

Thu 11 Feb
6.30-8.30pm

Five Bodies

Live transcript

KEYWORDS

doom, dream, book, world, feel, artists, body, language, long, afro-pessimism

SPEAKERS

Olivia Aherne, Jesse Darling, Johanna Hedva, Kameelah Janan Rasheed

1:15

Olivia Aherne: Hi everyone, welcome my name is Olivia Aherne, I'm the assistant curator at Nottingham Contemporary. And tonight it's my pleasure to welcome you all to Five Bodies, our online poetry reading programme. For those of you tuning in for the first time, Nottingham contemporary works with artists and academics to reflect on how research and practice intertwine in contemporary art and visual cultures. Our public programmes aim to understand how sensing, feeling, and knowing might support other world making narratives. So this is the third session of our year long series which looks at how practices of attention, invention and experimentation might help us develop new sensibilities. The programme welcomes some unexpected pairings and drifts but most importantly multiple voices to reflect on sensorial, social and political bodies. So five bodies is imagined in conjunction with our colleague Sarah Jackson and Nottingham Trent University, who has led the critical poetics research group since 2015, exploring creative critical practice, hybrid methodologies and experimental thinking. Before we begin, I'd like to say a few thankyou's. So firstly to tonight's writers, poets, artists, learners, Jesse Darling, Johanna Hedva, and Kameelah Janan Rasheed, who have contributed three amazing readings for tonight's session. I'd also like to thank Sarah Jackson, Sofia Lemos, and Jack Thacker for their invaluable work developing the series, a word of thanks to Nottingham Trent University and the University of Nottingham for generously supporting our events, and also to my colleagues Jim, Catherine and Ryan for their

msdnittoN Contemporary

technical support this evening. So tonight's event includes AI driven live captioning, which can be found in the YouTube chat. This will open in a separate window on your browser and within that you can adjust the scale and layout to suit your requirements. So I'm delighted to introduce tonight's contributors. Jesse Darling is an artist who lives and works in Berlin. They work in various media and in different spaces. recent projects include the curated series of one minute videos, everything happens so much archive as poen in the age of perpetual witnessing. Solo museum presentations, gravity road, at Kunstverein Freiburg Creve at triangle Marseilles, and The Ballad of St. Jerome as part of the art now series at Tate Britain, and a non institutional mail art initiative with no title, funding, or commission during 2020 and the early months of 2021. They've published texts in print and online including granta magazine trip wire journal, Whitechapel press documents series, art forum, frieze, rhizome.org, and the new inquiry. In 2022, they will publish a collection and a Nonograph with monitor books and bookworks respectively. Johanna Hedva is a Korean American writer, artist, musician and astrologer. Hedva is the author of Minerva, the miscarriage of the brain, a collection of poems, performances and essays, and the novel On Hell. Their album the sun and the moon was released in 2019, and the LP Black Moon Lilith in Pisces in the fourth house, a Doom Metal guitar and voice performance, influenced by Korean shamanistic ritual was released in January 2021. Their work has been shown internationally at the Institute of cultural inquiry Berlin, the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, performance space, New York, the LA Architecture and Design Museum, as well as the Museum of Contemporary Art on the moon. Their writing has appeared in Triple Canopy, Frieze, Lithub, The White Review, and is anthologized in the recently published Health, Whitechapel documents of contemporary art. Kameelah Janan Rasheed grapples with the poetics, politics and pleasures of the unfinished. With interest in the generative qualities of incompleteness, leakage, dispersal, and syncretis, Rasheed works across an ecosystem of iterative and provisional projects that have been exhibited at New Museum New York, Transmission's gallery, Glasgow, Rice University, Houston, Brooklyn Public Library, Brooklyn Historical Society and Brooklyn Museum, New York, in addition to public installations with Public Art Fund, and for Freedoms/Times Square Arts. Her work has also been exhibited at the 2017 Venice biennale, and will

Nottingham Contemporary

be included in Glasgow international and Prospect.5 both later this year. She is the author of two artists books, *An Alphabetical Accumulation of Approximate Observations*, and *No New Theories*, both 2019. So each reading will last for approximately 20 minutes. We'll then have a short five minute break before we meet back for a 30 minute discussion. There'll be an opportunity for questions and responses, so do send your thoughts through the YouTube chat. And thank you all for listening. For now I'll leave you with Jesse, Johanna and Kameelah.

6:52

Jesse Darling: So I'm going to read some poems fighting the urge to go like this. The first one is called immediate rest.

In the middle of this, the course of our life, I stopped and everybody got out of their car. The crickets roared, wind farms sliced up blue and chorus like syncopated swimmers or muscle blade and grace. Young biker soft shouldered with his leathers off, no arse to speak of, and not much of a face. He whispered of the car on fire ahead all reverent, and said, You can even see it just up there. I walk the broken line like I once walked in the bar, right down the middle toes out, and I flash my brights at all the girls and boys. Kids, I was gorgeous, I mean, drop dead, and I knew it too. It was all I knew, and not much else. But I was full of speed. Driven by longing for whatever felt like life, or fire, or a ride out of town into nothing. Nothing. And I thought back then, that people staring meant desire. Years pass. And when at last I let the bleach grow out, I see that my hair has turned grey. an hour or two goes by, frosted tips in the camper van, tap taps on the shoulder. Parched mouth puppies tongue the verge. quiet of afternoon except for the rumours, the distant siren and breathing gentle fire ahead. The empty car. When we all drove past in single file, we marvelled as it burned. What damage, what elegance. What happened? What happened here?

This next is called virgins.

They say we aren't built for it. This species or another? crew cut and fatigued. A swollen head on the box says thin lipped. when most people talk about killing, they are like virgins talking about sex. A gathered clump of persons, dogs, children, and there's several prosthetics and

msdgnittoI Contemporary

familiars with no cock in the fight and all the skin in the game. sit around a borrowed flatscreen on beer crates to watch it all go down. Holy hero Sado-Maso Kingdom glory shit, you know, Oh, here we go. I'm drinking in my overcoat. When little guy comes through. stiff legged hatchet faced in suit jacket jeans two fisting cig and tin for the tough slit of a stiff gob. Don't shut the hole. we eye eachother haughtily, two bantams clucking in the pen, proud, wounded, whatever, smack down the hand that scatters crumbs in the gutter and don't say thanks for dinner. Pride is made to spite. The likes of you and you and you and you can't imagine what it's like. They'll say it's counter revolutionary but give me milk and moans and money. Whatever can be counted must be loved. And give me the details of sex in the morning, life enduring, let impasse at long last be boring. Very democratic as the failure of the body. Very democratic is the weight at A&E deskilling us women and pledging secession, singing shut me up and hold me tight. We're waiting down the Depot at midnight, while the uniformed soldiers ignore us.

Glasses too dirty.

The nurse was a butch ex addict, knew how to put it in. She got way up close and opened her hand to show me the vial warmed from the skin. This is the place at which we break the glass like so. And then how slow she made the needle drink the oily hormone in, she knew what she was doing, perhaps enjoyed the fact I knew it too. We watched the fat syringe. Now you do it. Hands me the needle and I take it in my bad right hand. I pinch my belly fat and shove. We watch it slide inside my skin. Now push, she goes, almost a whisper. Yes, just push it nice and slow. I can't, you can, look. A thin foam of spit collects around the tiny lip, the needle sinks its long good potion in. Keep it going. But I, Oh That's right. That's right. She looks at me and beams like so I hand the empty needle back. she presses on the plaster. Still so close I could touch her and look at one another. You good? I'm good.

Circuits.

The Fair smells like pork grease and donuts, neons bright in the rain. A drunk I went to school with rides the ghost train alone. I go in my pocket for coins and there's the lucky stone been weighing down my coat. I

Nottingham Contemporary

don't know who gave it me or why. But it's as heavy as any blessing. Today they took so much blood, a long list of tests to discover how good I could be at giving or having life. And on the list, it clearly said not deceased. Do you have everything you need? she goes, sex, coffee. I'm like if you got it. A large look past between us. And then, I told her of the glory of dreaming aloud and the long moments, sometimes days before it all becomes terrifying. Wild flight communion. And meanwhile in here it's all awkward smiles and half entendres, as sickly but bright eyed, I take my inevitable leave. A ouija board and puppets of the old ghosts and machinery until it's all whirring out there in the whereworld, murmuring and yammering hum, and the ghosts sing whoooooo, weeeeeee, usssssss, and the punch line. clicks. into. place. unlimited pay per view in hotel etc. And when you took your clothes off, I wasn't meant to be looking at you nor you at me, but I noticed your flesh shaped by the long years you've been walking the way you do. Blue bleach and piss yellow mix in the bathtub's wet gusset forming a perfect soft gradient and a palette of tumblr tones, doing this way by beamer like visualisation and an open wound going Yes. My buddy confused by the data, wondered if this was erotic or traumatic. All the way home in the taxi I sat there alive. They wrote my name on a Starbucks and I like the way they spelled it, made me feel different like, possible, and you were only going home. A girl's huge beautiful arse in stretched blue satin, fake new lions at the Savoy, Waterloo Bridge lit up like a shit wet Vegas. Nobody ever smelled as good as this random big guy on the tube with womanish thighs and web dev blue jeans. tears in my eyes for I want to be near it. My whole life's girl writes to say that her youngest is so much like me that I might be the father. point is I no longer care about being beautiful. Wish you didn't either. Yours regretfully, jd.

devonne les enfants.

On a rubber tiled technicolour tundra, zoo born beasts with christianised names play out their putty psychodramas in a post race animalia of boys, girls and occasionally someone else, complete with own storyline dialectically suffering and thriving etc. loved by and affirmed by both parents, and indeed the industry itself. It's about children's books. Dinosaurs, carnivores, and walking pork, smiling, and police hats and Princess dresses, drive happy cars through happy lands.

msdnittoN Contemporary

no arrests are made, nor laws upheld, beyond the bright white birthright of the endless happy ending of the oozing Marxist model in whichever ever after. Cue canned children's laughter. We clean our fangs with fluoride, pull socks on over claws, wash paws, change clothes and remember, we never say yes to the stranger. How to Talk to your children about the New York Times. disappointment, resentment, anxiety. How to talk to your children, about people who want you to talk to your children, about what those people get paid. About the fact that there are no morals, nor heroes, puff hats and glory dogs, pinkly put to worthy Earth work on the soft edge of a hard machine, guzzling blood and fossil grease, bent backs, deferred grief, counted heads, cold shoulders, muddied knees, knees and toes, knees and toes, And eyes and ears and mouth. God knows. How to talk to your children, about the children at the border, about the bodies in the desert, about the big red motorcar at the end of the world smiling death with his panda eyes, pandemic fairy princess, jumping frog and talking windup mouse. Brother cockroach, chubby maggot, oily Meister, talking mouth of open mud and wind up wound. 1,2,3, and up, we all go, boom.

I think I've got like, what, five minutes? Something like that. Okay. This is for Sarah after five years.

Dear military wife, I went alone and drunk to midnight mass, on a street rotten with gift shops and bridal boutiques. Thought of you, and of what you call poetry. Thought of your kid, and you know how I worry. The headstones in chorus, much, most, moon and stars lies here, love always, devoted, dear, devoted etc. In the church, clustered halos swarm around Jesus like white blood cells, open eaves, wider spread legs above it. Most of the theory exhausts me for real, like it's bad drugs, bad medicine, a noxious substance held at arm's length by clever people who don't see the trouble, and how it clouds the world, and clogs the throat. Precocious misfits from no count shit towns forge a lonely Bohemia through sheer force of will, and the fuelling cruelty of others. It isn't courage, it's damage, in your skirt and dick sucking girlhood, you were the best and bravest of all the daisies in the field. I don't want to talk about that. I'm never going back. Once you, unhealed, bag of sugar unspoiled, waste merch, no leaves, mercy on the Christmas lights, round cut hole in the body unseen. The Crucible of language itself and

Nottingham Contemporary

all the metaphors have fingers and what we can't know we don't know. You know? I dreamed I attended your wedding party. There was wet confetti on the steps of the church and the moon hung in its cradle like a skinny white baby in the crook of an arm. Typed half of my immune system out into a chat window and called it a love story. red bricks, grey skies, girls out late in gooseflesh, and going straight if that's what you call it, was like being loaned in a box underground. Listen up ladies. They weren't the best minds of your generation Okay? Most of them were rich kids with addictions and unprocessed trauma, same as the best minds of my generation, like, all my friends are other, and they're pretty much all significant okay? Like Glory in the highest, exempt from sale, use denigration and culture, degradation of the word or flesh, deconstruction by critical theorists at al. Everyone's talking about New Year, New York and New meat now. Lethal flooding predicted just about everywhere but we're all kind of flaky and I'm making a plan, we're awful, Lily Marlene as pixel death, come splashes on a flat screen, green m&ms as racial diversity, and how far will you go to maintain your like wounded otherness? Oh libido, oh winch machine, oh Mary Poppins. Is it oppression? Or is it just inconvenience? business as usual in the suffering farms, but be a good girl and don't be racist, okay? Pass the Prosecco and watch mummy get fabulous, like cry me a river, hire me a sweatshop, and put it on a T shirt so I know it's like real.

And dream poem for Lux.

In the dark, a little shape looms familiar on the brink. Arms all laden with friends. Steps practiced but heavy over the barrier. I reach up to catch the fall as always and roll into awkward embrace. Light rises on a spiked sleep, sentience in the drift like water dreaming itself. And all these fish, elegant mackerel, and sharks on the ritz, and pearls and silk, every living thing whole and storming spirit of the new new world. who needs them, these beds and couches. Fish are for eating and life is for living, no less murderers for all we think we know. As a wet red dress, I stood floundering in a hotel, somehow left alone with the men, and then alone again. mug's game, left that bitch behind like beauty. stretched out the fishy beast and the snouted bag of me. My bed shirt damp, dry, wet rope, warm rubber, alive or dead now only homing to another. Oh, my little carbon footprint. May she live to turn it over, and land up something

msdnittoI Contemporary

much better than I gave her.

I think this will be the last, six short stories.

One. My dream was a novel about death in which the hospital was a rich heterotopia hung with tapestries and signs. A seminar on how to address the dead as a demographic when writing or presenting. You gave me the wings of four black geese in a plastic bag lined with newspaper. collateral, you said with a nod and you were gone.

Two. In the dream I woke up poisoned, vomiting, spattered with blood. I'm feeling good you said. It was your only birthday. I was having a sex thing with a dead girl but we were in two different places. jammed my mobility cane into the O-ring of a strap on harness and went lurching into the broken gates, like the old 1,2.

Three. The boys I loved in childhood were saltwater corpses, floppy stacked on floating beer and rotting in the sun. Each summer another on the pile. out of a nice blue sky I landed my plane on the water. I took off my man's flying suit. I took off my woman's body, I dove and disappeared.

Four. We swam in the flooded church, far below us, stark rusted crosses and the barnacles altar, organ and pulpit blowing quiet bubbles at the bottom. As they were hiding the body in the slop house they discovered that he had breasts and a vagina. But dead is dead anyway. Amen and rest his soul.

Five. Drawn under duress. A crowded folio of blueprints became a choir of buildings. Each one shot through the mortise with pain, long fields rushing past the windows and slow motion capture of a landscape experiencing orgasm. What really happened behind that wall Jesse? tears because truthfully, I don't know. I mean, I don't think I know.

Six. We thought it was terrorism. But it was just advertising. holy violence of the open fisted filigree as it met my upturned face on its way to ground. I stuck my finger into the hole in the middle and lifted the skirt on the lid of the world. Eyes rolling back all the way. to Sky

Nottingham University

That's it.

22:51

Johanna Hedva: Hey, thank you that was so great. I'm Johanna Hedva. I'm a Korean American person in a room full of books wearing all black. And I'm going to read something that I've never read before that I'm also very, well I've been working on it for six years. And I'll read a part of it. It's coming out soon. So I thought it would be good to start getting used to it's being in the world. There is a content warning for involuntary institutionalisation. And it's called soft blues.

The best thing I got from my relationship with Z was his description of Alvarado street in Los Angeles, being like a river, how the traffic just swims down it. The second best thing I got was that I was disabused of the idea that de Kooning was a genius. Z, a straight cis white boy painter from Texas, without one lick of irony or self awareness at how ironic it made him look, worshipped de Kooning, idolised and wanted to be him. de Kooning did it like this, de Kooning said that, repeating quotes like the rosary, which was all a big yearning, a hope that in small ways that we're accumulating, through will and determination and osmosis, by soaking himself in the sticky wet of de Kooning's everything. Z was comporting himself more and more toward de Kooning, and would one day walk in the shadow that would also be the light of the master. It's the kind of behaviour that straight cis white boys are born into, the kind propelled by something that commingles faith and delusion, faith in themselves and their God given right to be front and centre and always on top. And the ability to ignore completely the possibility that everything they believe to be true about themselves is a delusion. True, it's a delusion that the whole world believes them. But doesn't that fact only corroborate it's being alive? For the purposes of this essay, I'm going to need a working definition of the world. But there are so many. There's the world of Plato's cave and the world outside it. There's Wittgenstein's worlds, that is all that is the case. There are Leibnitz's multiple worlds, though for him this one is the best of all possible because, I'm paraphrasing, God is nice. I'm partial to Heidegger's world into which we are thrown, the abrupt and incomprehensible thrownness of existence because I'm, because I feel hella thrown. What's weird is that philosophically speaking, the world and reality are not the same, though

msdgnittoI Contemporary

their delineation from each other is interdependent. There can be many realities in the world, but perhaps not many worlds in reality. Until that summer, I had not yet learned this. At that point, my definition of the world was that it's the thing that holds you until it doesn't. The German word *malerschweine* literally means painter pig, but it is figuratively used to describe an archetypal Male Artist. chauvinistic, lauded, insecure and emotionally irresponsible, egomaniacal but allowed, and even urged to be that way. misogynistic in his art and life, despite the fact that both of those things could not have happened without the wives, mothers, sisters and girlfriends, who serve him in the capacity of collaborators, advocates, patrons, managers, curators, editors, critics, teachers, therapists, caregivers, mentors, librarians, accountants, assistants, cooks, maids, muses, typists, secretaries, publicists, laundresses, and nurses. No matter his medium, the *malerschweine* is a genius, a trailblazer, who in a divinely directed quest, like Moses, ventures to the wild frontier of his craft, spelunks depths, that he presumes and which the world substantiates back to him, have never before been excavated, or if they have, not sufficiently so, not yet by a genius. The *malerschweine* is always great with a capital G. And he always changes the world with a capital W. The goddamn canon is made of *malerschweine*, just Google genius and have a nice scroll through the history of Western civilization. An old boss of mine, an artist to whom I was a studio assistant once gave me the de Kooning biography to read. You should know about him, he said, and he loaned me his copy saying, but I want this back. This is an apt representation of patriarchy in practice. When I returned it to him he did not ask me what I thought, but he said, it's great, right? He was great, right? Though not set as questions. This is a better representation of patriarchy in practice. When I was working for this man, I had a miscarriage with complications, a biblical 40 days of bleeding, which ignited a grief in me so brutal, that it almost blinked me out of existence. A small hole yawned open to inhale the entire universe. And everything that had been explicable before, was now negated totally, radically. And I was left in a pool of tears and empty skin and I could not, I was not. I have endometriosis, a disease that I was told, when I was first diagnosed at age 20, meant I would probably never be able to get pregnant. And I am genderqueer and have gender dysphoria, the latter of which is also classified as a disease. The fact that I have a uterus at all can feel like a weird mistake, a curse

Nottingham Contemporary

nevertheless born from my DNA. So when I say that a small hole yawned open, I'm referring not only to a hole that was the absence of an impossible foetus, but to a hole that extended and existed at the very sight of the impossibilities that are myself. One night, bleeding blood that had turned to black ash, I was crying and could not stop. I was a mad dog trying to tear its way out of my own throat. I thrashed around like the protagonist in Greek tragedy, a cursed woman who has had everything taken from her. So I cursed everyone I knew, and the most unkind curse I gave to myself. So the father of the baby called the police, and had me involuntarily hospitalised in the psych ward. They took me away in handcuffs, and wouldn't let me bring my shoes. Because I pass as white. I was not shot by the police when they arrived at my home. On the way to the hospital, one of the cops looked over his shoulder through the metal fence that divided the front seat from the back. And he said to me, my girlfriend is pregnant right now. So I, I understand. I'm so sorry. I looked back at him. And I said in a calm, clear voice. You don't have to take me to jail. I'm just grieving. I know, he said, but we have to. It's the law. This is not a representation of the patriarchy in practice. This is the practice of it. For a practice to become an institution, it has to be instituted and reinstituted, it's a doing that has to be done. I met Z during the summer after I was released from the hospital. I was living alone in Chinatown in LA on chung king court, one block of a clean spacious lane where cars aren't allowed to go. I would sometimes walk barefoot at night down the lane. The air was warm and my body felt featherweight, capable of lifting into the air and tumbling away. I'd lift my arms up and sail down the lane under the paper lanterns. I'd feel as though my life, and myself, and my world, and what I wanted, and who I was, were my own. This is the only thing I comprehended in the face of many, often contradictory facts, untamed and teeming in their disparity. I had to turn away from them. In the face of too many things, I had to make only one, me. Nothing, of course, actually belonged to me, not least the entity I'd constructed and started calling me. But I told myself it did because I live by the law. And that's what I've been taught to want, a me I can own, like an object to keep in a pocket. Is it for me to say where I stood, where I still stand, in relation to the line between the things that happened to me, and deciding that those things were what I wanted. Let me put it another way, is desire a thing that belongs to you, a thing you can own? I should probably define delusion because it's hilarious. delude comes

msdgnittoI Contemporary

from de and ludere. A form of ludicrous, de meaning down to one's detriment and ludere, from the Latin meaning to play. So, a game you play to your detriment. Who might lose at such a game and who might win? I like to refer to this manic summer of mine as the summer of my 12 inch cock. My cock is 12 inches long, and it's a gun, and a Molotov cocktail, and a megaphone, and a long perfectly balanced sword, and a power drill that can grind through bone and a really big hammer, a hammer that could crush one of Jupiter's moons, and a flame thrower longer than my body and a huge punishing stretch of silence, and a ghost in a cave, and a vase of bleeding hearts, and easy sugar, and a deep old forest with ancient moss, and a combustion x mahilo, and it stinks like very expensive perfume. And when it lands on the face of my enemies it cracks through the air with a slack that registers at 150 fucking decibels. During manias, it is difficult to remember things you know are true. lies are difficult to distinguish from desires. Reality is impossible to locate amid what feels like a warm dream. It's easy to get lost and not feel like you're lost. And also, how can a person be lost if they went there because they wanted to? There are many etymologies of the word loss, but my favourite is the transitive sense from the 1200 - to part with accidentally, be deprived of, or miss the knowledge and the possession of that knowledge. I like that it can be an accident. And I like the double meaning of the word Miss, that it is both a failure, and the yearning. Who gets to say, what the line is between what one wants, and what one has been taught to want? And who gets to say, if that wanting defines a person, as the thing they have failed at, or the thing they have yearned for. And aren't these somehow the same? I want the world to allow me all of my delusions about my own importance, to bend over backwards to make my importance be true, not just for me, but for all of you too. I want to snap the jaws of people who get in my way and have the world applaud this and call it honour. I want to bellow with baseless anger and have the world hear it as a lullaby. I want to whine and yewl when someone wants to take up as much space as I do. And I want the police to shoot them in the back for their gross trespass. I want a secretary and a therapist and a nurse and a maid and a fuck toy all in the same body, who I never have to pay. And I want to blame everything on my mother, that cunt. I want every evil to be blamed on every mother. When I'm asked to account for myself, I want to be silent. arms folded across my chest. Jaw set indomitably, and have this act pull power away

Nottingham Contemporary

from my inquisitors and consolidate it within me. I want to call my inquisitors hysterical crazy bitches. And I want this to become the ideology in the world's water supply. I want my brittleness to legislate the wretched. But first I want to declare their wretchedness and define it recursively, that they are wretched because they don't look like me. I want my wounds to be the reason we build prisons, guillotines, and guns. I want the world to labour to secure me. And I want them to need no other reason to do it other than because I said so. I want this reason to become a universal truth with a capital T that constructs the world with a capital W. When I break someone else, I want the world to wag its finger not in my face, but my victims, tsk tsk, you should have known better. I want children to be taught not to tempt me, and when they do, I want them to feel for their entire lives the dirty shame of their mistake. I want wealth such that the world has never seen. And then I want my face imprinted on all the coins. Whose voice is this? Is it my own? No, it's not mine. But then why have I been taught to want it to be? And what happens to that sentence if the mine is changed to ours? If the I is changed to we? when a person who is assigned female at birth comes to understand that they don't agree with that assignment, often the first gesture away from it is to wonder if they are in fact a man, a swing toward the antipode. Some find solace there, and indeed find themselves there. Yes, actually, here I am. Some don't find themselves at either pole, but it's some treacherous ineffability between, and the question becomes whether a binary is an accurate framework for gender at all. Even though the world insists that it is. Have you heard of Schrodinger's cat? The thought experiment of a cat locked in a box with a device that has a 50% chance of killing it. At the moment before opening the box, the cat is theoretically both alive and dead at the same time, because of what's called its quantum superposition. Schrodinger was trying to figure out when the cat would stop being its soupy mess of both states at once at the quantum level, and become, on the level of the cat itself, either a dead one or a live one. Gender, for me, often feels like the moment right before opening the box, when the cat is a blur of probability of both, and therefore neither. Perhaps another way to say this is that during the summer of my 12 inch cock, there was a kind of collapsing of the very binaries that I thought I knew. And the site of the collapsing was me. The reader might wonder why exactly I was dating a straight cis white boy at all. Good fucking question. Now, when I look

msdnittoN Contemporary

back at that summer, this is the one and only bit of evidence that convinces me I was indeed mad at the time. The fact that this summer coincided with my being mad, should beg the question of whether or not madness is ever not insurrectionary. Am I defined by the house I was born in? Or can my definition come from how I've gotten lost? A tentative conclusion. I think that the world simply is the law. And the law is the world. The question is whether you're willing to break it. Thanks.

42:30

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: Wonderful. Thanks so much, everyone, for having me. I'm super excited to be here. Just like a quick arc for what I am doing today is I'm gonna read like a short essay thing. And then we're gonna hear some poem, things that I wrote. And we're just gonna play together. So I'll go ahead and get started here. Again, I'm Kameelah, super excited to be here. Yeah, we'll get started.

I hesitate to call myself a poet. I prefer no label. And if I do take one, I will take that of learner, a learner enthralled by texts and how words come into being and change and how they look on the wall, and on the page, on a screen in public space, and how they hide, and how they dance, and how letters, word, sentences, are indeed living. Which is to say, today, I'm presenting one formation of this ecosystem of letters, words and sentences. But tomorrow, or in an hour, these living organisms may take on new forms, new arrangements. I'm invested in process, like the messy doing that happens without being beholden to producing a final piece. And I say final with an awareness of the language of enclosure, but ask that we turn away from ongoingness. It is what Lucille Clifton writes in her 1974 poem, I am not done yet. She writes, as possible, as yeast, as eminent as bread, a collection of safe habits, a collection of cares, less certain that I seem, more certain than I am. Oh, my screen, just went crazy, one second. More certain than I was, a change changer, I continue to continue. What I have been most of my lives, is where I'm going. And I think there are two important things that she says here, I continue to continue. And likewise, I continue to continue, and this notion of we are as possible as yeast. So what we're talking about here is a poetics and a politics of revision. And this means this invitation to embrace leakiness, or this persistent sense of rendering completion impossible. This summer, I spent some time playing with

Nottingham Contentory

writing algorithms, or what I'm sort of calling playful divination or ways of conjuring up moments where texts run up against each other, or rub up against each other, and take on the impression of of the other. And I basically started by taking a stack of books, and I opened each book and for 60 seconds, I ran my finger over the letters, and wherever my finger landed was the word that I would write down. And after I wrote that down, I had to then create poems from that. And so in this case, I thought about the book as almost this talking board, this ouija board, and my finger was the actual planchette. Thinking about the page as something that holds these vibrating structures that blurt out words, and so I'm constantly thinking about what are other methods to invite other forms. This notion of ectopia, which is often referred to in terms of pregnancy, but I also think makes sense in the context of texts, or text that does not ask permission to exist as something other than typeset blocks, somewhere other than on a page. As a lucid dreamer who has encountered texts in a somewhat otherworldly state, I also think about letters, words and sentences as spiritual offerings. Sometimes these lucid dreams are like autocorrect algorithms, they don't make any sense until you sit back and ponder for a while. Like the time the autocorrect algorithm replaced the word fetish with foetus guide. Or the time my email's predictive algorithm offered me, I am in another embodiment. I don't even remember what I was trying to type because I was so struck by the script. So sometimes, indeed, the autocorrect algorithm can be an Oracle. And to say that an algorithm can be an Oracle is not to smirch the gods of Silicon Valley. Rather, it is to say that we, all of us have been engaged in some algorithmic behaviour since the beginning of time. If not bibliomancy, where a passage is picked, with the eyes close to foretell something. Then it was divination by shoulderblades. And so I wanted to sort of practice live a lot of what I talked about, which is improvisation, or sort of trying to make things on the spot, so not overthinking things. And so as Jesse, and Johanna were reading, I was looking for words, and I so I want to offer two things that I wrote as you both were speaking, so for Jesse, I want to offer this. The Ouija board asks of us not to count on Jesus, and to instead make a clan and put it on a T shirt, a choir of losing landscapes. And for Johanna, I want to offer this, I scrolled through genders, and my shoulders are sorry, sometimes you practice taming, we beg for soupy lines and fuzzy definitions. And also, as everyone was speaking, I started to think about things that we

msdgnittoI Contemporary

were mentioning in common, seems that we're really interested in cats, and heroes, and definition, and death, and breaching. So in the spirit of sort of playful divination today, I've numbered all of my baby poems that I wanted to share. And I placed these numbers on a sheet of paper, like this. And so I'm going to close my eyes and select one number, and then read the poem that's assigned to that number. If it hits a spot that says dictionary, then I will open my dictionary, and I will read the one word that is on that page of the dictionary. So we're gonna go ahead and get started. And I'm going to do my first one, and the first one is number 17. So that's the first one I'm going to read. I eat the moist clumps of jealous hours, and my mouth thickens around the sloppy horror of hero plots. The book wanted to eat my imagination, and sometimes we succumb to the canons we cannot banish. Next one. Number 19. But the story always ends acrobatic. Number seven. There is no software. God did not glitch. Number 15. The Trans Atlantic almost misplaced the words. dictionary page 100. Call, shout, cry, to utter a characteristic note or cry, to utter in a loud clear voice, out my name, to announce authoritatively, to summon, to make a request or demand, to halt, to demand payment, to get or try to get in communication. Number 21 aggregated apathy, anachronistic anger, arbitrary applause, beige bully, bedazzled bodybags, charismatic complexion, chuckling Cyborg, conditional citizen, corpulent capitalism, Cumulative caskets, decadent danger, delicate drone, didactic devotion, durable dystopia, emotional embargo, eventual extremists, Exalted endings, fermented flesh, flamboyant flashback, flaccid futures, franchise fear, frugal fantasy, gender garage, ghetto ghosts, gluten free graveyard, homicidal hemline, kind killings, lactating language, lethargic legislation, lopsided libido, malnourished mystic, nappy numerology, nautical negros, non committal nuance, normative nostalgia, obedient outcomes, obnoxious orifice, offshore optimism, optimal opponent, orwellian overcoat, panoramic patriarchy, pathological pretext, phantom power, plagiarise pleasure, pre emptive paranoia, recessive rights, reciprocal rage, redacted rage, rehearse revolution, reversible religion, soybean spaceship, strategic suffering, superlative subjugation, superhero specimen, surplus syntax, syndicated spectacle, tangential trauma, tangled throne, tedious temptation, tender truths, Trotskyist toothpaste, underground utopia, unregulated urgency, uniform utterance, up any uterus, velvet vulva, vigilant vocabulary, vintage vibrators, voguing vampire, wandering

Nottingham University

wage, weaponized watermelon, white wisdom, zealous zombie.

Number 25. This is from the forum on next door. February 8 2021. Hi, I'm looking to see if anyone has seen a black cat with a large glass jar stuck on his head in the backyards between the halsy and Megan, and no strand and Marcy. Number 8. Also from next door, a renters inquiry. we have a bird in our wall that is crying and scratching. How do we get it out? And is this the landlord's responsibility? Number 9. I'm in the business of navigating the casual expectations of language. I'm writing my dream novel, The blue plot, Moses splits the past into Martians who use photo metres to locate the faces of a secret people, and bootless American sweethearts named George who just remember, we all load on to our three story arc with abba and 40 pairs of birds. The compass used to navigate our ship into habitual futures self immolates under the threat of an unknown black resistance on the horizon. Number 1. each sentence is a sponge. Number 22. Living between threat and triumph, a tender translation makes me a believer. living between threat and triumph, a tender trauma makes me belligerent. Number 18. Surely, dogma needs a chaperone, and orthodoxy requires a sieve. Number 15. The transatlantic almost misplaced the words. Number 14. I was no good at algebra, but geometry, geometry, I paid close attention to how to escape the perimeter. Number 20. And internet inquiry reads, honestly, what sauces really need to be refrigerated after opening? The answer is that all Negro flavoured dipping sauces must stay refrigerated. She was too saucy having refused to stay in her refrigerator. She has now expired. A sour protein rich puddle. I watched my mother make breakfast. It seems that the flapjacks can't decide on which side they want to carry the curse of Canaan. Number 24 I no longer desire home, I desire safe orbit. Number 23. Runaway slaves burn more calories, no further studies are expected on this subject. Number 6. If you look back to September, the moving pieces softly sneeze and the February trees deliberate one happiness, a wild messenger dwelling on a spectrum because the ocean is a healing curriculum. Our objective should be a durable and incandescent way to see good. A meditation that eases restriction, an anorexic contradiction corners the racism project, and public soldiers reconnect to a new set of priorities, the eternal outbursts and no one rekindle any unlikely satisfaction. A new movement composed of direct freedom is key to the

msdnittoN Contemporary

right tone, has a club improved? a piece of antibacterial karaoke music, cranky pass uncontaminated by common kindness. we formulated an observable universe that is experienced through assessable software, and displayed as metallic rubber and plastic patches. an invitation. No future wicked geographers who present alliances or criminality. My field notes are a digital portfolio of my fresh mine. travel to the top and save Chicago. Number 11. Some are still asking how long? Some are always looking for the perfect black formula. Everyone will not be safe the algebra it is an awful arithmetic. source the Jetsam, not for utopia but for the face of pleasures that exceed announced freedom. twisting against an algorithm that predicts our refusal, we marooned and our circumferences managed to escape detection. dictionary page 790 untried, not tested or approved by experience or trial, also not tried in court. Number 18. Surely dogma needs a chaperone and orthodoxy requires a sieve. Number 10. What is the difference between a spell and an equation? Number 24. I no longer desire home I desire safe orbit. Number 16. In a dream I am reminded, slavery is not a time based medium. Number 13. draped in calcite we map a geometric rebellion, or you can't destroy us if you cannot locate us. Dictionary page 266. fetishism, belief in or devotion to fetishes, the pathological transfer of sexual interest and gratification to fetish, fetishise, to make a fetish of, fetlock, a projection on the back of a horse's leg above the hoof. Number 12. Secretly we all long for a saviour, we all long for an easy solution. dictionary page 181. date, the day, month or year of an event, a statement given the time of execution or making, as of a coroner check, the period to which something belongs, appointment, a social engagement between two persons that often has a romantic character, a person with whom one has usually a romantic date, to date, up to the present moment. Number 2. I wasn't sure that this fickle afterglow would be enough to find the path to your altar. I use this dole knife to keep count on my inner thigh. How many times have I travelled this road searching for this man who speaks in fixed sentences? How many more nights will I drag my web body across a damp mattress seeking a gentle story? and how many of you will it take to carry my tired body to that sparkling utopia, where the woman climax in couplets, and other pleasures arrived in triplicate, and the four moons drawn across the sky offer us five baptisms before and after each Bismillah. Number 5. Living is a casting session. A fabric agency corrected by crude long division,

Nottingham Contemporary

an afrocentric autopsy yields some accurate results. Dictionary page 44 atomic clock, a very precise clock regulated by the natural vibration of atoms or molecules. Number 3. your analogy is a sloppy menace. Number 4. Eventually we all become leaky harmonies refusing to sing any known song. Number 23. runaway slaves burn more calories. No further studies are expected on the subject. And we'll do one more. Let's see what we get. Our last one quite fittingly is number 19, reads, but the story always ends acrobatic. Thanks so much folks.

1:07:51

Olivia Aherne: Hi everyone, welcome back. And a quick reminder before we begin that the chat, the YouTube chat is open. So if anyone would like to drop in any comments or reflections of their own, feel free to do so. And so there's so many overlaps. I mean, as you've already identified to Kameelah, including cats, but I thought I'd start the conversation off, not with a question but more of a reflection about thinking about spaces in between dreams and realities. So Johanna you spoke about this in relation to mania, madness delusion. Jesse you also spoke of an inbetweenness and dreaming aloud, and Kameelah as well about lucid dreaming. So I wondered if you had any reflections on on the space between between dreams and realities?

1:08:47

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: Are we all waiting? [laughs]

1:08:51

Jesse Darling: Being polite [laughs]

1:08:51

Olivia Aherne: Silence [laughs]

1:08:54

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: I can jump in because I just had like a weird dream. Last night, I was coming back from beacon. And I was in this weird state of like being awake and fully. I'm a lucid dreamer. So I know when I'm being awake and like entering a dream and coming out of it. So I wasn't actually resting, which was like this weird state. And so for me, I don't, I've been lucid dreaming since I was about nine, and I didn't know

msdgnittoI Contemporary

what it was until recently, Maybe like a decade ago, what it actually was, and I actually ended up taking a class. I took a class on lucid dreaming. And I sat in this class and they're telling us all like how it happens, cognitively, neurologically, blah, blah, blah. And then for several months after I took that class, I couldn't lucid dream. It didn't happen. And so for me, I'm like, very, I will say I'm superstitious. My husband makes fun of me. I'm gonna say I'm very superstitious about things. So I'm hesitant to talk about like what lucid dreaming is in terms of trying to figure out the mystery because I do think there's an element of like things that are naturally occurring for us becoming so bogged down in like the scientific language of explanation that they lose sort of their like heft. And I actually felt like I was being punished, like I literally took it as like a punishment. And I was like, You know what, I'm never going to try to figure out what lucid dreams are again. So for me, I think about lucid dreams almost as this like, moment of gifting where like language plays in weird ways, your sentences come together that just like, would not come together in my waking life. And so I think about it as like a moment of like offering where I just get lots of gifts, without asking for them. But the exchange is that I can't be so over involved in trying to overanalyze it. So I have to take the gift, I have to sit back, but I cannot, and I will not be involved in the process of trying to decode the mystery of it.

1:10:42

Jesse Darling: Yeah you know, how I, you know, I forget, but there's this kind of texts where, you know, there's this sort of remain in touch with your creativity, you're supposed to do these morning pages and write three pages, or whatever, anyway. So you know, I've got a three year old kid and other shit to do. And it's just whatever man in the morning, I go and have a cup of coffee. So I don't do that. But sometimes, I write down my dreams. And that's the equivalent, you know, and then I have no memory of what I've written. And then when I look at it, honestly, it's like, who came up with that, you know, and I really, sort of, really want in, in every kind of form I'm working on, I want to get to this place where you get kind of beyond your own self consciousness, and especially with writing, it's so self conscious, it's so over determined. It can, the voice, you know, the narrative voice so easily like overwhelms everything. And I feel like it's almost impossible to lose it. And I'm still trying and failing all the time. But the dream logic or the dream language doesn't have that

Nottingham University

because, you know, it just it's kind of direct from the, you know, some other source. And it's weird, Kameelah, that I mean, I don't lucid dream. But since puberty, I've been, someone taught me how to fly when I was about 12 in a dream, and I wasn't good at it. It was like someone's older brother. He was like, Man, yeah I've got to take the kid. Yeah, fine. Okay, so you do it like this. And he showed me how, and we went over the river low because I was going to fall and, and he's like, don't laugh man, if you laugh, or if you kind of like lose your focus, then you fall. And you know, now I'm quite a lot older. And I've got better at it ever since. But basically all the way until my mid 20s, it was always couched in some kind of pedagogy. I was always in school for it, you know, like, and now, now I can just do it, something that I've learned to do. So, you know, sometimes I still have these dreams where I'm like, Oh, yeah, I'm going up. And it's this old, like, feels like a muscle memory. But I obviously this body doesn't have those muscles, because I can't fly. But damn, I know how so well to do it. As I've done it so many times. But yeah, if you think about it, that's it. It's really like it's a skill set. I could explain to you in detail. But I won't but yeah, anyway, it's only something that I can do in dreams, clearly, sadly.

1:13:23

Olivia Aherne: Johanna, I wondered if you wanted to reflect on on just what you were saying in relation to sort of dreams, but perhaps in relationship to a mania or a disillusion that you were speaking about in your reading?

1:13:39

Johanna Hedva: Yeah. Well, I just have to say I had such a great time listening to you both read, I'm kind of not thinking about how to account for myself in a cogent way. Um I guess the main question that a lot of my recent work has had, and this piece I read tonight, I was writing about the same period of my life that my new book is sort of documenting. the main question I think that I've been worrying and troubling for years is why exactly what we experience in our dreams is not considered some form of legitimate life. And I would say that goes for not just sleeping dreams but other kinds of states of consciousness. It's just very odd to me that you know, no one wants my CV of like what I do in my dreams, they want it like what I do in this like kind of weird waking life part. You

msdnittoI Contemporary

know, I'm like, but I do great shit in my dreams, like, don't you want to know about that? Like, shouldn't that be attached to my like value in society? like yeah, that I could like fly. I could like do all this amazing shit. And I guess I, you know, a lot of the pieces in my new book are written in either a hypnagogic or a hypnopompic state, which is falling asleep or waking up. I keep like a kind of a notebook by my bed to write, as I'm falling asleep, and as I wake up, and a lot of the time, yeah, what I've written there is indecipherable. And that's kind of, also what's interesting to me is it's right at the limits of the kind of languages that I've learned so far. And I would say, yeah, dissociative states or states of madness, quote, unquote, they fall kind of in that same territory for me, but they're as, you know, vivid as, you know, life itself. And yet somehow, we've decided that they're not qualifiable knowledge or something. And I kind of like that fugitivity to them, like, I don't really want to, like, envelop them into the capitalist world of like, what's valuable or not? So yeah, I guess I just try to insist on it, wherever I can.

1:16:10

Olivia Aherne: Yeah, thank you. I'm just thinking on from dreams, and and I suppose in relation to time and non linearity. And I just wondered if you could all expand a bit more on how that plays in your work and a kind of multiplicity, and how that materialises through your writing because it felt very present in everything you've shared this evening, also Kameelah through the sort of game, the non linearity through a game, through kind of collaging words and text together.

1:16:54

Jesse Darling: Yeah, I think about this a lot. I think this is one of the, it's, I mean, you could almost say it was an ambition. And what's, what I started to realise is good about poetry as a form is that it, you know, it's a good way to displace time. Because it you know, in a novel, you're like, sketching out a whole scene, and, you know, breaks in time have to be more accounted for, or something like that. Whereas in a poem or the poetic form, it seems like less necessary to do that. And I think also, just to sound a bit serious for a second, I also think there is something about altered mental states. So both, you know, what's called madness, also drugs, and the various I mean, altered mental states with people going in and out of those all the time. So illness, hormones, being in love is a

Nottingham Contemporary

form of psychosis, you could say, so whatever. But these kinds of, you know, maybe more extreme states, they do all that, you know, time is experienced differently. And, you know, people talk now about how time feels very different in the pandemic, and lockdown, and, you know, so this is just like, a contemporary example, or whatever. I'm sort of trying to, trying to, actually, to destabilise time as such a bit, not saying that, you know, this is something that I managed to do. But time is, is itself like part of the problem. It's one of the big kind of colonial constructions that, you know, among many other things, it's sort of ripe for a rethink, now, you know, the time that we live by and the way that we live in. And that's like, something I seriously think about a lot, more about time than about space in writing, more about time than about identity, or pretty much anything else. But yeah, that's also a question of the form. I think.

1:19:11

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: I really, Jesse thank you, I really liked what you said about taking notes, as usual. Poetry as a form, where you get to displace time, and how when you're writing, like a novel or something like that, you do have to account for time. So like, if you're talking about like, Jesse at aged 4, and you jumped to age 20, you're sort of accountable to the audience, the reader, we like what happened for 16 years, and I really liked this notion of accountability to time feeling different. And I think in my practice, I'm thinking about that also in terms of like collaboration and writing. And I think that all writing is collaborative in the sense that like, I don't like, anything I've written has been written from like my soul, genius brain, right. And that's not calling myself a genius. It's just sort of like challenging this notion of like, sole authorship. Alexis Pauline Gumbs talks about this a lot when she talks about ancestry co written texts. There's a poet Bhanu Kapil, who I think is in the series later, who rote schizophrene, and she talks about like throwing her notebook in the yard, and then retrieving in the sort of writing from those fragments. So there's life is collaboration with like nature, and wind and weather that's really beautiful. So I think when I think about time, I think about time as like a collaborator in a lot of ways. It's like a constraint that like allows me to produce in a certain way, but also, like, what happens when I write something and a certain amount of time elapsed, and I come back to it? And there is one poem thing that I read, which actually came out of, I like games, as you can tell, came

msdnittoN Contemporary

out of a zoom game where I was presenting, and I wanted to talk about collaborative writing. But it's hard to do collaboration over zoom. And I was like, we're gonna figure this out. So I basically presented and then asked for people to find a book that was nearest to them, and to type three words from that book into the zoom chat. And then I went away for like, 37 minutes. And my challenge was make something in 37 minutes from those words. So the poem where I was talking about antibacterial karaoke, and some other things, that was that poem, right. And I would have never gotten there if it weren't for like that collaboration with time, that collaboration with other people. And so I think to Jesse's point, I really am trying to make sense of like, what time demands of us, but like, what are the ways to like, escape time, or play with time, or to refuse to be accountable to time, to actually like, yeah, it's something I've been fascinated with. And I think because I lucidly dream, and I'm fully aware, and I'm like, in a dream being like, Okay, I know, we have to go through this stage of life, the mountain, like, when can we get to the next one, I'm constantly thinking about sort of space that I have to play with time, and lucid dreams that I don't have to now, I can't just skip a week of work. But in a lucid dream, I can just be like, I'm just gonna go to this door. And I can just bypass time. So yeah, I'm really interested in this notion of accountability to time, which is really just accountability to capitalism. But it seems like capitalism doesn't exist in my lucid dream. So that's kind of cool.

1:22:17

Johanna Hedva: Yeah, I don't have much to add other than I guess I'm super mollified by the fact that there are different kinds of time. And chronological kind of chrono-normative time is just the one that holds sway at the moment, you know, that has institutional power behind it. But there have been many times in the past, and I'm sure in the future, that that's not true. And yeah, I really like what Kameelah is saying about this sort of collaboration that happens like, just because you guys are seeing that I'm like in this room full of books. What you can't see is on this side, and on my desk are piles and piles of books and more shelves. And when I sit in here, and I write, I keep piles of them on my desk, and I kind of open them all the time, similar to like a kind of divinatory thing that like a game that Kameelah is talking about where I will like open them at random, find a sentence, put it into my manuscript, and then

Nottingham University

go word for word and change each word to a synonym or antonym or something. As someone who has written a couple of novels, I can say that the time thing is definitely a fucking oppressive [laughs], like thing that hovers over you the entire, like, process of writing it, my agent recently had to tell me like, in my latest manuscript I sent to her she was like, I think you need to tell the reader like if this is the next day, or if it's like, the next year, and I was like, but do I? and she was like, Yes, you need to put a couple of moments in there where you locate us in chronological time. And I was like, Well, you know, I had all these reasons I didn't want to do it, but but I think that one of the things about keeping a lot of other books by other writers on the desk is that it kind of allows me these portals into other, yeah, moments in time and other kind of worlds around it. So yeah, I mean, it's it's a kind of constant dialogue or cacophony of these other times coming through other voices.

1:24:41

Jesse Darling: And you also collaborate with some versions of yourself in a way you know, like things you wrote many years ago. Things you can't remember writing, people you've been, you've really like, you know, all of yourselves are different now. You know, many things have happened. You're not that guy anymore, you know, so it's But it's also this, you know, to. It's not, it doesn't feel like the singular message, but it's quite interesting. I think that throughout our life, people tend to be banging on about the same thing throughout. But you know, it's hard to see what that is, at any point along the trajectory, I think really is, which is what's pretty interesting.

1:25:24

Olivia Aherne: Mm hmm. Yeah. And I was gonna, I was gonna ask you all actually about bringing multiple selves, or multiple voices into your work. And specifically referencing yourself or, yeah, bringing back other works, bringing back quotes, footnotes from other works, and how that sort of has changed or materialised in your practice.

1:25:52

Johanna Hedva: I can say, I have a moon in the eighth house, which means that every night that I fall asleep, I die. And when I wake up in the morning, it's like, oh, like, new life who this? like it's very, and it's been

msdnittoI Contemporary

kind of a strange experience to publish this book, which I think, don't you have something that people can get the book discounted right now, if you get the event code? You know the logistics.

1:26:20

Olivia Aherne: I'll mention it at the end.

1:26:21

Johanna Hedva: Okay, great. But yeah, this book of mine just came out is a decade of work, which is a completely staggering fact that I can't really reconcile that I have a decade of work at all, that I survived a decade, that the person that was living those decade, years, is somehow still attached to me. And one of my favourite things that a professor ever said to me was that books are little coffins. And I find that that's true, when they arrive there's something kind of, of the dead speaking to you. But I guess you know, for me, like the dead are always still alive somewhere. So it's not as morbid as the quote, as it sounds. Yeah.

1:27:08

Olivia Aherne: Yeah, just hearing you speak about sort of 20 years of work is making me think of a kind of expansiveness, which Kameelah I mean, your your recent publication, there is sort of text, sentence, words, that bleed over sort of many, many pages throughout the whole book. And you often work in kind of large scale Commission on billboards with text wrapping round. So I just wanted to ask you a bit about that kind of expansiveness.

1:27:36

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: Yeah, and I'll also just say to your last question, I'm always excited about this question, because I get super, super geeked, about talking about revision. Because I think it's something that we are not allowed, as people who produce things to the world, right? so you make an installation, Jesse puts up a really beautiful piece, and then it's supposed to sit there on the wall. And you can never be like, you know, I'm just gonna move this like part over here, because I changed my mind, right? It's frozen for that period of time. And so it is, it is my gripe about all things related to art, which is this insistence that we sort of, like built these, into this language of coffins built this, like

Nottingham Contemporary

coffin of ourselves to put on display every so often, right? And so, with regards to the book, you mentioned, that book is the second edition of a previous book. So I published a book in 2018, I was super geeked, about it, came across the water, and I didn't open it immediately because I was like, I know what's in there, I'm gonna take a break from looking at it and then I open it and I keep seeing like, these random things are just misprinted. And I'm like, Kameelah chill out, like it happens. And then I just flip out at somebody [noise]. So I remember calling printed matter and being telling, talking to them, like pull it off the shelf, burn the books, and he was like, we don't burn books, just like there's this whole process. And I had like a really depressive 2018. Because there's a sense of pride when you put a book into the world. It is finished, it is final. And this is a representation of you, right? And so at the top of 2019 they said, well, you can just fix the book. And I was like, cool, I'll fix the book. And I was like, Well, what if I just like made a whole new book, we called the same thing. And we just talked about the fact that people should have the right to revise their work. So that's what we did. So it was a book that was 176 pages, the new book, which is called no new theories, is 225 pages or 200, it's bigger. But the interesting thing that we did is that I had, was in this interview that ended up being a two year long interview because of the time between when first beginning the next publication, where it's just like basically me annotating on top of different stages of this interview. Because I think it is important for artists, for people who make things in the world to be able to say I can publicly learn, I can put like, we have the right to be leaky. We have the right to move, we have the right to say like yeah, I thought I knew what I was talking about but I don't, or like, I just changed my mind. And so when I think about expansiveness for me and like a, as a short stature person, I feel like when I enter a room, I take up a different amount of space. And so when I think about my art, I'm trying to think about how does my art do what I don't feel like my body does, which is like, take up lots and lots and lots of space. And that's not like a desire for dominance. But it is a desire to sort of experiment to see like, what does a sentence look like inside of a book? What does the sentence look like on a wall? What is the sentence look like projected on the floor? What does a sentence look like if like, we all just linked our bodies, and each had a word and we made a sentence with our bodies? Um, so I used to be a high school teacher. And so much of how I think about expansiveness is like, you're taught to teach by

msdgnittoI Contemporary

thinking about how many different ways can you present the same thing, for every single person, 30 kids in your classroom, how can you present something in enough different ways, where it feels like a personal invitation to every single one of those students? And so I think when I approach making work, it's not that I'm trying to, like, hit on every single possible audience member. But I really am interested in like, what does that dance look like between like, giving and yielding to the audience? or What does it look like to play with form in a way that invites engagement for someone to say, this sentence doesn't belong here. So I'm just going to move it somewhere else in your installation, or that I can say it doesn't belong there, and I can move it somewhere else?

1:31:32

Olivia Aherne: Jesse, anything about expansiveness?

1:31:36

Jesse Darling: Well, yeah, I don't know about expansiveness. I mean, I just don't think about scale. And, yeah. I mean, no, I can't I, I really never like to, you know, I want to talk about many things at once. That's also something I'm trying to do. And if it, you know, many things at once, without kind of like, spinning the wheel until everything gets greyed out, you know, so there can be a kind of the chorus, but not the drone, or whatever. And that is also a matter of the form and something that I'm still practising. But I do think a lot about the edit. And I have like, a lot of, you know, I mean, I have, I've written so much over these years, and a lot of it has been, for example, interviews where, you know, let's face it, you write the whole bloody thing yourself, you have to rewrite the questions most of the time. And then you also do the editing, because it's our own good name on the line. Especially if it's a spoken interview, you look at it, you're like, Oh, I'm just gonna run this through [laughs], you know, but even if it's not, you know, Google Docs anyway, so this, this righting, and yet the idea of publishing, like, a volume of, you know, my greatest hits, like all the clever things I said in public, just makes me want to cringe, cringe, like, also, because, you know, who am I? I'm just some, some, some, you know, do you know what I mean? Like this, this idea that artists should be, you know, experts on their work, or on something or other. But, you know, I really want to resist that. I think my whole career such as it is, and my practice is about resisting this idea that I or anyone

Nottingham Contemporary

should be an expert on anything, or my own work, or do you know what I mean, this, this idea of the expert, like, who needs it? And it I don't know, like, at best, what Kameelah talks about being leaky, I think Hedva's work is also like really exemplary of this, what your job is to, Kind of like be be the be the leaky portal or whatever. Which means it's like the opposite of the of the monolith. But the but the art worlds in both the market and what I call the travelling discourse production industrial complex, you know, that the travelling fair of all the panel discussions and stuff, there's this, you know, this, kind of like trying to form the, the, the artists thinker as commodity, as monolith. And it's really, really exhausting to try and evade it. It's continually like, you know, you're just like, you gotta be like a snake in the water all the time. And every decision you make, has to be about evading that But somehow, still keeping your job because I don't know like, it's, it's a good job in some ways, if this is your job, and we all worked hard to make that happen. Anyway, I'm aware this is a bit off piste. I was just inspired by what Kameelah said about the editing, I very much agree. And it is also formal. It's also, you can also relate it to the question of writing. Yeah.

1:35:11

Olivia Aherne: But I wonder if just in relation to what you were just saying, if one of the strategies is to be a kind of unreliable narrator, or be playing with contradiction.

1:35:22

Jesse Darling: Yeah, totally totally, got to be the unreliable narrator. Yeah. Especially if, you know, you have a subjectivity meaning you're not the, you know, eponymous, straight, cis, white, able bodied man, then you have, then you know, you are in this position where you're supposed to, that's another kind of monolith making, which is also very much at work. And one is also trying hard to evade that, you know, not to not to evade responsibility for what you're trying to say, for those people who suffer like you do, or whatever. But at the same time, yeah, absolutely. The idea of being, you know, the public intellectual expert on this or that experience, or, you know, truth value or whatever, no, no, got to not do that, in service to, for me, like, the whole of human experience is going to come after you. You know, and I think like, that, that does kind of come down to like, a super subjective, like, that's also formal, you know, like,

msdnittoI Contemporary

the unreliable narrator is unreliable, because sometimes they're 15 years old. And sometimes they're 40. They're unreliable, because they're obviously tripping right now. Or because they've lost their mind in a manic episode temporarily, or because or because, you know, and yeah, I think that is definitely a strategy and also something that, you know, I'm, I think I'm actively like trying to deploy, as in in the various voices or whatever, that show up in the work and writing. Yeah.

1:37:15

Olivia Aherne: I wanted to ask you all about Johanna ran a workshop yesterday, which was titled on doom. And, and I wanted to bring this into today's conversation, because in some ways, it feels interesting in relation to the readings, but also your wider practices. Kameelah, your book makes reference to a doomsday, the rapture, and a kind of end of time as we know it. So perhaps Johanna, you could say a bit about doom and your thinking around doom and Kameelah and Jesse as well, if you have any thoughts.

1:37:52

Johanna Hedva: Yeah, yesterday was so lovely. I'm still kind of high from how nice it was to get to talk with people. Yeah, I mean, really, my, what I tried to do yesterday was just try to think of all of the different ways we could think about and talk about doom. I think my kind of premise or where I started from was trying to reposition it as a place to begin rather than a place to end. And thinking of it as a way to kind of measure different kinds of time. So I've been thinking about it, because I mean, as I told some of the people yesterday, so apologies to them for this repeat. But I was at a metal festival in Los Angeles, and my friend and I were kind of discussing how death metal is different than doom metal. And we realised that death metal is fast, and doom metal is slow. And that felt like kind of a profound thing, that death is fast, and Doom is slow. So it's been on my mind. I mean, I think that every generation, as I said yesterday, I think every generation has to reckon with its doom. It kind of looks different, depending on the generation. But it generally is about the same kind of sense or feeling. I think the Doom is quite aesthetic and material, and affective, and psychic as a space. I'm really interested in thinking about the ways that the aesthetic and the political kind of come together in it. That not that they're even

Nottingham Contemporary

connected, but actually that they are the same thing. I think that that's true for anyone for whom you know, for whom their own materiality is necessarily political. So I think about it in that way. Yeah. Yesterday we talked about obviously the Afro-pessimist. I talked about Leila Taylor's book on the Gothic and blackness. I shared some really great musicians I love, sayin Conancherlock, kigi hino, Junko Hiroshige, these people that kind of embody Doom like in their skin and spine, and the sound of it and the colour of it. Yeah, that's what it was. I'm so kind of excited about everything that people talked about yesterday.

1:40:36

Olivia Aherne: And Kameelah, you mentioned a doomsday or rapture or kind of end of time, I wondered if you had any reflections on what this might look like? Or

1:40:46

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: [laughs] if I have a prediction?

1:40:49

Olivia Aherne: Well.

1:40:49

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: you know what's funny, if you look on Wikipedia, you can find a list of like apocalyptic predictions, and I sometimes enjoy just like peeking at them and reading them. Because there's something really fascinating about the predictive quality. It's almost like an algorithmic, predictive quality of being like, if this happens and the world ends. And so I guess, I'm thinking about Doomsday I there, I think there's two points of like, grounding here, which is like, I grew up in a religious, Muslim family, I'm still Muslim, I went to Catholic school, and in addition to that, just have like, a wide range of people in my life from different religious backgrounds. So for me talking about the end of the world, or talking about death, or talking about Doomsday, which is like very Matter of fact, like, yeah, the end, it was just like, there was nothing about it that was scary. And then as I got older, my mom started telling me stories about a friend of hers, whose family member went to Guyana, with Jim Jones, and unfortunately passed away in that, in that mass murder. And so I started being really, I was always interested

msdnittoN Contemporary

in religion, particularly new religious movements, but started getting more interested in sort of like apocalyptic cults and learning more about this notion of like a society that's organised around a specific date on which the world from will end. And when I first moved to New York, there's this guy who was predicting the end of the world, like on May 12. There were always like flyers outside of my apartment when I would collect them, like super giddy about it. So I was fascinated by his certainty. And of course, it didn't happen, not at least in the way that he thought it would, on May 12, but I was sort of like fascinated with sort of this industry, what it felt like, of folks who were predicting the end of the world, and how much I also started attaching that to capitalism, and the ways in which there is an industry for the end of the world, which then led into this other train of work that ended up being around the sort of like, end of the world industry, which are like these luxury survival bunkers, or like these water filtration systems that you can buy now, or like, there's a whole real estate still, that's just about building homes that can survive the apocalypse. And so for the past like year, and some change, I've just been going down this road of like, what are all the ways that people are trying to escape the end. from this thing that I learned about some like artist person made like a basically a dildo that had the remains of a loved one inside, and the notion there is like, no one ever dies, nothing ever ends. And there were there was that in addition to like, a range of other things that are happening, particularly amongst this community, called these life extensionists, and so I got really fascinated by like, the refusal to die, like you're gonna die. Like, that's just what it's gonna be. But there's an entire industry, language, vitamins, scientific research, transhumanism, and this effort to like outlive everyone because you have more capital than everyone. fascinating stuff. And so I think that when I think about Doom, I can't think about Doom without thinking about like, the racial politics of doom and who can survive the apocalypse and who can't, I can't think about the gender dynamics of the who gets to survive the apocalypse, and who can't. And I guess the last point that I'll make here is that when I started learning more about transhumanism, I was fascinated by the ways in which folks were talking about hacking genes and having these superhuman abilities as a way to just basically create like another layer of inequity and what that would actually mean, when at this current moment, people don't have access to basic health care, that people are spending a lot of time trying to

Nottingham Contemporary

extend their life into their like two-hundreds. It's really fascinating stuff. I think something is coming out about it, if I get my act together soon, but it's Yeah, Doomsday is nothing without a conversation about capitalism, and whiteness, to be quite honest.

1:44:46

Jesse Darling: The other thing is that that, you know, like, you can spend as much money as you want, and you can, you know, bunker yourself into your special like, you know, nuclear proof, whatever, but basically, nobody ever found a way to live past, you know, 100 or so. So, you know, it's it's like it's actually wild, I think there was something that I was going to read tonight and didn't because I thought it was better on the page. But anyway, there was some riff, a letter to a translator. And so I was writing to the person who was going to translate that text into Arabic. And the text would be anyway, but I was thinking about the fact that it feels to me like the whole of Western modernity. So white supremacist, Western modernity has been a project to banish death, or at least relegate death to, you know, to only certain people in certain places and the rest of us kind of live, if not forever, not, not the body, but then, you know, the marble statues and these kind of like, objects, the monolith, you know, like, all of these things that are supposed to live forever, or for as damn long as anyone can see from here, you know, and I think, I mean, even statues have, have their death. And some, you know, it turns out that some of these statues are, that, you know, that we've seen this year that they're dying sooner than, you know, perhaps, planned, or, you know, what happens to a statue that's toppled? You know what I mean? So, everything. I mean, I really, I'm not into the idea of doom so much, because I think it I don't know, feels indulgent to me. And I, there was a point where I was very afraid of the apocalypse. Also, because I was having some kind of a, you know, a manic episode. And, well, I'll draw a veil. But, um, it was 2012 and, um, you know, it was very, very unsustainable kind of terror that I lived with, you know, and I still struggle with the trigger of you know, clickbait titles, saying there's going to be an asteroid hitting the earth or whatever, all this kind of stuff, that every time I remind myself that this is an eschatological phenomenon. This is a Christian world narrative, with fire and brimstone, you know, that the end of days. And, for example, in indigenous theology and philosophy, and with that, say, the indigenous

Contemporary

of Australia, or the First Nations of America, have experienced the apocalypse. And nowhere in that thought, and writing and thinking, is there this linear, fucking apocalypse narrative, you know, the Doom, and I'm kind of with Wilderson and Hartman in that, you know, that, that the afro pessimist kind of end of the world is then the beginning of the world. But I don't even, I don't like actually any talk of the end of the world or Doom or the apocalypse, but also because it frightens me but, but that fear, it's just really useful for me to remember that I'm afraid of it because I grew up in a, a white supremacist, Christian dominant colonial Imperial project. And that is also you know, I am riddled with it, like most of us are. So this kind of act of decolonization or, you know, you have to decolonize your own psyche. And think, actually, what, you know, what is this, the apocalypse, a fantasy of like one event that will, in some ways, make things better, like Freud said, you know, what you truly desire is the thing you're most afraid of, this is something weird shit going on with it, you know, and all of the rhetoric and all of the Hollywood movies, you know, Hollywood, the kind of metabolic god of planet America, this is kind of where you see the libido play out of, in some ways, what the what the culture really kind of wants but can't let itself want or won't let self look at. Anyway, I'm getting deep now. Yeah. Anyway, yeah. As death, Doom, like, you know, everything is it's, it's, I feel like we, culture, the state of things, contemporary Western society, whatever, is very dissociated from death. And as such, there's all this doom. Yeah. You know what I mean?

1:49:33

Johanna Hedva: Well, let me just say quickly that one of the main questions we worked through yesterday was who is allowed to be doomed? And who is registered as dooming, or the doomer because this is absolutely a racialized, you know, colonial kind of project and often Doom is leveraged and weaponized by the state to justify certain things, you know, wars and surveillance and genocides. So one of the things we were talking about is exactly like so if Doom is in the body, whose body? Who does it get kind of put upon, like whose bodies sort of have to be kind of inscribed with it against their will? And so that's what I guess I was trying to say with this, like kind of connecting a material with a political or a more abstracted position is like, yeah, Doom kind of comes in as this kind of arm of the state. And yet, then there are

Nottingham University

certain people who are considered signs of doom, or indexes of doom or indicators of the doom. You know, I think in America, that's very clear. You know, no surprise that the coup happened because Georgia had its election, and elected you know some of the first black politicians in that state, so, you know, the people who brought the insurrection to the Capitol, were using this as an example of doom. So I think that's like, one of the things that we were really getting into yesterday was who is allowed to kind of be embodied by and upon whose bodies does it get inscribed? without consent? Or, you know, yeah. Yeah, just to say, Yes, I agree with everything.

1:51:36

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: I just wanted to, is that Okay, Olivia.

1:51:39

Olivia Aherne: Yeah, go ahead.

1:51:39

Kameelah Janan Rasheed: Okay. I just, I'm, Jesse as you were speaking, I was gonna say, I got excited. But, I don't know if I should get excited about Doom, I got excited about what you were saying regarding Doom, about doom. Because I was thinking a lot about this funny thing that I found on Twitter, which was, this person had put a QR code on their headstone. Because they wanted to ensure that whoever passed by the headstone like knew, they knew that that person existed, they knew that that person had importance and it kept making me think about this, like persistence, around expertise, this persistence around like having your legacy live forever. And it kept making me think about the ways in which all the structures and systems that are so terrible, have always lived beyond the people who have been the constructors, because part of like that ongoingness is the way in which like, that's transferred, not only from structure to structure, but from person to person, right? And so there, there's still like, there are things that die, right, like a plant dies, my grandfather dies, like, those are things but it feels like those structures and those systems, those scripts, and those encoded, things don't die. And so that one moment where I saw that QR code, it became this like, weird moment of me being like, that's why this shit keeps going. Because like, just die, like just die. We don't need the QR code. We don't need that,

msdnittoI Contemporary

like, let it die with you. And so I guess one question that keeps popping up for me is like, if we are to think about Afro pessimist language and and, and a conversation around the end also be in the beginning, but also to think about, like Apocalypse, for whom and how many apocalypses, apocalypsi? I don't know, the poor apocalypses [laughs] have happened, that we don't acknowledge, I guess my question is how many endings? There's a Sun Ra song where he talks about the world's already over? Don't you know that, like the world has ended? Like, why are you still talking about the world like we were, we like leave, the world ended. And we're like, in the after part of it. And we're talking about it as if it's like an impending thing. And so it just got me thinking back to our conversations around time, which is like the conversation around the apocalypse, around Doom, there's a conversation around linearity that, as Jesse you said, at some point, on this linear timescale, things will end. And my question always is, like, how, when it comes to language, and texts, how language and texts allows for things to extend far beyond the lifespan of a human, right? far beyond the lifespan of a plant. And there's something really fascinating and scary about the fact that some terrible thing that someone wrote in 17, whatever still lives in 2021, and has a certain impact. So I'm, yeah, I'm thinking about the lifecycle of like, a literal text quite frequently, and I don't, I don't know. Seems like some things just never die when they I wish they would.

1:54:25

Olivia Aherne: And yeah, I mean, I'm super conscious of time. I didn't really want to end on death and doom, but I feel like we've gone full circle back to time and cycles. So I don't

1:54:37

Jesse Darling: Talking of, Sorry, Can I just ask, what's going on YouTube? Is this going on YouTube forever?

1:54:42

Olivia Aherne: This is streamed on YouTube, and there are-

1:54:45

Jesse Darling: Forever you know, until the server farms die, and you know, till the apocalypse? No. Just wondering.

Nottingham Contemporary

1:54:52

Olivia Aherne: That will be a recording available. Yeah. So, just there are no questions from audiences, So I would just like to thank you all again. Jesse, Johanna and Kameelah for tonight's readings and of course for your reflections as well. And before we end, I would just like to mention that our friends at Parrhesiades have kindly offered tonight's audience 25% off Johanna's recent publication that was mentioned, Minerva the miscarriage of the brain, which is a really wonderful collection of plays, performances, essays, I absolutely recommend. My colleague Ryan will put the link to purchase in the chat along with a discount code, which I believe is Nottingham Contemporary. And I would also like to invite you all to our next Five Bodies session which will take place exactly in a month's time. So Thursday, the 11th of March, we'll be welcoming three more wonderful artists, writers, poets, we have Himali Singh Soin, Ariana Reines and Simone White joining us. So I do hope you'll tune in then and thanks again.

Colophon

Curator: Olivia Aherne, Sofia Lemos and Dr. Sarah Jackson

Programme Assistant: Ryan Kearney

Technician: Jim Brouwer and Catherine Masters