of being sent. For example, the feeling of being sent between micro organisms and whales. In an episode of the podcast in

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visibility via marine microbiologist to get David Gruber talks about falling in love with pond scum, and how hard it can be to share that love, when most people prefer but few times charismatic megafauna such as well as love aside, in terms of ecological crisis, the fact that people can see here and relate to whales doesn't help to save them. whales can sing in bestselling albums like songs of the humpback whale, or star in blockbuster movies like Star Trek Four: The Voyage Home, as their populations are threatened by noise pollution and the destruction of marine ecosystems. I am skimming the surface of this argument without irony when I say that scientists and feminists know well the limits of a politics based solely on visibility, audibility and representation. This argument depends on imperceptible movements, connections and pull voicings, I want to write something that can send people between sounds between scales, just over the surface of a sentiment and deep down into the unknown, something that might set us vibrating between being and non being, or the physics and metaphysics of sound. Flower cup seed vessel reef of words. misting the IV, her ground chakra is at 47%. The green hearts of the leaves turn as pale as they're almost white outlines. She considers phoning her mother for advice, but the thought of speaking of hearing oneself speak of compelling body to expand more breath and simply breath of pressing lungs, laryngeal muscles, organs of articulation and pronunciation. The thought of those latent sites of her own voice inside her of interiority exiting the body without smell, stain or structural rigidity of her interiority, in cantering her mother's across space time, like one's own serpent rising out of one's own body to meet another circuit rising out of another's body to lick to twist to bolt, the green hearts of the leaves turn as brown as their seat of desire.

1:12:33

Sarah Jackson: Welcome back. And thank you again to those compelling readings by Victoria Adukwei Bulley, Bhanu Kapil, and Nisha Ramayya. And it's been wonderful to hear and to listen to you read. And I think perhaps there's something about listening through my headphones, I don't know. But it was felt like a really solid sonically resonance experience listening to your different voices. And I'm aware that we had our workshop on listening yesterday with Nisha, so, I'd quite like to start by asking you both about the role of listening in your writing about what listening means to you in a poem, and perhaps even whether listening could be considered as an ethical act? This, should we start with you, as you were speaking about this yesterday

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with us? And then we'll hand over to Victoria?

1:13:35

Nisha Ramayya: Yeah, sure. Um, well, I think I am. One of the ways in which I think that listening are kind of right, and read to try and listen and like, I'm really, I love this question of like, Can you write a poem that listens, which I think like, someone asked me kind of, it kind of lightly wants to send in like something email correspondence, and it just hasn't left me since? Like, is it possible to write a poem that listens? How do you do that? Is it is it true creating openings in the text through space, or through question marks, and one of the ways that I try and approach it is like having a really heavily citational practice. So having lots of epigraphs lots of quotations, like always, also wanting to name the people that I'm quoting, and in order to kind of gesture towards some sort of chorus or, or even dialogue or, or a clash. And so it's, it's definitely a question that drives me and I think that I was, I guess, I started thinking about this name. When I was interested in mantras, and like and ways in which kind of sound and sound has its own meaning that is beyond the verbal, and it's a kind of meaning that resonates with the body and and with the planets. And, but then I started thinking about these like more and more about that. vibrations and imperceptible sounds and then just recently about the, the, the imperceptible sounds of microbes and, and just like as a kind of, not like on their own, not just as an analogy, but also we're thinking about his network of the inaudible and like, what we can do if we kind of pay attention to that or activate that?

1:15:23

Sarah Jackson: Yeah, I love that idea of the of the network of the inaudible and it's almost these ghostly sounds, sounds that appear on the other side of hearing, perhaps that run through your work. And Victoria, does this resonate with your practice as well?

1:15:41

Victoria Adukwei Bulley: Yeah, it really does. And I think that, you know, so a lot of the work I'm doing right now, through my PhD, and also just sort of like writing and thinking in general is thinking about an idea of quiet and interiority. And that was that was mentioned before. And I think that when it comes to listening, like, I, I feel that it's almost like you think he's like, when you were told as a kid that you've got like, one mouth and two is, so you

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should do twice as much listening as you do. Speaking. And I think, I guess the age that we're in right now is, is an age where we can't even really get a break from, from noise. And I think there's a difference between thinking about noise and actual meaningful sound. And so in thinking about like, quiet and interiority, I think, quiet for me, it's not an absence of sound, it's about a certain modality of, of, you know, of being where we can sort of feel that there's a there's a rashness in noise, and there's a sort of loudness in noise that when we think about quiet is, is it's a kind of reprieve I find. So listening specifically, I think is an activity that kind of brings us back to, like meaning. And, but I also think in terms of belonging, we often we often speak about belonging as being something that's like, Oh, I'm listened to, or here, here is somewhere where I'm seen, but I think, you know, I have good friends who have had very varying experiences of hearing, like the ability to hear and itself. And it's through them that I've also come to understand how the ability to listen is, is also about belonging, you know, it's, it's, it's about our ability to, it's not always about being heard. It's also about what we can perceive and how, and how that embodies us in a family of have a sense of community, I think. So that's a really, that's a really like model's answer, that it's something I think about, I think, in my research and reading around quiet, which is very much guided by a book that a brilliant DJ scholar, Lynnée Denise through into my orbit, a book that's called the sovereignty of quiet by Kevin Quashie. And thinking about what is enabled when we are actually able to, to perceive a quiet modality between the loudness of things above the surface, and I think listening is something that we don't inherently know how to do. I think we have to relearn.

1:18:48

Sarah Jackson: Yeah, absolutely. And, and I guess this is, this is where I'm thinking about it as an ethical experience, as well as an aesthetic experience. And I am really struck by what you both seem to be saying about the kind of the quietness or the, the inaudible, and our capacity to listen, perhaps between or beyond or underneath and Nisha when you were reading, I was really struck by the kind of the resonances between words the way that you kind of play on boot body boat, and it's almost like, you're encouraging your reader or even the poem is listening to itself or listening to those resonances that fall in between the words. Is that is that a kind of a conscious or deliberate part of your practice?

1:19:36

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**Nisha Ramayya:** Um, yeah, I mean, I, I think that one of the things that I tried to, to do or think about is like how to show multiple, like multiple perspectives, or simultaneously, in in a in a poem and like and it is really very something that like reading phrases, motions work has really taught me about how like, it's motifs, like how they can recur and transform, like continuously throughout work, and across works and kind of speak to each other. So it's like, I, you know, like did this diagramming, like in a frenzy when I first started reading it, I was like, curl curls appeared on this page, and that page, and this other book, just like cheat like these, like, little, like little moments, little words of the references and just kind of becoming really, you know, a bit like, you know, finding, finding connections and feeling very inspired. And so, I wanted to do try to, like, can't do not do what Fred Moten does, but just see what was possible using, like, the things that I've been working with. So like, so like, for example, Montrose, and like the kind of the ways that sound carries meaning of its own that separate from the signifier. And so like, yeah, trying to just plot points, or as I was at coordinates and keep turning round, and round and round. And in the work, I don't know, it's part of, it's part of like, opening up spaces, and tunnels, wormholes,

**1:21:12**

**Sarah Jackson:** Lots of wormholes. And so if we're thinking about kind of the other side of hearing, I really want to bring Bhanu into this conversation is, it's such a shame, she can't be here to join us. But I kind of think perhaps, in a strange way, she's also listening, or perhaps we can listen to her speaking on the other side, and I was really struck by, you know, one line in particular, and Bhanu's reading, where she writes, I don't remember the underneath everything I will miss when I die. And it's, it's, it's just a line that takes my breath away. I wonder whether it's, you know, again, we're talking about listening, listening, under the water listening, in other ways, whether there's a sense of the underneath in your both of your works, what does the underneath mean, for you, Victoria?

**1:22:06**

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley:** I think it's funny, really, because I think, when I think of like, underneath I think of Earth and I think of, you know, water as well. But your question kind of makes me think more in terms of like geology and like the land. And, you know, like, in the piece that I read the sap read, I'm big, there's a bit where I say that the land remembers, and that's not, you know,

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that's something that so many writers have said, and it's a concept that is not new at all. But it speaks to that sense of the land as being the earth literally being a record of everything that has ever happened here. And, and also being a record into which we will go. So it's like, for me, beneath in that sense is about history, but it's also I guess, about ancestry, it's also about the future, because it's where we where we're going to go. And, and, and also the future in terms of thinking about biology and like, there's another there's another essay that I've worked on recently, where I'm speaking about a compost bin like this year is the first year I've had any, I've had a compost bin and I just find it fascinating because it's you're literally looking into the future of life. And it's muddy, and it's messy, and it stinks, but it's, I there's a comfort I find in watching decay. And so yeah, I think in terms of underneath, I, these are the things I see. And also underneath language I can very fascinated by how language works. In that we are speaking even in English, we're speaking Germanic languages, we're speaking Latin languages, we're speaking Greek languages, we're speaking. And then more recently with, you know, the words have come in through, you know, communities over the years, sort of in the UK. More recently, whether Asian or, or African Caribbean, like there are so many things underneath the language that we speak that we don't even know are there, but that they're in there. So I yes, I like this question because it kind of makes me think about the things I'm fascinated by which is things which are underneath the surface of our day to day. I wonder

1:24:43

**Sarah Jackson:** if it also, you know, this idea of the underneath of language connected to your Mother Tongues projects. I wonder if you could just tell us a little bit about that project.

1:24:56

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley:** Yeah, in a nutshell You know, mother, yeah, mother times is a project where myself and three other poets collaborated with, with our mothers to translate some of our work into our mother's first languages. And for me, that project was born out of a sense of out of a sense that, like, I know that I only really have one language in which I'm fluent. And that's English. And, yeah, I can understand a bit of Portuguese here and there. But I feel tremendously limited by the fact that I only have one language of fluency. But it's also related to the fact that I have grown up hearing my parents speak Ga, which is their first language to each other around us. And haven't picked

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it up because they didn't really speak it to us. But I think it also gave me a relationship to language, where in language is not just meaning language is also music. And so, yeah, so for me, I think underneath language is always music, and I'm very comfortable being in spaces where I don't understand what people are saying, because I just like the sound of it. Yeah. Yeah.

1:26:07

Sarah Jackson: It reminded me of, I had an experience last year in Columbia, reading at a poetry festival and, and people of all nationalities reading, and actually just the beauty of listening to them without necessarily understanding any words at all. So, you know, I really, relate to that. Thank you. And Nisha, what about you? What what? What does the underneath mean for you?

1:26:35

Nisha Ramayya: Um, well, I love what you were saying. And I have a similar experience of growing up monolingual despite being raised by multilingual parents and feeling very resentful. But, um, I think that underneath like, Well, I think but go back to Bhanu. Or go to Bhanu, he's already here. Um, one of the things like, I remember reading her saying about her own work, was it underneath all of her, all of her texts is the body of an immigrant. And I don't know, I'm thinking about that, what that means that there's so much in bonus work about like, lying down, like these acts of radical passivity that might be saying no, or might be saying, stop or All I can do is stop right now. And, and the way that that that particular kind of gesture of them laying down on the ground, or kind of, and but then, but then thinking about the underneath, as like a kind of case basis, and which is the thing that I love about Bhanu's work and had not encountered, until I read Bhanu's work, in terms of like that combination of like, seriousness, sincerity, but also so much humour, so much grossness so much, like losing leaking bodies, and embarrassing moments and, and yeah, just deadpan humour. And so like, there's something about underneath, in that, like, that makes me think about those things. But honestly, I just, like, I just think, so amazing. And, and uncommon. And, and then, I guess, like, with we use, we were kind of talking about surface and, and, and depth. And I think often the way that sound is talked about, like in poetry or in literary studies like that, it's a superficial layer of language that rhyme is as a superficial technique. It's not the same thing. It's the kind of deeper meaning of imagery and, and wanting to kind of refuse that

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and think about, like, surface on depth. And in terms of sound, and, and, I guess, explore, like, you know, like, if you have, sorry, I'm really scattered because you were seeing so many different amazing things. I want to, like speak back to you, but also thinking about like, what, like the kind of visions of the future kind of which might be utopian, or let's say, like, visionary revolutionary politics, which which often are located in the future, but but then by some thinkers, they are located in the present here, they're just not easy to see which is deliberate because there have to be kept safe, they have to be guarded to show it in secrecy to some extent, and thinking about so that could be like, as Moten and Harney talk about the under comments at the university, this place is always already there. It's just not you know, not everyone, kind of like eating recognises it, and it's revolutionary potential. But then, but also thinking about, you know, even just to go snorkelling and, and thinking like, there is an there is another world and this one like, oh, girls do exist. Like, there's so much unknown here and like, I guess, yeah, something about I think that that like how you can kind of just suggest that would even just like a little splash kind of opens up those like spirals into the unknown and just yet creates depth and imagery

1:30:06

**Sarah Jackson:** Sticking with your snorkelling and your splashing. Can we say something about the oceanic because it seems so pertinent to both of both of your works how does the oceanic feeding operate for you Nisha?

1:30:24

**Nisha Ramayya:** Well, it um, I guess when I first came across, it was well, like, probably many through Freud and Civilization and its Discontents and, and feeling like similarly to his friend, Roman Roland or Roland Roman cover, which we read his name goes, and that it is an experience, and that maybe Freud hadn't had but that Freud also didn't refute. And I kind of wanted to spend more time on that particular experience and also as a spirit and experience, I was think of spirituality in terms of like a, and as an excessiveness. But like it could be like an excessive sociality as much as it doesn't. I don't really think of it as an individual bound experience, like experience that's just for like one person if it doesn't make sense to me in that in that way. And, and then yeah, as we talked about, which I'll just give a shout out to Jackie Wang's piece on Oceanic Feeling as Communist Affect, which just reframes things in such a way that it just it centres, the sociality that's



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inherent in the oceanic feeling, and which Yeah, so I kind of just want to keep thinking like, Stan, but those are, those are the oceans that we're swimming in. And I kind of just want to stay there for a while.

**1:31:48**

**Sarah Jackson:** I mean, and Victoria, obviously, we had we had extracts from your wonderful essay on water. And I guess what Nisha's has been saying about Fred Moten and his work I wondered, you know, whether this idea of the relationship of being black and the oceanic was something that that's at work in your writing.

**1:32:09**

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley:** Yeah, definitely. Yeah. And it's Yeah, really useful. Make sure that you mentioned a friendly thing, because I think he's someone who I like when I'm reading him, I have to read so slowly. Because it's just like, there's so much going on. But yeah, and thinking about the ocean. And also about the underneath, I'm thinking now of an essay that was such an amazing essay that I read by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, and it's called on being ocean as practice. And it's she speaks about how in the Atlantic Ocean there are certain types of coral, and how coral builds on top of itself. So it sort of builds on the bones of its of its former selves, or essentially like its ancestors. But I think Yeah, and I think it's inescapable to think about the ocean in relation to blackness, because it was such a site of transit and even is still a site of transit when we think about the Mediterranean. But it's also then in in relation to the sort of Afro diasporic relations of relationships with water. So for example, in my piece, I was thinking, the reason why I wanted to write about microplastics was because I was thinking to myself, okay, so all across the African continent, we have this whole thing of libation, it doesn't matter whether you're left, right, East West, stuff like that. It just seems to be this thing that is across the continent. And it's a way of creating a kind of vehicle of communication. And I was thinking to myself, like, imagine, imagine if, because of the quality of water now, we can't communicate in that way. Imagine if we now cough, and I didn't make it into the essay, but I think thinking oceanic Lee, I guess, there is a sense that everything is connected and and the ocean is many things. It wasn't always a space of trauma, or the largest mass grave, you know, of African peoples or black people's. It wasn't always that there was another relation before that. And what was that? And where do we go from here if, if, as in Christina Sharp's that the particles of the

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people are still there Because they're the app that at summit time has not sort of passed yet, but they are not still a part of the ocean. And in a very, very real and practical way. So yeah, so that's, that's

1:35:16

**Sarah Jackson:** Yeah, yeah. You know, I want to I want to kind of push that a little bit further and again, keeping Bhanu in the room and thinking about, I guess, the underneath of the term hospitality, because obviously, the root of that term also resonates with hostility. And I'm guessing, you know, I think you all write to different Greek degrees about this sort of diasporic experience in this this experience of, of hospitality or hostility. I wondered if you could perhaps just reflect on on that kind of the complex relationship between hostility and hospitality of Nisha, do you want to say something about that?

1:35:59

**Nisha Ramayya:** Um, yeah, I mean, it's, uh, I feel like what Bhanu really makes explicit in that work is that if you to be as hospitable as your host might be, that that, like that gesture of hospitality, letting you know that you're only there conditionally, that you can be rejected at any time, rejected anytime refused, thrown out, that you actually it lets you know that you don't have the you don't have the same rights or like, you're not entitled to the same level of comfort or, or even just like a basic, you know, like basic privileges as the as the host, you might be treated really kindly and warmly, but it's always conditional. And I feel like that's, that's really what they're never like, so in, like, what Herbert just makes so explicit, is that they're like, you can't like that, that root x holds them together so closely, like, they're really there's no distance actually, between those two words. And their bounds bands. Um, I think, yeah, I think that that's my kind of initial response.

1:37:14

**Sarah Jackson:** Is that something that you feel plays out in your own in your own writing?

1:37:21

**Nisha Ramayya:** Well, yeah, I mean, definitely. It's something I'm I trying to think about, in terms of like, you know, immigration, but, but also, I think I have a very, there's a particular complex of being second generation Indian, and like having, so having this like, being stuck in between, like the former

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colony, and the present Imperial militaristic power. And, and so for me that like, you know, the, the hybridity of, you know, whatever the diasporic identity is, like, it's, it's, it's definitely it's like, it's like how to be really angry and really critical. You know, you know, both centres of power at the same time. And yeah, it's, it's, so there's a kind of, like, wrenching so I feel Yeah, I think maybe I don't know if that's, I feel like that that sort of is just like constant in the, in the work and it's interesting with the waters, there's a tart, there's a whole different kind of mythology around water in, in Hinduism. And there's this idea that there's like, the water is like, that lead is like kind of out of India or like they're actually called Kala Pani Blackwater's. And there's this, this idea that if you once you cross those waters, you lose your endianness. And actually, specifically, you lose your caste, which for certain Hindus is fundamental to like identity and powers, and like and hierarchy. But that's not the case. Because people hold very dearly to cast like, once they move, but still, I'm really interested in the like, how this how to think about like, it's not it's, you know, not at all a comparable kind of ontological rupture. And as the like what you were talking about Victoria, there is something very, I think just something I really want to think more about, like about the ocean is actually representing the fact that you've lost your home now that you don't get to go back. And that comes from the homeland itself.

1:39:33

Sarah Jackson: I wonder if you can answer that question. But at the same time, I'm somebody who has posted a posting a few questions on the chat. I wonder if we can link it to one of the questions that's that's come through. And the question is that your essay on water covered a lot of ground geographically. And I guess, in particular thinking about lockdown Do you feel lockdown has made you re examine the writing that you've done on travelling and your future travelling right travel writer So, again, thinking about ideas of belonging, of hospitality and of movement of mobility and perhaps immobility in your writing, I wondered if you could reflect on that for us.

1:40:14

Victoria Adukwei Bulley: Yeah. I really do miss, I really, really do miss travelling I yeah, I really miss being able to, you know, what I, what I really miss is being able to be in like a hot place like I'm really not loving, like, I don't love like the time of year when it starts to get really wet and cold like I do. But, but in terms of lockdown and thinking about travel and like relation to place like, as much

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as I do like travel, I think I am very much a homebody and I really like to build home. And so I could be anywhere at home, if it's, if it's on my terms, and the place reflects me in some way. Within those four walls. I could be anywhere. And, and but yeah, it's hard to ask the question, because I'm sort of going around in circles. But yeah, I do miss I do miss the experience of being able to be. I was gonna say a foreigner. I think I carry that sense with me anyway. But I do miss the experience of being somewhere new. I guess that's a good way to put it.

1:41:35

Sarah Jackson: Yeah, yeah. Thank you. And in some ways, my next question takes a different approach. But it I guess it's still about movements. What was really struck me about all three of the writers that have been brought together for this event is the movement between forms, that operates in all of your work, in the essay form, to poetry to prose, to hybrid fiction, to performance art. And obviously, this is something that really kind of we find very compelling within the Critical Poetics research group. And one of the ideas that we've been exploring in our workshops, this is a guest this kind of hybridity of form. And can I ask you to say something about form in your writing and about the different forms of crossing forms crossing genres and how that operates? For you? Victoria, she wants to start by telling us because you shared with us both the essay and suppose.

1:42:33

Victoria Adukwei Bulley: Yeah, I think for me form is, is it's not the first. So it's not like, when I think of something that I want to write, I don't think form first, I think, more and more lead by impulse, and I'm trying to find the best way to articulate the thought or the imperative. And so far, I think poetry has been the main way that I'll do that. But I also really like, I guess, essay writing. Because, ultimately, that was how I started, like, if, you know, I was writing in my journal. And essentially, I think journaling is a is a kind of essay writing practice. And so essays for me are a way to think on the page. I also think, I think Nisha, what you were saying about, you know, params, as carrier bags, I also really agree with that. And I think firms for me, this specific purpose that they that they serve is that they are my way of writing a code to remember something in in as boiled down a form as possible. So I wouldn't really say I'm like a maximalist kind of like, writer, when it comes to poems, I think I'm often trying to x just tap away at something until it's like the constituent parts.

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Whereas with essays, I'm actually trying to expand, expand, expand, like zoom in expand. So there are different modes, and I might find use for them. But

1:44:12

Sarah Jackson: that's really interesting. Thank you. But Nisha, what about you?

1:44:16

Nisha Ramayya: Yeah. And I think that I, partly it's not being it's probably like a non committal attitude that I can't, I can't commit to any single form, even first thing, even for one image or one idea, I have to try a few out. And partly, it's like the different ways you think, in different forums, the way that like in an essay forum, I really enjoy posturing like that kind of like really authoritative posturing. And then also seeing like, how you might deflate that like in the footnotes or in brackets, and, and there's a certain kind of thinking that I associate Oh, it's just like comes with schooled in academic training, and that comes with the SE, which, which I do actually find very flexible. And I, like, I am a kind of like, geek who, when I was at school, I loved writing essays. And like trying to come up with like the most powerful ever sentence to end on. Thank you, I had to leave a trace in the readers mind to know that that they came essays is like playgrounds at places you could just like look at trees, and just like put little voices in those quotations, like just test loads of different things out. And then with poetry, I really like to and to try and find forums that like kind of will enable the different kinds of thinking that I might want to do. So sometimes if it's like, something really complicated, I want to I'm trying to grapple with, I might do something like actually be extremely precise, like so there are going to be seven syllables per line for seven lines, or, you know, like, set or there's going to be a meter between these intervals, like so sometimes that I would get the spreadsheet. I really plot points so that I tend to do that for Yeah, like if I'm trying to think of four things all at once. And, but then other times, I just want something scattered and diffuse and spread all over the page. And, and, and that would match whatever the kind of the thing was that I was trying to think about or trying to feel. And But yeah, I think I was like Victoria, whether you were talking about like micro plastics, it's so funny, because I was like after the workshop yesterday, and I'm listening and like oceanic listening was thinking about micro plastics and, and also like the, so much of my work has been about like weaving is this kind of quite generative

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metaphor, threads, and then thinking about like, what's a net in the sea that's like an instrument of violence and like, separation of families and kids like breaking of cannon. And, and then microplastics in that instance, might be the irreducible particles, but not the ones that we want that were the ones that we wish we could say that but actually the ones that get to escape, so just thinking like, Okay, I need to really turn that whole thing on its head and like, think about, yeah, just and I feel like yeah, that's another way of life it for and just like kind of like everything that can be kind of generative can also be weaponized.

**1:47:27**

**Sarah Jackson:** And I think I think that goes back to weaving itself. You know, we can think of it very much as generative. But obviously there are forms of violence implicit in weaving in terms of sort of domestic labour, incarceration and weaving. So I think what you're saying about net and the way the net operates, feels really useful. Useful one to consider. Victoria, have you got any any further thoughts? I'm aware that time is ticking on and we've got only maybe time for a couple, couple of minutes. So any further thoughts from you about for more about writing or connections? What Nisha has been saying?

**1:48:10**

**Victoria Adukwei Bulley:** No, I think, you know, I think it's, it's really nice to, to be led by thinking about, like, so you know, to be to be thinking like element, like, thinking elementally So, you know, whether it's a thought like the underneath or like water, and, you know, the ocean and I really love reading work that, that looks for the metaphors that are quite easily, like, inherent in different in different elements and how they function. And yeah, I think it's exciting to hear work that comes from that kind of place. Yeah.

**1:48:53**

**Sarah Jackson:** Right. Well, I think we have to wrap up now. Victoria, you just use the word, you know, thinking and feeling elemental. And I feel that's been, you know, so important to what five bodies is about, it's about, you know, thinking and feeling and knowing differently, and, you know, connecting with our earth with other elements. And I think what I've come away with feeling is not only kind of the joy of your writing, but also your writing as acts of resistance. And I'd like to think that we have Bhanu still with us in terms of listening in a hopefully, and her sense of the underneath her own writing, you

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know, lying underneath our conversation this evening. I'm going to close by thanking you and thanking you also on behalf of critical poetics at Nottingham Trent University. It's been wonderful to hear and to talk with you. So thank you, Victoria. Thank you, Bhanu. And thank you Nisha, and at this point, I'm going to hand over to Sofia to say a few final closing words. Thank you.

**1:50:11**

**Sofia Lemos:** Dear Nisha, dear Victoria, dear Sarah, thank you so much for this wonderful evening. It's been such a mouthful experience of language. So I loved to sort of delve in its liquidity and its fluidity and towards the places that you've taken us to. So thank you so much. Thank you for the conversation as well. I want to take this opportunity to announce our next session, which will be on December 10. So in a month from now, and we'll be welcoming American poet Donika Kelly, James Goodwin and Sandeep Parmar, so please do join us. The conversation will be led by our NTU, Nottingham Trent University colleague, Linda Kemp, to whom we thank in advance as well. So we're so happy for this first session. We're so happy to have you joining us tonight. And we look forward to seeing you soon again. Thank you.

## Colophon

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