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## **Five Bodies**

Live transcript

### **KEYWORDS**

language, feel, contemporary, mother, form, conversation, sound

### **SPEAKERS**

Sofia Lemos, Maureen N. McLane, Jack Thacker, Mirene Arsanios, Lila Matsumoto

Sofia Lemos 00:04

Good evening folks. Welcome. My name is Sofia Lemos, I'm the Curator of Public Programmes and Research at Nottingham contemporary and tonight it is my pleasure welcoming you to Five Bodies, our online poetry programme. For those of you who are tuning in for the first time, Nottingham Contemporary works with artists, with academics, with thinkers, poets, to reflect on how research and practice intertwine in contemporary art and visual culture. Our public programmes and to understand how sensing, feeling, knowing might support different world-making narratives. So, this evening is the last session of our year-long poetry series, which looks at how creative critical practices of attention, invention, and experimentation might help us develop new sensibilities. The programme welcomes some unexpected pairings, drifts, but most importantly, it welcomes multiple voices to reflect on how poetics is not the recognised or given modalities of form, but it's a practice that welcomes creative critical practice, hybrid methodologies and experimental thinking. So, Five Bodies was imagined in conjunction with my colleague Sarah Jackson at Nottingham Contemporary, pardon, at Nottingham Trent University, who has led the Critical Research, the Critical Poetics Research Group since 2015, and with her, I also want to thank my colleagues Jack Thacker and Olivia Ahearne for their support in putting together this year-long poetry series. I'd like to take this opportunity to show our gratitude to tonight's poets Mirene Arsanios, Lila Matsumoto, and Maureen N. McLane, who have kindly accepted to contribute three incredible readings for our session this evening and I would also like to reiterate my thanks to Sarah, Olivia and Jack for their invaluable work,

# msdnittoN Contemporary

developing the sibling workshop series, and of course, a word of thank you to Nottingham Trent University for graciously and generously supporting this event and acknowledge my colleagues James Brouwer, Catherine Masters and Ryan Kearney for the technical support this evening. So, tonight's event includes three 20-minute readings followed by a 5-minute tea break, and a joined conversation with our guests. You're warmly welcome to write your comments, your responses, your thoughts, share your references in the YouTube chat. We also have an AI driven captioning system that can be found on the YouTube chat. If you click that link, it will open a separate window on your browser and within that you can adjust the scale and the layout to suit your requirements. Without further ado, I'm delighted to introduce you to our host this evening, Jack Thacker, who is a Postdoctoral Research Assistant at Critical Poetics at Nottingham Trent University, where he supports the Critical Poetics Research Group. His poems have appeared in numerous magazines including PN Review, Stand, Blackbox Manifold, The Clearing and Caught by the River, as well as BBC Radio 4. He has been a poet in residency at the Museum of English Rural Life and more recently a writer in residency at Lighthouse, Poole. His debut poetry pamphlet, Handling, from 2018 is published by Two Rivers Press. So, thank you all for listening. I hope you enjoyed this evening and I'll turn it over to Jack now. Thank you.

## Jack Thacker 03:31

Hello, and welcome everyone to this Five Bodies event. Thank you for that introduction, Sofia. As Sofia mentioned, my name is Jack Thacker, I'm a poet and researcher and I help to coordinate the Critical Poetics Research Group at Nottingham Trent University, which is led by my colleague Sarah Jackson, and which provides a home for scholars and artists to work across disciplines to explore critical and creative theory and practice. This is the final event in this reading series. So before I introduce our speakers tonight, I'd just like to take this opportunity to thank Sarah Jackson and also our collaborators at Nottingham Contemporary, Sofia Lemos, Olivia Ahearne, and Ryan Kearney, especially, and everyone else involved in organising these events over the past year. I hope you agree, it's been a fantastic series, and of course tonight is no different. In fact, we have an appropriately stellar lineup for you this evening for this final event, and I'm delighted to say we're joined by Mirene Arsanios, Lila Matsumoto, and Maureen N. McLane. But, before I introduce our three readers, I'll just take this moment to give you a brief outline of the schedule for this evening. So first, I'll introduce all three writers before the

# Nottingham Contemporary

readings, so as not to disrupt performances. Then each reader will speak for roughly 20-minutes, after that will be a short break and then we'll return with our guests for a discussion of their work. And we'll wrap up around at 8.3pm UK time. So, it's now my great pleasure to introduce our readers for this evening and I'll start with Lila Matsumoto, who is Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Nottingham. Her recent recent works include the poetry collection *Urn & Drum* and an essay on immigration and folk ritual, which aired on BBC Radio 3. She convenes the Nottingham Poetry Exchange, a programme of poetry readings and seminars. Her research and practice is focused on experimental forms of production and performance of poetry, and the points of contact, historical and potential, between literary practice and visual arts. Lila's second collection of poetry *Two Twin Pipes Sprout Water* is forthcoming from Prototype this year. Following Lila we'll have Mirene Arsanios, who is the author of the short story collection, *The City Outside The Sentence* and more recently the excellent *Notes on Mother Tongues*. She has contributed essays and short stories to *e-flux journal*, *Vida*, *Brooklyn Rail*, *Lithub*, and *Guernica*, among others. Arsanios co-founded the collective *98 Weeks* research project in Beirut, and is the founding editor of *Makhzin*, a bilingual English/Arabic magazine for innovative writing, I hope I've pronounced that correctly. With Rachel Valinsky, she coordinated the Friday nights reading series at the Poetry Project from 2017 to 2019, and her next book, *The Autobiography of Language* is forthcoming with Futurepoem this year. And lastly, we'll hear from Maureen N. McLane, who is a poet, critic, educator, and divagator working in a tradition of lyric and critical inquiry. She has published six books of poetry, including *This Blue*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award in Poetry, *Mz N: the serial*, *Some Say*, finalist for the Audrey Lorde/Publishing Triangle Award for The Believer Award in Poetry, and *What I'm Looking For: Selected Poems*. Her book, wonderful *My Poets*, an experimental hybrid of memoir and criticism, was a finalist for the 2012 National Book Critics Circle Award in Autobiography. She has published two critical monographs on British romantic poets and numerous essays on contemporary literature and culture. The poems have recently appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *Granta*, *PN Review*, and *Bomb*; her most recent essay appeared in *Public Books*. She is Professor of English at New York University, and her newest book, *More Anon: Selected Poems* will be published in July 2021. So, without further ado, I'm going to hand over to our first reader this evening, Lila Matsumoto.

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Lila Matsumoto 07:57

Hi, good evening. Thanks so much Jack for that introduction and my thanks to Sofia and Sarah for inviting me to read and Ryan for the tech and I really look forward to Maureen and Mirene's reading. I'm going to read a selection of things from my last collection of poetry, as well as my upcoming collection, and then some other things on the side. So, I'll begin. Princess of Flexible Bamboos Scattering Light. Resisting the gloss of love's wide eyed lens, scooping deep into my self help muesli, I know I must change my life or otherwise perish. Why does nearly every evening summon us to feelings in the hanging gardens of late scepticism. Morpho Gilsonite and Bishamon in circle, the mountainous situation of my inner scape. Olive Oak, tamaris, Juniper and bamboo, the flowering perennial evergreen of my namesake. See me as bull or ram, as man or mollusk, or I must become my own angle worm and fish myself silly. I'm now going to read a sequence called Pictorial Programme. Pictorial Programme. The dog wanted to go one way, the dog wanted to go one way and I another. The leaves press their five red fingers lightly on the ground. All around us was casual destruction and I don't blame it on the weather. Anyhow, we had gotten used to it and made jokes that felt like having your butt pinched by a friend's partner. I admired the mean of the dog, how in the distance her silhouette looked like a fallen tree: noble and tragic. All of the Pans in the Kitchen. All of the pans in the kitchen were being used to boil cauliflowers submerging the house in a deep mephitic funk. He showed me around entirely relaxed in attitude, lord of the duplex, a sort of constant humming emanated from his body even as he spoke, producing curious and not entirely unpleasant overtones. I had the strong impression that he was an experimental ventriloquist. On top of the dining table was a weightlifting bench because he said 'one should always exercise with altitude'. In the end, I turned down the lodgings. I couldn't imagine the musical group he insisted we form, us housemates. A toppled Release Emanated Waves. A toppled release emanated waves of inexplicable energy in the mathematical Park. From its appearance I gathered it had been hastily abandoned and frozen overnight, and now its contents were splayed out before it like a nervous poker hand. A large and colourful towel intended for a faraway beach, an imitation tequila hat, a paperback, whose pages had rippled together, the title of which I was desperate to discover. As I poked at the book with a Long Branch, my dog's hackles began to rise, giving her body the appearance of an extended cockerels comb. As if on cue, a child shrieked with uncurbed joy in the playground, plunging recklessly down the square

# Nottingham Contemporary

root slide. They Were Amazed at What They Saw. They were amazed at what they saw, a huge self-portrait of the artist dressed like a general sitting proud and amount of voluptuous cushions. Next to it was a work that really made them gasp, a work that had never been seen before having been locked away in the temperature controlled vault of the eremitic, now deceased patron of the arts. The painting was done in the characteristic style in pasto, to the point of pastry, the usual mountains and rushing streams. But when they looked more carefully, a hidden landscape emerged in the dizzying folds of ultra marine. There were two brocaded base retreating, a tender mummy. A mendicant carrying a fresh sense of loss whipped up in tempere and a doorknob wearing a rough signalling the rudderless drift of life. The world is all here, they thought. All Day The Peacock Screamed. All day, the peacock screamed outside the building where the conference was taking place. In one panel, three men spoke with authority about a venerable literary figure. In another panel attendees watch the clip of gorillas performing a waterfall ritual. Lunch was taken on the lawn in the presence of the peacocks dragging their tail feathers, mewling from the parapets shitting. In the afternoon plenary attendants were instructed to form groups of three and to take turns walking slowly around the room with their eyes closed, while the other members of the group performed three actions on their bodies swipe, pat, and jiggle. Later the conference organisers car was found being scratched up by a peacock, which has seen its own reflection in the bonnet. From The Sleeping Body a Branch Had Sprung. From the sleeping body a branch had sprung splitting and growing upward towards the sky. In the profusion of vine leaves and bunches of grapes, a seated man in a crown is brandishing a twiggy finger. He is surrounded by figures standing with beatific expressions, all men mimicking his bossy gesture, always pointing these loaning men and their mercenary so called angels. The next piece was a variation on the theme, but here the man is under the ground, and wears a determined grimace, the Acolytes are nowhere to be seen. I guessed he is some kind of unlikable Titan with a preposterous attitude, punching his way up from the earth, and from the frame of the tapestry. We All Know the Sound of Wine Being Poured is Sleazy. We all know the sound of wine being poured, sleazy each propulsion of liquid galloping eagerly, even cheesely, into the glass. Don't get me wrong, I'm not parched to the promise of effervescence. These were the things most commonly brought to the party. He's so large, you rest them on your shoulder, fragrant boxes, small black books, which no one ever seems to open, riveting too where the guests lineaments, such gorgeous

# msdnittoN Contemporary

crimson pile and velvet silks arranged in august arches. Here a can brick surcoat there a resplendent skirt trailing to the ground, garnished with infinitesimal crystal berries. There are at least four people with wings strapped to their backs. They parroted each other barefoot, their toes in extreme angles, mysterious in their attitudes, no doubt they have compared us to the arrangement of their compositions. In Order to Make Words Pleasurable. In order to make words pleasurable, the feted author said, approach them as spearheads of delicate flint, nap them with antler buttons and soft stone hammers. But I saw her art for what it really was not a punctilious crafting of rare materials, but a reckless haunting of obscure works made flesh in modish lingo. It was a Trixie turn of pen, a vaporous bobble. But who am I to criticise, I too have a searing desire for recognition and have committed textual crimes in the name of a more proper. I have plumbed my own life for material, dressed up it's feeble out minds and have stuffed descriptions of sensual delicacies in every chapter. Well, I bought her book at the launch, and she signed her name in it, and not on the title page, but on the front cover, which showed two mamas sparring on a house of cards. Okay, I'm going to now read something quite different, which is a kind of, I was given a challenge to write a poem about a band that I like. So I chose to write about the band beat happening. I quote some of the lines from a song and I'm going to raise my hand like this as if giving an oath to show when I'm quoting from the song. So this poem is called foggy eyes. Hippie stationwagon parked outside the university with a licence plate from the state of Washington. In the contour of the Blue Mountain depicted there, I traced an Alpine possibility of artistic communitarianism. Upstate New York 2002. On my Walkman, Beat Happening, their eponymous album, Beat Happening. Heather Lewis, Bret Lunsford, Calvin Johnson. In their songs, I sowed the seeds of self fashioning. The lecturer of Russian literature, who lived in my dormitory said, sure I know Calvin. He was on solo tour with his dead pan baritone. She said, she used to run a hip hop show on the college radio station at Evergreen State University Olympia Washington, where Calvin also had a show in where he started K records. What I saw as culture coming from the periphery seemed small and intimate. In the hallway of the dormitory. I was a satellite in outer space, receiving signals from DIY indiepop. This idea felt simple, dreamy and true. We passed the house of a dentist, its clapboard walls painted black on our way to Calvin's house, aka headquarters of K records. We didn't want to go in, it was a kind of sightseeing. Though we resolutely denied the genre of music tourism, casting



# Nottingham Contemporary

ourselves instead as nostalgic cartographers, mapping our audio bliss onto the streets of the city. Its very ordinary mailboxes, bus stops and weed sprouted sidewalks rarified as witnesses to a jangly lo fi insurgency. Olympia Washington, 2004. Foggy eyes. Heather on vocals and drums. It would be a travesty to call it a soundtrack to our trip. It was the summery bone of it. Open up your eyes and speak your mind. Leave your youth far behind. We were in the northwest, we had rented a car, we were 21 we wanted to rewrite Dharma Bums from the point of view of four riot girls. The album cover shows a cat on a rocket ship USA waving a pole under the arc of a sun. Middle class adolescence in America in the late 90s. Semaphored in a song from 1985, look in the mirror and travel far away. The world they see is enough to make you cry. Its fervoured beat excites the horizon of a sheeny future, agitated and mixed unknowable as something other to the logo of the chemical and materials company. And its incongruous name Grace, that I daily looked up at waiting for the school bus. It's all caps sans serif, austere, clean and menacing at odds with the shambolic and candy jamboree streaming through my headphones. South Florida 1999 seemed marginal to the true suburban angst located in songs from the official pop and punk fringes of DC and Boston, Seattle and Chicago. Is this why I insisted on going north to study? Financed by my work conscripted father, keep your eyes shut and live your life someone else will pay the price. Upstate New York 2006. Three bands on k records on tour played in the basement of the student housing co op, where we sat on the floor among cables and zines. On faux-Persian carpets, dirtied and clumped by past footprints and beer. The opener was a guy with deer antlers strapped to his head, followed by a girl who performed a pop opera with a line of paper dolls and a string cast between her guitar and amp. The headline was a guy who made his fist into a silhouette of a giraffe and sang to it. Was this data reincarnate, anti art? Probably not. Was it purposeful without a definite purpose? Maybe. My liberal arts education sponsored by a multinational automotive manufacturer had held and hardened me to parse the tunes as nothing more than artefacts, emissions of a pleasure industry willfully tuneful, artfully dejeune, codes in a fixed matrix of late teenage rebellion received by my pampered ear. I put down the books to honour the utopias, inscribed in the music, self change, sociality, experiment. Heather's urgent beats turned us on, proliferating elsewhere, not as places but transits we're thinking something new, edging borders and features we couldn't name yet. Foggy eyes looking at foggy eyes, foggy eyes going bang, bang, bang, bang. The song is a cypher and time capsule, a cat on a rocket

# msdnittoN Contemporary

ship crashing through the romantic mist to bring messages of hope through space. Okay, I'm now going to read four very short poems from Urn and Drum, which was my last book. So just bear with me while I get it up here. This poem is called Meteor. Is it only interested in following form? is that it's altering concern? If there is it and me, do I initiate the form of encounter, I don't mind. But after all this, the delirium of contact set to un-casual music. Is it up to me now to articulate what I think is its shape and velocity? To what extent is it sustained by longing? To what extent is that longing mine, it's better, I'm better, it's better. If the fluctuations come closer and closer together, is that important or not important to its present position? This poem is called Landish. You read in the news that The Weird Sisters are no longer subsidised by the Charity Commission. We must now work overtime to patrol the gates of Hades and ensure the two headed dog, you forget its name, is fed four times a day, or is it twice, two feeds per head? Lest the unhappy from unhappy foreign places, they who have unusually strong powers of flight, jungle into a swarm and knit us all in a complicity of shame and trouble. Is the standing stone worth the skirting by the plough? Should the doses of anxious attention be administered, wittingly or unwittingly, be up for an annual review? A white sheet escapes the clothing line in streaks across the field. You have never seen such a joyful thing. I'll do anything for my baby fig tree. If it presses his hands forlornly against the windowpane wanting to join the yellows and pinks, I'll tear down the whole house with my ungainly hammer. It's true what you've heard, we let our animus run riot, we let our soapbox become a prostate and play golf in yards of unmitigated sun. We boil owl pellets with impunity, and insert fingers inside of rotten fruit and really rummage around in there. Roll on John or Jack or any of you towheaded boys, fall back down to earth on your airbrake outside Aztec softplay. Toss your cares over the transom into mother Big River. Turn the sun's bright wheel, select all, rename all in our garden trumprump, in our garden forsaken, rogue russet symphony, September tomatoes, diluvian dream, the blight in the gooseberry fool and song of the oyamel. This one is called Got to get your love. Tizzy steals an airbag from a truck rocking a spike with a mullet. My project Packing Nada. I shave your name into my skull, get hit with an egg or a jar, ships into unthought no. There but for the grace of nobody, I'm a bush, a bush, a bush. No, she didn't edit dope, congos and collapsed eggs on, flame retardants in her pants. kitsch. satchels. page. strikeout. Once the terminator tells the entire kitchen staff to gather around Who's he to say, to tell us to do a stupid dance? Instrumental for vegetable. Nevertheless, I acknowledge your



# Nottingham Contemporary

rucksack following and the use of the obsession with sex as a weapon against spiritual bankruptcy. I feel many uncertain breaches with all kinds of cheesy comestibles. Cheesy but not insurmountable, maybe an ego echo. She hosted the hell out of that tapas party, even though we saw straight through her lie, whalebone on the mantelpiece, not really from Colonsay. So this is my final poem. Thank you for listening. I will try to find it. It's called Obad. The city is a body ringing itself a sound. Two voices, three and clarion getting louder carrying down the street. Remind yourself of death. Each time an elevator opens as the song that implores in four four the watch to be turned facedown. Pain is always circumscribed in music's sweetness, calling origin and disappearance of sound. Is the city then not a stance against the contingency of ends, dorming everything before the raid? Tarrying in the Opus, food everywhere spilling out, gleaming globes of fruit, white Silver Star lights garlanding the street, also a charm to cream wealth. The highest watching of an earlier wood, of flesh seared insensate. Do you live the things or observe them? What voice effusive and quick, thin and coercing, from door or window to the sleeping city? What must you sing? Thank you. Thanks for listening.

**Mirene Arsanios 27:53**

Hi, it's weird to see your face repeated. So, thanks for that reading, Lila, it was beautiful. Thank you, Jack, and Sofia for hosting this event, and Ryan and Catherine for your technical help in setting it up. So I'm not exactly a poet, so I won't be reading poetry. I'll be reading mainly an essay, like an essay that I wrote a year ago. And then a more recent piece, which is a score. So the essay, and they both sort of are connected to the question of language and mother tongues. Sorry, that's my son in the background, you might hear him in and out. So I will start with notes on mother tongues. I'll read for about 10 minutes, and then I'll read the score which is about six minutes. So Notes on Mother Tongues. My language has a baby whose language is without words. My language communicates affection to her baby by fluttering her lips, twisting her tongues babbling inchoate sounds. Syllables her baby seems to understand. Her baby won't stop laughing. My language is hilarious. My language is searching for a language capable of expressing in words the magnitude of the love she feels towards her son. Soon he will demand words of her. This inevitable human expectation makes my language anxious. My language is an anxious language. Languages who become mothers typically passed down the language their mother spoke to them, a so called mother tongue. But my language doesn't speak such a language. My language

# msdnittoN Contemporary

speaks many languages - French, Italian, Arabic, Spanish and English, none of which she can call home. Like other languages originating in histories of colonisation, my language always had a language problem, something akin to the evacuation of a first or native tongue, a syntax endemic to the brain and to the heart. When she has time, my language barely has any time, my language wasted, googling etymologies. Etymology, analysis of a word to find its true origin, etymos, true, real, actual. Native and nation share a common entomology from the Latin *nativos* - innate, produced by birth. But nations belonging to the nation state system aren't innate. They are the outcome of ongoing territorial wars, manmade borders, oblivious to pre existing ecosystems in which language and land evolved symbiotically. The nation of the modern settler colonial nation state is premised on the eradication of groups and languages predating its formation. It turns land into territories that stand for nations' monolithic identity. Nationalism, monolingualism. Native languages, like other endangered species, are going extinct. On January 4 1984 for example, the last speaker of Yavitero, an Arawakan language spoken near the Atabapo river in Venezuela, died together with the last Yavitero words. My language isn't dead, but she suffers episodic bouts of systemic melancholy. She comes from two nations, Lebanon and Venezuela, that are terrible at being countries. Economically devastated nation states on the brink of irrecoverable collapse. As she writes this, people in Beirut are rioting, torching symbols of wealth accumulation, like banks and partially built condos promising luxurious lives in English. The government has defaulted on its debt, 50% of the population is predicted to sink below below the poverty line and into hunger, prices of bread and other basic goods have skyrocketed overnight, all of it compounded with dysfunctional public infrastructures in which basic services like water and electricity are irregularly supplied, if at all. In Venezuela, in May 2020, the inflation rate was 2,296.6%. My language can't entirely blame her countries or their criminally corrupt political class for their dramatic failures of being countries. Formerly colonised territories inherit from the mother country a poisoned legacy, whereby their survival is contingent on the adoption of a state system and the enforcement of a colonial language. Fanon, an author who has shaped my language's understanding of herself, talks about the pitfalls of national consciousness in *The Wretched of the Earth*. There he describes how the bourgeoisie of recently liberated countries do terribly at emancipation. To become a country is akin to replicating colonialism's social and economic disparities. My language calls Beirut in English on the weekends. We are

# Nottingham Contemporary

becoming Venezuela, her aunt sighs. [child cries] I'm having, my son is having a meltdown. I'm sorry. My language doesn't know what to say. Her two countries converge along a godless, collapsing nexus. Subjected to US sanctions, considered threats to the stability of their respective geographical regions, Lebanon and Venezuela are paying the cost of their non alignment. Crumbling economies and devastated ecosystems are political in nature and nature is never natural. All mother tongues are ideological. In Beirut, posters of Hugo Chavez represented next to Hassan Nasrallah are pasted on the highway's serpentine cement walls. The poster says the symbols of international resistance. Triangulations between Lebanon, Iran and Venezuela haunts America's worst nightmares while people on the ground struggle for survival. My language speaks of her countries in statistical and geopolitical terms because she wants to talk about love. My language was born out of a love story between her two inoperative countries. She emerges in the 70s, in specific bodies, that of her mother, a tall, fair skinned, black haired Venezuelan secretary, and her father, a Lebanese diplomat living in Caracas. My language remembers the glamour of an era she never lived. Her imaginary was marked by colourful images such as an orange Corvette her mother drove to multilingual parties where finely dressed guests donned rock heavy rings on neatly manicured fingers holding martini glasses and seafood canapes from the French. While my language's mother and father were falling in love, people had started killing each other in Beirut, marking the onset of a Civil War, waged from 75 to 1990, spanning my language's entire childhood. Words to describe the emergence of love amid such brutal juxtapositions keep escaping my language. My language is convinced that her parents loved each other, a third world glamorous romance driven by class aspirations. My language suspects that her parents' love was largely fueled by the desire to form a norm, own property and reproduce a language they would educate and raise according to the precepts of their class. My language became a language among the middle class of two broken developing nations. She remembers the words her mother lacked when yearning for objects she couldn't have. My language would sit on her mother's bed, while her mother browsed through the pages of a hefty jewellery magazine, turning my language into a powerless witness of her burning desire for rocks. My language remembers the black glossy backgrounds against which the rings were photographed, the way she tried hard to make sense of the difference between one ring and another, how the chiselling of the stone resulted in variations of glow, which according to her mother, was proportional to the

# msdgnittoN Contemporary

size of the ring. Her mother longed for a wealth she didn't have while living in the fear that the wealth she did have might be taken away from her. She despised Chavez with an intensity equivalent to her desire for gold. My language must have been 18 when Chavez came to power. She remembers trying to make sense of her mother's revulsion at his never ending empathic speeches, what he claimed he was fighting for and against. Although my language's 18 year old self wasn't particularly politicised, she remembers thinking that someone who granted land titles to indigenous tribes and declare their languages heritage couldn't be that bad. Later, after her mother's death, my language honed her understanding of context, acquiring words like class, socialism, and capitalist accumulation. When her mother died, my language firmly positioned herself on the left end of the ideological spectrum, to the antipodes of where her mother stood. My language is engaged in the necessary but difficult enterprise of developing a language through which she can diagnose herself as a symptom of history. She believes that she can put the stories of her conditions into words, the story of how she became a language without a mother tongue. My language leans towards analytical language. She sometimes confuses abstraction for liberation, liberation for self dissolution. My language doesn't belong to a single body. She isn't an individual language. There is nothing particularly special about my language. My language doesn't talk of herself in the first person because she doesn't feel ownership over the self whose body she transiently inhabits. Her sense of self is tenuous. My language could be anybody. She prefers to talk of herself in the third person. Self scrutiny or the practice of incriminating what is closest to you comes more easily to those who already experience a double consciousness, in Dubois' term. Fanon writes, consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third person consciousness. My language doesn't pretend to know what it means to suffer a white gaze on black skin. She can't possibly know. But when she speaks, her voice, whether in French, English, or Arabic, is unhomed, lacking a centre - a dance of perspectives blurring her most vital intuitions, as if colonialism, an internalised, devaluing gaze, had hijacked my language's ability to access herself in language. My language isn't argumentative. She believes that her lack of a primary language is the result of personal experiences, compounded by structural circumstances, but she can't prove it. I cannot demonstrate what my language is unable to prove. I speak of my language in the third person because knowing my language intimately means accepting the inherent split that exists between us, a dialectic of embodiment

# Nottingham Contemporary

and estrangement that defines our relationship. My language is wary of my efforts, she doesn't fully trust my ability to come up with a language that convincingly demonstrates that certain platitudes, such as everything is connected, are in fact true. I too have misgivings about my language, she can turn against me at any moment and deprive me of my words. She doesn't know that at night, while she's asleep, I'm awake, striving to come up with a syntax that can hold in a single sentence antithetical histories of ownership and dispossession, sentences in which the victim is also the perpetrator. So I'll stop the essay here, and then I will read the score that I wrote recently called How to heal language with words. So it's my ongoing reflections on the many forms, or the many relationships that I have to language. So just gonna drink a little bit. When a language loses its last host, the body through which its syntax materialises, it dies. Language death is typically the outcome of a long attritional process. Some of the causes include ecocide, a natural calamity like a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, ongoing wars, economic collapse, a relentless history of colonisation, a devastating heartbreak, or wildfires. A linguicide is a linguistic suicide, a situation in which speakers of a language gradually let the social and economic forces of the present dictate the fate of their syntax. When a syntax becomes obsolete and loses its last speakers, it is released into an energetic field in which time doesn't apply, but frequencies persist. Now, relax your tongue. In a few sentences, describe the feeling or thoughts that arise when I say, relax your tongue. Although I'm using the imperative tense, you do not need to do as I say, the score isn't meant to be performed. If you perform the score, expect disappointment when you realise that the correspondence between words and the actions they designate as fictional. When I say relax your tongue, I mean, in how much pain are you? Pain in the sense suffering inflicted as punishment for an offence, from Old French peine, from Latin poena, penalty, retribution, indemnification. On a spectrum ranging from utter vitality to total decay, where do you situate your languages health? In other words, how much pain do you have? Find a system to quantify your pain that excludes numericals. Calculate the ratio between the losses you have incurred and the physical pain you are feeling. Who owns your debt? What is your pain paying for? This score presupposes that at some point you experienced one or more ruptures, a parting, a breakdown, an excruciating moment of dispossession. You were left without words. Think of the intersection of your material condition and your internal life. Fear of war lodged in the chest, precarity stiffening your hips, the repressed somatically resurfacing. Some call the convergence

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between the external and internal world trauma, an event imprinting itself on you, an immaterial incision. Score from the Old Norse skora, make an incision. A traumatised language is at pains finding words to express its pain. Then try pluralising your pain. Don't be fooled by its individual manifestations. No one understands me. Although singular, your pain is also collective. It belongs to a larger historical matrix you momentarily embody. Find a language to describe the manifestation of the familial, patriarchal and colonial histories expressed in your trauma. Avoid growing attached to your trauma. Avoid using possessive pronouns. My trauma this, my trauma that. Don't spend all your money on Infrared Sauna sessions. Collect your sweat and your toxins. Make words out of them. Remember the last time you said I can't find my words. Describe in a foreign language with this loss provoked in you. What parts of your body did it bring into focus? How suffocating or alternatively, liberating is the blur of wordlessness? Describe your symptoms before you can enjoy them. Consider pain as information pointing to the inadequacy of your current language. Consider pain as a language in formation. What is your pain telling you? Consider pain as a form of orientation. Where is your body taking you? Consider pain as the lack of words needed to describe your pain. Search for a language that can sustain verbal scarcity or its opposite, logorrhea. Familiarise yourself with different healing traditions; naturopathy, homoeopathy, acupuncture, iridology, holographic crystal therapy, sound therapy, craniosacral therapy, esoteric medicine. Take notes of the lexicons they utilise, how x helps unblock and support the flow of energy, how every frequency of light is a signal conveying specific information, how stagnation is at the root of all illnesses. Search for a language you can imagine. Imagine a language for your pain. Imagine a language to heal your language. Sleep in a temple like the Greeks. If too ill to get to a temple, elect a proxy who can sleep in a temple on your behalf. Expose yourself to the sunlight. Cure your condition with a colour, red for anaemia, for example. If the damage predates you, hand it over to the gods. Reach for a syntax to communicate with your ancestors. Sleep, for example, is a healing language. Record yourself talking in your sleep. Translate the language you use at night to the one you use during the day. Say mother tongue in your mother tongue. In the advent of the absence of a mother tongue, forgive your mother. Let go of your cynicism for the word healing. Challenge the understanding of health as something you own and can pay for. Reckon with the fact that capitalism is the ultimate illness. That no healing can ever derive from its matrix. Think of a language to articulate these metabolic disorders. Think of health as the opposite of



# Nottingham Contemporary

wellness. Think of the ways in which health is distributed, how it affects the poor, how it affects the rich. Think of a language in which healing is divorced from capital. How would you say healing divorced from capital in such a language? Think of health and illness as a single system, the same currency. Think of another word for think. Think of another word for pain to describe your pain. Pay back your debt. Let go of the idea that pain will subside. Place your finger at the centre of the crack splitting your tongue halfway. Can you detect a beat? Some say that languages have no existence without people. Do not believe them. Your language will outlive you. Believe that you are made of light. Expose your tongue to the sun. So that is the score and I think I'll stop here. Thank you all for listening.

**Maureen N. McLane 49:02**

Hi all, good evening or good afternoon or good early morning, depending on where you are. It's a delight to be here and to be joining you after hearing Lila's and Mirene's phenomenal readings. I'm Maureen McLane, and I want to thank very much Nottingham Contemporary for for inviting me, and Sofia Lemos and her team, Ryan Kearney for his help with the tech and Jack Thacker, our wonderful host, guide and shepherd. So I'll be reading some poems from previous books and then a few from a current project. And I'll start with a poem called envoy. Go little mind book and blow her head off. Make her wretch and weep and ache in the gut. Make her regret everything about her life that doesn't include me. And since we're being hosted by Nottingham Contemporary, it seemed to me appropriate to read a poem in which the title features of word contemporary is a poem called Mz N Contemporary. And this is from a book called Mz N serial, and it tracks the misadventures and wayward thoughts and experiences of a character, Mz N. So Mz N Contemporary, and there are actually a couple of figures that appear in the poem. Hannah Arendt the philosopher, and the artist? Tino Sehgal and the choreographer and director, Yvonne Rainer. Mz N tries each day very hard to be contemporary. One must be absolutely contemporary. They've harangued her for over a hundred years, and who is she to object? She admires, after all beyond Rimbaud, Yvonne Rainer, who in an interview somewhere said something like, I am so happy to have been able to be contemporary. Or was it she was happy to have made an art wholly contemporary? Well, you're too young to think so much Yvonne said to Mz N about death. Mz N felt oddly abashed, but what to do? You thought whatever you thought about. That's an evasion the cognitive therapists could flush out

# msdnittoM Contemporary

of Mz N very swiftly with their meta mind techniques, and surely Zen Buddhists and their American epigones would also say, let the thought pass through, just observe the thought as it passes. That was one of many mistakes Mz N kept making. She held on to a thought as to the sharp end of a knife, which puts her in mind of an old Setswana proverb, Ellen Kuzwayo taught her, Mmangoana o tshwara thipa ka fa bogalend, the child's mother grabs the sharp end of the knife. But Mz N was not a good enough mother to her thoughts. They raged and sliced her barely surviving for years until they didn't. A thought isn't irrevocable, Arendt said. Only action. Mz N would take action against her thoughts. You think too much her sister said which meant, why don't you chill out? Why not? Mz N was no riot girl. There was no club she could join to align herself with weird sisters or brothers. The three punkish kids in high school were heroes in her private Pantheon but they like odd gods were remote as a loon calling from a far Adirondack lake. Oh, there is a loon on the lake I look at right here right now. Now I am being contemporary. I can bring the now right into this poem. And when I say as I now do, with how sad steps o moon that climb'st the skies. I am still very contemporary, which is to say, I am alive. As long as this poem. I and the loon and the moon are alive. All the artists Mz N knows who are alive want to be contemporary. It takes effort to be contemporary, simply being alive doesn't cut it. One artist made a piece called This is so contemporary, which is elegant and funny like him, Tino Sehgal, a piece both contemporary and a critique of the enforcement of the law of the soon to be obsolete now, which consumer culture and deep structural forces of finance capital sustain. Or so Mz N's been told. O tempora o mores. Dance and political economy and Game Theory are intricate choreographies of the now. Critique is dead. Poetry is dead. Tino told her no one in Europe reads books. It is contemporary to ironise the contemporary but in a light way. No one bothers anymore with the past. There is no longer an Oedipal rage or pathos to fuel the now sprung from the paternal then. Sometimes depth is just depth. Brecht said to Benjamin when depth was still an option. Mz N's deep inwardness is positively German, an unfashionable Innerlichkeit best cordoned off in the foreign dead field of lyric inwardness an effect of repression, but hey, don't fence me in. The little dogie of Mz N's soul cried to the post modern cowboys lassoing up the language of reference and branding it for sale. Sometimes Mz N even feels conceptual. What is a concept? What is a conceptual artist, an artist with a concept. Some days one can't help being Horace and writing an ars poetica. All day Mz N has been eating cherries of a kind she first saw in Cambridge 1989 ish when her friend

# Nottingham Contemporary

Polly with higher standards for fruit and men and clothes, went to the beautiful shop on Huron Avenue and bought these golden cherries I now eat as my memory is the fact of my being alive and her and you too. And the cherry ripe I gave my love and that stone I gave my love still ring that song that cherry song still ripe in our live mouths. I thought I'd read a poem that takes wing from a Sappho fragment, fragment 16 that gets translated variously but one stab at it is some say a host of horsemen, a horizon of ships under sail is most beautiful, but I say it is whatever you love, I say it is you. So this poem is called Some say. Some say a host of horsemen, a horizon of ships under sail is most beautiful and some say a mountain embraced by the clouds and some say the badass booty shaking shorties in the club are most beautiful and some say the truth is most beautiful. Dutifully singing what beauty might sound under stars of a day. I say what they say is sometimes what I say. Her legs long and bare, shining on the bed. The hair, the small tuft, the brown langour of a long line of sunlit skin I say whatever you say I'm saying is beautiful. And whither truth, beauty, and whither whither in the weather of an old day sucker punched by a spiral of arctic air blown into vast florets of ice binding the Great Lakes into a single cracked sheet. The aeroplanes fly unassuming over. Oh, they eat and eat the steel mouths and burn what the earth spun eons to form. Some say calamity, and some catastrophe is beautiful. Some say porn, some jolie laide. Some say beauty is hanging there at a dank bar with pretty and sublime. Those sad bitches left behind by the horsemen. I thought I would read a poem that actually was published in a journal founded by by our host, Jack Thacker, in the Journal Eborakon, and I was honoured to be included in that journal some years ago and this is a poem called Seal Cock. When you said seal cock, I heard seal talk, frozen stiff, four dozen packed in a box in the ice cream meat truck in the Arctic. Open the box. It was inarguable what they were, you tossed them to the dogs who loved them. A vegan here you can see you'd eat meat and white bread all year up north. No way not to eat what you have to and live if not like it. Oh, cheerful poems about complicities. Um, I thought I'd read a few poems from a manuscript in progress. This one is called Interval Notation. This was going to be an essay on Guillaume de Machaut, inventor of the first wall of sound. This was going to be about a kind of open fifth that you can't modulate your mind out of a friend to whom I submitted, with whom I shared. I have loved some conductors, not others and have been myself conducted, and not only by myself. Is the conductor a dictator? Let us salute the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. The submission to a world of co-created sound, that kind of

# msdnittoN Contemporary

ecstasy I can get behind, beside myself, standing out myself, into and toward you. Call it participation. Call it reciprocity, the linguistic circuit become choral. The kinds of listening we do as sound resound. Everyday we throw our voices. Some days they are notated and some hours we throw our throats at printed notes the staves catch. I would never be a good jazz singer, the state judge said, I was unsuited to the vocal jazz ensemble. It was a matter of personality. Did he mean whiteness? Did he mean tightness? We were almost all white up there in the snow, ba do dee do, the flat foot floo de floo de floy floy. Where was Alice Coltrane? Where was my love? Where did our love go? We can love John Cage's lecture on nothing and Cecil Taylor's calling out of Cage on jazz. Whos silence, who's silencing? Are these unmusical questions? Most musical most melancholy bird a nightingale? Is not that said Coleridge, exasperated by Milton, and Wallace Stevens never heard a Nightingale though yes, he several times said Blackbird. Singing in the dead of night, singing in the dead. Oh fly all your life a floy floy. Is every poem a conversation poem and K every concert a composition? Ruth Crawford Seeger transcribed and notated so precisely below Max's recordings of black singers that they could not use those first transcriptions for their songbook. Unplayable they were by the general and yet what fidelity, what respect for the singers of tales. When I was sad in the 90s I didn't listen to Liz Phair. I didn't listen to Nirvana. I didn't listen to Belly or Leadbelly, it was Gorecki why? An orchestral business within the intestines of life. A tuning up toward. Some days one sounds to an inner voice, barely audible. A specific interval closes Machaut's mass, perfect and just and open, notated in a new style. I think since we're being welcomed by Nottingham Contemporary, maybe a poem that conjures a walk with friends in and near the Peak District might be appropriate. I went with some Irish friends long resident in the UK, in Sheffield and Newark. And this is one of the precipitates of that experience, a poem called Every Place is Also Another. Clouds mount over the Midlands. The clear day you for walking you wanted is gone. The power stations cooling towers, the windmills, the oaks, the suburbs. This is Brexit territory, this remain. One sees almost everything from the window of a train. The Bronze Age stone circle, the Nine ladies, the King stone some yards off - no one knows what anything means though we pay good money and a licencing fee to hear. You sit and vape on one of the nine. A committee's poisoned the intrusive volunteers. A light rain. You scorn the rhododendrons, invasive. The birches encircle the circle and beyond, whortleberries, hurtleberries bilberries, the low pointy leaved bushes unbearing berries till June or is it July, on a high plateau near Sheffield,

# Nottingham Contemporary

opening onto Skatutakee Mountain, it's blueberried ridges, New Hampshire raining the mind away. Is this a general rain? You talk of cricket as a foreign game. The English, their summers, their whites, these green fields, these Meadows, the yellow shock of fields of rape. The mediaeval contours of strip farming, binding the land into narrow bands of shaded greens. Quakers lie buried nearby and their light. Someone's tied, someone's left a ribbon tied to a low twig by the graves - a May Day relic. It is time to look into the migration patterns of the region's birds to see how changing conditions affect the prospects for survival. Poem called Snow. Snow on the daffodils, sirens and a whitened sky. A world where Yes, justice. A world where no, this. Every man thinks himself immortal, death a portal to fuck the police, riots by definition, exciting. Movement itself life. The Greeks didn't have quite to say but we are motionless, the snow drifts, the sun traces a dim arc across the sky. A world of pointing, the given boilingly remade. There's a tear in my throat. I call it you. My voice box programmed, an acceleration of dust, mass noun mounded, Burial Rites the crows observe, the small dead fish floating for days in the lake. The heavy trucks roll by, new logs heaved in the well, future burning. Palm trees. Everywhere today, the irises insisted on waving their blue flags, hairy tongued things with mouths hanging open as if to fuck the air. Oh la la spring and dying. The usual song. Every flower in a garden is a sign of a complete failure, the landscape designer declared. Why not select the trees? They take a long time to die, and then can die only halfway for a long time. For a long time, be half alive. And I'll close with a poem called Moonrise. The moon rose in the sky as the moon rose in the poem with the new held in the lap of the old, and we talked about the weather, an imminent disaster forstalled since we were together. Comrades, I am with you under this very full moon. And we shall not yet set forth but we'll talk about the shape of things and thereby shape this hour, this day if not this life. Are you depressed? Does a reflection of bright objects themselves reflecting brighter objects, pulsing energies, make you cry your face toward the darkening sky? Are you too always mooding the air, sulphurous or snow cleaned? Wind washed, particulated with microplastics. I cannot see what I breathe except when I freeze. There's a streak on the lake of a yellowy white you could drown in for real. Please don't. All you believers in total immersion. All you who hope yet to surface, I salute you. I on a far shore but thinking of you as no wind tears the bare branches away. There's a stillness and another stillness. There's a whiteness whitening the grey. There's a phone as plain as day in the dawning night, an impersonal rock drawing the waves far away to their end. You

# msdnittoI Contemporary

wanted real things, food and trucks and diapers and Okay, a moon, a baby says good night to. Good Morrow. I haven't given up yet. We haven't. The connectivity is good. Today, every conversation found an open channel. Thank you.

Jack Thacker 1:09:06

Hello, everyone. Welcome back. Delighted to be joined now by Maureen, Mirene and Lila for a discussion about what we've just heard and their work, their thinking, their practice more generally. I was actually just struck by something you said Lila and you mentioned Maureen's mention of poetry and the conversational. So I thought to start this conversation. We should start there. And we'll begin with a question about the conversational in poetry. So perhaps Lila, you could get started on this? What does the conversational mean for you in your work? Does it feed into it in some way? Or does it feed out of it in performance? What does poetry in the conversational mean for you?

Lila Matsumoto 1:09:58

Yeah, I kind of floated that question in the break, and I don't have any fully formulated thoughts, but it just struck me that all of our kind of works today, there's something kind of discursive about it, I think in different ways, perhaps in similar ways. I can't speak for either of them. So I'd love to hear what they, Maureen and Mirene, think. But I think in my work, I've been thinking a lot about music and sound. And in those, the sonic qualities being conversational. So I'm thinking about, like, improv, different tones and things like that. I play music as well. And yeah, I just been thinking about how poems can communicate or attempt to reach out to audiences through kind of tones, and rhythms and things like this, um, which, obviously not original thoughts. But so in one of the poems I read, Foggy Eyes, I just found that an interesting challenge to think about my naive, unarticulated enthusiasm for music, and how I could talk about that in a poem, which is all about thinking about form. So, I really enjoyed that challenge, to kind of actually combine a conversation about music, which is, you know, a shared activity, through a poem, which is also can be a shared task. But yeah, I was really intrigued by Mirene's kind of essay, which draws in so many different ideas from thinkers and Maureen's wonderful poems that are kind of a patchwork of quotations from others, as well as kind of I love that phrase that you use Maureen about on the wing of Sappho. So yeah, I would be so interested to hear what both of you think



# Nottingham Contemporary

about kind of conversations as well in your poetry. So I'll hand over to you two.

**Maureen N. McLane 1:12:02**

I could jump in, I suppose if that seems good, as we we're slightly having a zoom enabled conversation here. Yeah, I was so I love the long piece. I don't know if you're calling it a poem, Lila, about the band and the way that you were threading, questions of music and autobiography. And I think, for me that that question of conversation, some of that comes down to, you know, with whom is one in conversation, with what artistic forms, political forms, community exchanges, and also what poets and what histories and partly I had in mind Coleridge's conversation poems, you know, supposedly, the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Coleridge et al, you know, birthed this genre, I'm sure we can find many conversation poems in other nodes of world literary culture. But since they subtitled, some of their poems, a conversation poem. That sense of sociability and friendship that a poem might carry, is very, very appealing to me. And, and that sense too of how one's writing might be in conversation with other forms too, whether it be music, whether it be political philosophy, or theory, and how that might be threaded through one's work. And so it was another aspect of what fascinated me with Mirene's two pieces too, this sort of threading and putting into active conversation, things that until each of you organises and specifies them, didn't exist. So I think that is just such a vibrant way to think about composition, as well as what happens beyond the world of composition and what happens in us in social life?

**Jack Thacker 1:14:11**

Mirene, do you want to speak to that?

**Mirene Arsanios 1:14:13**

Yeah. I mean, I do like what you're saying Maureen about, I think there's a about the compositional aspect and the formal aspect. And I feel like this craft and sociality don't always go together. I feel like when I'm working on my craft, I'm very much alone. And I think that maybe there's also a loneliness to the essay, or to prose. That I mean, I think community, poetry is more sort of community driven. There's a performance of it, right? And there's like an audience, a live audience, often to a poetry reading. Um, I think prose is maybe, I think of conversation in prose in terms of lineages, like, you know, how do you sort of draw lineages with ancestors or other thinkers or poets,

# msdnittoN Contemporary

or? And so yeah, very much instead of asynchronous terms, right, so who knows who we'll be in conversation with in the future? Or how you know, past people, or who you're bringing into conversation right, yourself, you know, what kind of voices from the past and those from the present are you sort of juxtaposing? So yeah, I think of prose as a space of like an asynchronous conversation, and a space where you can sort of, maybe not so much conversation, but sort of, you know, stage certain voices, right. So more sort of almost like an echo a space for like, voices to sort of echo and maybe sometimes resonate, and sometimes maybe sort of answer one another, but not necessarily.

**Jack Thacker 1:15:56**

Thank you for that Mirene, I love this idea of a much slower conversation that can span centuries. That's really great. Unfortunately, we don't have centuries to talk about this conversation. I just want to repeat at this stage that if you do have a question for any of the guests, then please do post that in the YouTube chat and we'll do our best to get to it. So you know, we'd love to hear from you. I'm going to jump in with another one. If that's okay, and Maureen, you prefaced one of your poems, or you started one of your pieces with this was going to be an essay. And I had one of those moments where I thought, well, I could have said that about so many of my poems. And likewise, some of my essays, probably started their life as poems as well. And you're all writers who work across creative forms or critical perspectives and engage in sort of essayistic forays. So I wondered if, if you could articulate if you like the relationship between the creative and critical faculties in your work? So this is a question for three of you, if you like and, perhaps because I singled you out Maureen, we could we can begin with you. Man of my poets, which is sort of a great text in that genre of creative and critical work, but I've wondered if you could speak a bit more widely about how those things work for poetry?

**Maureen N. McLane 1:17:24**

Well, I can I can take a stab at some musings. I partly, I always partly want to resist a partition between the creative and critical. I always feel like sometimes that proposition as if one had, you know, separate hemispheres of the brain and never did they connect except through some very strange corpus callosum that some robot erected in your mind, you know, so I kind of, so part of me wants to resist that. And I often feel like to be frank, there's a kind of anti intellectualism that can be baked into that coming not from you

# Nottingham Contemporary

Jack. But coming from from some people I sometimes feel it's an artefact of institutionality and how people and genres get branded. And that all can be incredibly depressing to reckon with, and so I guess, and this may go back to to some of Mirene's observations too about affiliations and ancestors and I mean, I feel like you know, I've had the privilege of trying to follow affinities, you know, and just feeling I feel like I've been so moved and schooled by so many things, disproportionately by dead people, let's hear it for dead people. So, I wouldn't like to. So I sort of feel well, how does a work like Gertrude Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* sit in me, or in other readers? Or how does one think about oh, I don't know some of Coleridge's *Marginalia*, you know, or, you know, Montaigne's, essays, right? And how do those sit with, say, long narrative poems that used to be the bestsellers in 1800, and, you know, then fell off the map. So, so I feel kind of open to, what I do feel is there are these kind of wonderful affordances of different genres and different kinds of expectations. And I feel like that's a possible social contract you're entering in with readers now or hopefully in the future. And, you know, not everybody has the privilege of being recognised when they're alive, or their work being recognised when they're alive. I mean, you know, one always thinks of Blake and you know, and of course, all the people one doesn't know, right, who never got to flourish. So, but I do feel you know, I'm not a kind of believer in the indifferentiation of all right, I think there's something about different kinds of traditions and bending of them and experimental genealogies that have been really, are these wonderful engines that can be, you know, part of, you know, the hood of your car under the hood of your car. And so, so for me, part of it is responding to those different seeds and getting into a key. And I often find that what I'm working on is responding to previous things I've done. And if I felt either exhausted or frustrated with my my own work, or felt particularly inspired by other people's work, and certainly the book *My Poets*, which is kind of a book of essays, you might say, but it has different kinds of forms in it. And it also has a few poems in it. That came out of frustration with a more standard critical prose like writing brief review essays for newspapers or journals, which was invaluable for me as a writer, was a real school to go to. And I really admire people who do it well. But I felt for myself, I didn't want to be on that horse for a while. And I wanted to be on a few other horses. And I wanted to be able to write a more you know, whether it's kind of Baudelarian poetical prose, whether it's a more associative or aphoristic and less journalistic prose, all of which I've done or tried to do. So I'm kind of, I feel like I'm agnostic about these things and hopeful about their possibilities. And you

# msdnittoN Contemporary

know, what does one call Anne Boyer's *Garments Against Women*? I've seen that book multiply categorised, right and so I'm sorry, that's a kind of long I but, that kind of, and that and an interest too. And I typically haven't written so called prose poems, a tonne of them, but I have found myself in the past few years writing what I guess one could call them, including that that poem I read that begins, this was going to be an essay on Guillaume de Machaut. So, so a long, winding, a slightly rambling answer, but I'd love to hear from from Lila and Mirene, and Jack you too, obviously.

Lila Matsumoto 1:22:22

If I may come in. I love that Maureen. I followed your your thread and your your ramble, which wasn't a ramble. And I think you mentioned Anne Boyer and someone like her. But also I love Lisa Robertson and the kind of adventures she takes with forms. I'm thinking, you mentioned Baudelaire, I'm thinking of a recent novel, whatever it is, a Baudelaire fractal, which is kind of a memoir, poetry, mash of things. I think for me, when I first came to poetry, when I was in my 20s, I guess, in writing it, I saw it as a quite demarcated field. But now I'm really interested in kind of deploying, I suppose the kind of possibilities and tactics of poetry in other genres, in particular, what we might call art writing, where poetry may write criticism about art, or think about art. So a lot of my, my first my own forays into thinking beyond poetry as some kind of set form came, I think, through engaging with art and seeing visual art, particularly. And to see how I could write about them in ways, which seemed, in my own naive way, different from my own encounters with art criticism, for example. And there are lots of great publications that now support those kind of forays into weird art writing, I guess, which I'm really interested in like map magazine, based in Glasgow. And speaking of conversations, there's a really great piece at the moment up on Map by the poets, Maria Sledmere, and Katie Lewis Hood, which are letters about Etel Adnan, the amazing artist, it's poems that take the form of letter exchanges they had over the years, and I love that. So yeah, I think for me in terms of poetry, as a kind of essayistic form or poetry as other forms are working across. Yeah, I think I'm always interested in the how the weirdness of poetry, how poetry, I like the word affordances that Maureen used. I think there's the providence of poetry is very generous. And yeah, I love that when poem essays, use really spiky words or you know, Maureen mentioned sealcock and you know, like, it can be fun and playful and do acrobatics. Yeah, and similarly with Mirene's work, I mean, the mother tongue essay that you read, I really loved that. Because

# Nottingham Contemporary

to me, I, I was listening out to it, but as a poem. And there were so many amazing words that you use and the phrases and the way you read it as well. So yeah, I guess it's like shifting the lens of how we encounter things as well. Particularly with sound and images. Yeah, that's my ramble.

Jack Thacker 1:25:28

Mirene, it would be great to hear from you on this.

Mirene Arsanios 1:25:32

Yeah. Between a creativity and criticism, I think for me, both realms can feel, are guided by conventions. So you know, a poem can feel deeply conventional, just as, you know, an essay or a critical text can feel very, very sort of the language can sometimes feel like very flat. So I feel like it's not for me, it's more about like conventions really, more than about distinctions between these two things. So how do you renew these conventions within these specific categories? Right. So, I feel like, when I'm about to write an essay, if I can already hear my voice, I'm already bored with it, you know, like, I don't want that, you know, and I want the subject matter to dictate the form. So I will try out the essay multiple times, until I land on the form that feels that it's doing something to the subject matter. And that can happen in any, any genre you're working with, right? I mean, you can be bored in your own voice when you're writing poetry or fiction, right. So is it's more about sort of undoing the conventions of the genre that you're working within. And open it up to sort of, so that can spark, you know, another way of thinking, right. And so that's what I'm looking for, even in the essay. You know, I wrote Notes on Mother Tongues multiple times, until I landed on the construct of my language, because I didn't want to write a first person essay, because I was already hearing myself and I was like, I don't like that, I'm just, it was it was too, it felt that sort of displacing the, the pronoun from the first to the third also opened up a kind of theoretical thinking around what that, what the shift means. Right. And so then I went to Fanon who talks about third person consciousness, and it just felt that the theory aligned with the form. And that the form itself was something that, you know, felt specific and singular to my problem. And that's what I'm looking for, I think when I write, whatever, anything, you know, that's just Yeah.

Lila Matsumoto 1:28:12

Can I ask you a question Mirene? Because, um, I think I saw the phrase

# msdnittoN Contemporary

fictional essays, in conjunction with with your work. And is that connected to what you were just saying about writing, Someone's, another voice?

**Mirene Arsanios 1:28:27**

Yeah. Somehow, like I felt, you know, what would an essay be, if it's like an essay is, there's an assumption behind the essay, right? There's the assumption that the author is the one thinking on the page, but what if it was someone who wasn't the author who was thinking and what conventions would you mobilise then right? And so to think of these combinations, I think, for me, is sort of very generative, and also a way of displacing the form and its traditions. And so it just, like sparked something for me to just do that, you know, experiment with, with the third person and the fiction, because, you know, there's also the assumption that what the author is saying is true in the essay, and I like the fact that I'm already telling you that this is a fiction. Yeah.

**Lila Matsumoto 1:29:15**

Yeah, I really like that, because I really also like the concept of fictional poetry. And that, for me really opened up thinking about, you know, because what you just said about the essay writers, they're writing out of their own experience. And that's, that's something that poets often get right as well, right. We're writing out of our own selves, and we're being somehow baring our lives and our homes. But yeah, so what if the poem can resist that? And be faithful? Right, speak out of someone's someone else's voice or body? Yeah. Or what if the poem can question what my own life means, right? Like, what are the sort of conventions that uphold the first person, you know, and I think that I think yeah, that's an interesting question.

**Jack Thacker 1:30:05**

Yeah, I think the the lyric I has a lot to come up for there doesn't it, by bringing us into our own poems, unannounced if you like, I mean I was I was really struck Mirene by the sort of the way it was almost like a biography of the language, of someone's language, whether that was yours or someone else's. And you mentioned at one point that, you know, not this isn't necessarily your language, but my language is an anxious language. And I just wondered if we could take this opportunity to check in on our language. I wanted to ask, you know, how has your language been affected by recent times? Is it you know, and these are incredibly anxious times that we're living through. You also mentioned, you know, language, which has a melancholy is that an accurate



# Nottingham Contemporary

representation of where everyone's language is at the moment? Or is it a bit more hopeful? How healthy is your language? Have you had to take a bit more care of your language over this last year? So Mirene should we start start with you? And then Maureen and Lila, have a think about that?

**Mirene Arsanios 1:31:10**

Sure. I mean, the score that I read was about, you know, how to heal language with words. And and it's, you know, it's referencing Austen's like how, what, how to do things with words. And I'm thinking about the relationship between, I mean, I suffer chronic pain. So I, you know, pain is something I live with, but I was thinking, what can my language do to address that pain? And what kind of language can I develop to heal? Right? So I was thinking about the relationship between language and healing and performativity. Right, is there I mean, and that's what a lot of, you know, guided meditation sometimes do or, you know, but how not have it sort of fall into this kind of, you know, New Age kind of wellness, you know, movement. But, but keep an edge and keep a sort of, you know, critical. Yeah, critical lens, on to what it's trying to do. But, so, yeah, I've been thinking about how to sort of re-centre myself, and really sort of ground my language in my body, and align these two things. Um, you know, if what I'm feeling if my hips are hurting, I can't, write. It's like, this is, you know, my posture, like, there's a lot also about like, being a writer is being at your computer basically being seated, and watching it. And that's what we've been doing for the past year, just watching the screen and being on zoom and teaching. And so how does that affect, you know, my ability to write? Or how does my body sort of responding to the conditions of, yeah, what I'm what I have to do every day. And so, I just didn't want to say like, okay, I just thought, like, for six hours on zoom, and I'm gonna stop now and start working on my writing. That's not what my body wants, I can't do that, you know, so I need to sort of a lot. So when it comes to my creative work, and my own language, I'm in the project, I'm sort of more interested in now of sort of aligning my body with my words and see, you know, where things need attention and care.

**Jack Thacker 1:33:32**

That's wonderful. Thank you. I wonder if Maureen or Lila, you have anything to say about the health of your languages?

# msdnittoN Contemporary

Maureen N. McLane 1:33:41

Oof, I mean, I feel this like kind of slightly, maybe approaching this from another angle, I guess, I feel, you know, partly in terms of the, the pandemic this past year plus, and also, beyond that, the ascendancy of Trump and just a bunch of horizons that have been, you know, devastating, and I feel so, and then, you know, more more locally, things like zoom, and the kinds of weird siloed attention, it requires of you to be present in, say, classroom situations, and, I guess, the confluence of all these things, frankly, I've often felt like mildly brain damaged, you know, and I felt like I don't know that that might be the proper term, but somehow cognitively diminished in a way and the other thing is, you know, the sense of that the ambient language around us. Public language is just was just so weaponised and reified and and I was just so and to be honest, I felt this since you know, you know, well, the first Bush administration, right, just hearing these phrases, they just felt like horrible shards, damaging shards, you know, heading right, you know, for your hippocampus, and I think you know, the Trump phenomenon and just everything attending that exacerbated that. And, and yet, what I would also say is, there is no, that's in me. That's not out there. That's in me. One of the truly diseasing things for me about, you know, the past several years is I have an inner discursive Trump in my head. This is disgusting. You know, and how does one vomit this stuff out? How does one you know, and so I found a really I found myself actually listening to a lot more music and instrumental music and things that don't have words. And I for years, I found it intolerable to listen to any news, even though I endlessly read and scroll, but I just couldn't stand it if suddenly and this isn't only about as it were political position taking. It's also about the the the surcharging of affect around phrases, and just realising, you know, and this whole and now a whole new readymade lexicon, which is has been useful, but it's also how does one think about like, you know, social distancing, mute yourself? Are you unmuted? And I don't know, I just so I honestly, I feel like I've been increasingly aware of swimming in deeply alienating waters. And yet, it's not for me to be protected. So how does one think about that, you know, and I love the way Mirene was talking about these anxious language, these multiple languages, none of which, you know, gets the prestige as the mother language or the original language. And I do think the, I'm very conscious of my, you know, more or less monolingual existence and have felt very much a hunger for developing other, you know, domains. So I'm sorry, again, it's just I just feel like it's such a profound question. And it just moves into so many ambient, you know, and prelinguistic

# Nottingham Contemporary

registers, and I don't yet know, how it is informing or my writing or how much I'm writing against it. I think it's going to take a while to figure out what that really is. Yeah.

**Lila Matsumoto 1:37:35**

I think just yeah, I agree with so much of what both of you said, but I work for a university, and I sit in a lot of kind of management committees in a kind of trade union capacity. And, yeah, just thinking about how we are in it. This new language making as well, there's a lot of kind of language that refers actually to body parts about now that we have lean management or lean economy or the fitness of the universities on budgets, and you know, we've had redundancies a lot of them. But also things on zoom, like legacy hand and all this stuff. And I'm kind of struck by that as well. To be honest, I feel like I actually, um, my capacity for writing poetry has really diminished in the last year, mostly because I am exhausted from work and things, but I don't know, it's almost as if, like, what Maureen was saying about the kind of insidious language of, of the government and the kind of various management committees and things has kind of effaced some of the wonder or something. I mean, that sounds kind of gloomy, but yeah, and I think just I agree with Maureen that increasingly, I'm turning to music over the last year, I probably made more music than poetry, mostly because I feel at a literal loss for words. So yeah, in terms of the health of, of language, I think it can be kind of a peril, I suppose. Particularly, I think for poetry. And I also agree with Maureen, that I think it will take time to process for all of us, really, in terms of how our language has changed, and the kind of the matrix that we are all in. But it's a really interesting question. It's a really political question, actually. And yeah, how do we resist the effacing of wonder, I guess?

**Jack Thacker 1:39:38**

Thank you for those answers. I mean, that's, like you've articulated so much, so many people there. So to counter that, at the risk of descending into a gloom, Lila one of your homes have the phrase, you know what, what is required in order to make language pleasurable? So perhaps we could go in that direction now. And, you know, try to heal that way. And so, so I guess the question I put to you is, is what does it take for you? Is it a musical element that a number of you've sort of mentioned? Is it a visual aspect? Or is it another quality that makes language pleasurable or that you know, that from which you take pleasure in language, is it an ingredient you put in or is it

# msdnittoI Contemporary

something you made? And so perhaps Lila we'll just go straight back to you on this. And you could start off on that motion seeing as it was one of your poems.

**Lila Matsumoto 1:40:38**

Yeah, thanks, jack. Um, yeah, I don't know how to answer this question. Even though it's really fun one. I think. I take a lot of notes. I never sit down to write a poem. So whatever purpose I might deploy the words for, sounds instrumental, but I think I do I think hitching a poetic practice to other artistic practices is always fruitful for me in giving pleasure to words. So I mentioned earlier responding to art, responding to music. I think of people I admire, poets I admire like Fred Moten who wonderfully articulates how music kind of gives joy to his words, in his thinking, so I'm really inspired by that. So in terms of, yeah, my own practice, I think, looking out beyond my own, I don't know, compromised ways of thinking about language. I think music and art, as you mentioned, Jack, have definitely been my my influences. I love reading various things. I like reading music reviews, the way people have various modes of talking about things. There's a really great music critic named Byron Coley, who writes for Wired Magazine, and he just has this really flippant way of writing, not just flippant, a really joyful way. And I think, oh, maybe I can borrow his syntax somehow. And yeah, I think I'm always kind of looking out for ways in which non poets or people working outside of literature, I guess, also use language. So yeah, I think that's one way anyway. I'm interested in the kind of tonal qualities of, of phrases and, and yeah, phrases and tones. Yeah, sorry. That's not it's not really a very articulated answer. But it's a good question, which I will mull over more.

**Jack Thacker 1:42:46**

No, no, you've given us plenty to mull Mirene, I wonder if you had anything to say on this you know?

**Mirene Arsanios 1:42:53**

Yeah, I don't know. I think I encounter a lot of pleasure when a writer managed to encapsulate something about the times that we're in, that just feels right, or like, oh, my god, yes, this is exactly how it is. I love that feeling. I feel like I have a lot of, I feel a lot of satisfaction when someone manages to do that. It's kind of rare. So I do love moments of, because I feel these are moments of clarity for me and there's pleasure in clarity, like, Oh, yes, I can, I can see. I

# Nottingham Contemporary

can see the world, I can see myself, I can see, you know, what she's trying to say? I yeah, so I feel like when there's this alignment between, you know, the world and the way it's expressed, you know, I feel like there's pleasure there. I think there's pleasure also in just reading fiction, and just like disconnecting from everything else. And just afford like, you know, allowing oneself to have, I'm someone who's very very tuned in with the news like I'm just always on the news and like listening to the news and this year has been crazy for my country Lebanon, which is entirely collapsed economically and in other ways. So I've been very, and living here and not being there has produced a lot of also anxiety and so I'm always sort of on social media, I also have a social media job. So you know, I'm often on Instagram and following the news and so to just like to pause all that and just read fiction, that feels good. And just, you know, allow yourself to live in another, create your own sort of time, right. It's not sort of you know, anxiously kind of trying to catch up with the temporality of the media, whether social media or, you know, the news, etc. And pleasure. I think there's pleasure, I live next to a park, Prospect Park. And it's been like my biggest source of pleasure so far this year, like I just go for walks. And I've tried challenging myself also to just wake up with the sun. And there's a kind of very specific light at that moment that just really sort of recharges your batteries. And in a very deep way, and my son wakes up early. So sometimes it's, it's possible for me to do that. And to go to sleep for the sunset. I feel like just following that cycle is is very, keeps me sane. Yeah.

Jack Thacker 1:45:56

Maureen do you have anything to add?

Maureen N. McLane 1:46:00

I mean, now I'm thinking about these, these sort of what buoying routines that Mirene is talking about, and I would definitely agree that daily or twice, daily walks, has been an incredible tonic, particularly this past year. And, and thinking about, you know, maybe chiming with with some of Lila's thoughts to just the great, both pleasures in reading different kinds of writers. And, you know, during official work time, a lot of my reading is unfortunately, much more instrumental, right, because I'm, I'm preparing for class, or I want to, you know, give response to somebody, or I'm, you know, pathologically scrolling the news to try, you know, so it's not, it's a very different mental disposition. But that, where pleasure and joy can come in, I mean, that is just such a gift. And, and that has been, I mean, it was funny, I just, you know,

# msdgnittoN Contemporary

recently was reading a review of a recent biography of Chaucer. And in the review, they were quoting various stanzas. And I hadn't read any Chaucer in probably, you know, 20 years, and it was just such an unmitigated delight, you know, all of in this sort of buoyant way. And it was really striking just to, to suddenly have this other set of linguistic textures, you know, right before me, and in other ways. You know, I think too about certain kinds of works that carry with them, both incredible precision, but also oceans of silence and openness. And, you know, whether that's some Haiku works, whether that is when I think of some poets who are real artists of shorter forms, I think of, say, Craig Dworkin's book *Moats*, which is full of these super short, little moat like poems that just, you know, unfurl, in your, in your mind, like an incredible bud of jasmine becoming, you know, jasmine tea, or, or Andrea Cohen has a new book, and these are very, you know, dare I use the word lean that Lila brought to the table. So there's something about that, that that just allows for the mind as a resonating chamber, you know, a kind of sound goes, but I also just can love these works that set up whether it's sort of like maximalist fiction or if somebody like, who was I thinking about? Well, certainly, Fred Moten is a is a great example of somebody who, wow, when he locks into gear, you are in Moten gear, and you are going on an incredible, incredible ride. So I'm so so I guess, so what I feel is too, if when, if one is lucky enough to be able intermittently to have chances to tune into these different frequencies, I feel very grateful, you know, for the artists in whatever key they're doing it. But also I I'm a big, I guess, I was gonna say overhearer, but I guess more perniciously it's an eavesdropper, and I'm now in a pretty rural place. So and I'm not going indoors into you know, indoor dining, but but, you know, New York City is certainly a mecca for eavesdropping, right? I mean, just the fantastic sentences you hear on, you know, any given day and I feel like that sense of the vibrancy. And I'd also say too, this being very interested to in the work of a number of poets who insist on opacity and multilingualism and a, not necessarily meeting the desire of English language readers, for transparency. I think of the work of the poet Raquel Salas Rivera for example, who writes, he writes these amazing works that have often two tier linguistic structures and make no concession to the reader who does not know Spanish. And I can get, I get a profound other kind of pleasure in that, in seeing what he is doing in this work and how he is both inviting, and, you know, also not facilitating. So I guess, you know, these are some of the things I mean, and also in terms of just a kind of pure amazement in a work the past year, one book that really just blew me away last summer was Srikanth



# Nottingham Contemporary

Reddy's Underworld Literature. And I mean, what I mean, talk about hybrid work, I mean, it's classified as poetry, but you could read it as, as a novel, as essays on translation. Mirene has it there. And, and again, many languages are in this work, both visually and, and linguistically. So I just, I feel so grateful to the artists who can, who can carry that and also who aren't little militant joy machines, you know, because like, not every day is a day of joy, right? But so it's a delicate thing. You know, I sort of, I kind of, as you can see, I just, you know, dwell on ambivalence, right? So and if there's too much, too much pressure on some aspect of the emotional spectrum, I'm going to want to, you know, have a counterbalance.

**Jack Thacker 1:51:34**

Thank you. Thank you for that counterbalance. We're approaching the half hour now. And I know that if I asked another question, I'd only get a brilliant answer from each of you. So if that was the case, we'd go over time. So I think we'll bring things to a close there. But we're incredibly grateful to each of you for first, those wonderful readings and then this excellent discussion. And for those who have been sort of eavesdropping from YouTube, we hope you really enjoyed it too. And this wraps up our Five Bodies series, we've really enjoyed the ride. Thank you to everyone involved. And thank you once again, Maureen, Lila, and Mirene and we'll say goodnight at that point, or good afternoon or good morning.

## Colophon

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