



Library podcast

Activist Poetics

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[00:00:35] How's everybody doing.

[00:00:39] Wait a sec. We're going to start that over again. How's everybody doing.

[00:00:46] Alright my name is Davida Ingram and I'm the Public Engagement Programs Manager at the Central Library.

[00:00:55] I'm so delighted about this program.

[00:00:57] It's on the heels of a program that we produce last week called Beyond the school to prison pipeline and I think it's very appropriate that the title of tonight's event is activist poetics.

[00:01:08] It's made possible with support from the Seattle Public Library but also from the really really thoughtful collaboration with the University of Washington. But before we go further I wanted to acknowledge that we are on Duwamish land tonight and applaud. And I'm also very proud that tonight's speakers represent both indigenous culture and black diaspora culture and I think that's a credit to our curators Amaranth and Misha. Tonight's evening is the evening that blends poetry intersectionality shout out to Kimberley Crenshaw and social justice. We'd also like to extend a very warm thank you to our artists again without the support from UDUB would not have been able to bring out Alexis, Chi, Fabian and Lily. So thank you so much for coming out and travelling to us. This program is made possible in addition to the Seattle Public Library Foundation with support from the Simpson center for the Humanities at the University of Washington the school of interdisciplinary interdisciplinary arts and sciences and the MFA in Creative Writing and poetics at the University of Washington Bothell. Anybody from UDUB Bothell in the House and the University of Washington Law School. Lawyers have been doing a lot lately. Libraries are always free and open to all. Do any of you all follow us on Twitter.

[00:02:36] We're at SPL buzz. This is a podcast by the way so if you want to make some noise make noise. Because the evening is always about the audience. I was very proud to notice that today that the library tweeted that we will always welcome everybody. And I think that in the times that we live in

[00:02:56] As that is just the important thing to know. I'll bring Mischa and Amaranth up to introduce our speakers and then we have a video by Brian Tucker I believe Brian Tucker's in the house. Can we give him a shout out. Applause

[00:03:14] He did a video that's very in keeping with tonight's theme so I'm excited to be able to show that video before we get into our program. But for now if I can have Mischa and Amaranth introduce the speakers. Whose lives matter. Black lives matter. Whose lives matter. Black lives matter. Whose lives matter. Black lives matter. Whose lives matter. Black lives matter.

[00:03:44] That was pretty good. Black lives matter. Say her name. Black trans lives matter. These are incantations or poetic phrases that have mobilized people and that were our primary inspirations for creating this daylong event.

[00:04:02] So thank you all so much for coming.

[00:04:05] During the daytime part of the event included a symposium at the University of Washington where we talked about poetics.

[00:04:11] You might be saying WTF is poetics.

[00:04:15] I have heard poetics described as why we write how we write.

[00:04:20] But today we also oh I've got to say my name is Misha Gardenus and I teach at UDUB Bothell. You say your names.

[00:04:28] I'm Amaranth Borsak I also teach at UDUB Bothell and I'm Sarah Daling.

[00:04:32] I also teach you you UDUB Bothell.

[00:04:36] Yes. We also but we wanted it. We expanded that conversation today to think about poetics broadly.

[00:04:41] I invite you to do that throughout this event. So not just thinking about why we write how we write with words but also how we write the body even when our body is two bodies or mini bodies or or in-between bodies. How we write as a form of healing or also how we write. In order to relate to each other or how actually relation between us could be a kind of poetry and how we can try in this space and in our spaces to create relations amongst each other with with care and intention.

[00:05:15] So we thinking about poetics broadly in terms of all of the all of the ways that we could think about rhythm and tempo including dance and film and digital media. So we talked about all these things today.

[00:05:25] We also talked a lot about our ancestors and prayer and poetry as prayer and being connected to something larger than ourselves. And we asked

[00:05:35] What kind of poem do and most importantly or very importantly can poems save a life.

[00:05:45] But we wanted to do more than have a conversation inside a room inside a university we want to bring that to the broader community so we're here to do that.

[00:05:54] And thank you all for coming and we have some amazing performers and we're going to give you their bios now and sure so we'll tell you a little bit about the performers before they come up and this will be the order in which you will see them. The first presenter will be Alexis Pauline Gumbs

[00:06:20] She's the founder of the School of Our Lorde and intergenerational multimedia education initiative.

[00:06:25] The author of many books and an important community builder. Following Alexis we have Kai Green. He's a scholar. I'll tell you more. And a poet and a filmmaker. Next we'll have Fabian Romero

[00:06:47] As they are currently completing a PhD in gender women and sexuality studies at UDUB Bothell.

[00:06:55] They a writer performer artist and activist and last but not least we have Layli Long Soldier. She is the recipient of a native arts and cultures foundation artists fellowship and a learning fellowship among many other honors.

[00:07:16] We're so grateful to all of you for being here. We're really grateful to the library for making this possible. And we're grateful to this audience for coming out to hear poetry in a time of crisis.

[00:07:34] So we are going to bring Alexis up after the video but we want to thank Brian Tucker for allowing us to start our program with a video that helps us to understand some of the ways that when we began our program by saying black lives matter how can we use poetry to consider some of those social concerns. Wish me luck. All I wanted to be was a firework. Brilliant. Bright. Glowing.

[00:08:14] Filling your night sky with dancing rainbow light gracefully twinkling in little eyes.

[00:08:20] But-but I guess this is how fire works in the hands of men. Once stone-aged neanderthals who move with heavy hands-some things, never change.

[00:08:34] Returned to his palm I pray I've stopped working. Cannot be used to bring pain under the pressure of his violent desperation there are flashbacks I tear gun powder and bullets work fire into that child's chest until he is lifeless. Fireworks - meant to leave you breathless but not like this. I will never understand why we followed him that night. But we did. Against his flesh, I feel cold comatose. His fingertips taste of blood and death and secrets they lie across my trigger.

[00:09:13] I pray he does not pull it again. I pray he is not triggered. He does not load cock or even carry me. He sets me down leaves me idle whose hands they far from the curve of my lips. I know too well how his fireworks. You humans know nothing of accountability claiming some second amendment while refusing your right to bare account for your own body's movement. I find you irresponsible I wish you would not hold me he says. You're just too easy to pull in. Well these guys always get away. It's not our fault. You're not dirty. We did the right thing. I'm not perverse you were built to serve and to protect. In a hunt. But that child did not look like an animal for trapping. He did not sound fierce or dangerous or even hungry. I knew it was wrong. But I could not flee his desperate grip. Relieved when they finally pried me from his sweaty palm. Go by then it was too late the damage already done.

[00:10:17] I tried to tell them the truth. I am the gun he used to murder Trayvon Martin. He is the man who claimed me weekly loaded,carried, stocked and pulled me from his belt. Lifted. Pointed. Cocked. Fired into that child's chest. Firearms - carried us off into the night. Screaming. But they didn't listen. I don't want

[00:10:39] To know the truth. So with everyone watching. They return me to him. I leave this courtroom. His new badge of honor. Party favor. A conversational piece. At dinner he'll pull me off the mantle lift me up once again and say. You want to see it. Show me off

[00:11:03] Like a trophy. I am no trophy. I have pistol whip and lash in the face of black people time and time again an instrument for humans making game of death

[00:11:16] and vigilance. But this is no game. I don't like being played made mockery and toy for more war and slaughter. Humans - why must you act so vicious. Like monsters. Bloodthirsty making spawn of each other with my flare. All I wanted to be

[00:11:30] was a firework. My only light was short lived and dark explosions in the chest of a boy. Too many you and children. In their eyes. I do not sparkle. I cannot dance

[00:11:55] I only fire and they never see me coming. I wish. I had not worked

[00:12:04] In the hands of men. Is too much fire. Too much ash and their bellies. Too many bodies made targets. These fire arms. Never felt. So heavy. So that poet was Nikita Oliver and that video is by Brian Tucker and I would like to bring our next speaker who is Alexis Pauline Gumbs.

[00:12:59] Can we take a deep breath. Inhaling exhaling. I'm so grateful to be here and I

[00:13:10] Wanted to give my gratitude to the organizers of the symposium. You all are amazing. I'm thrilled that you invited me. Thank you Davida for holding the space for this evening to happen. Thank you. Each of you for deciding to be here. It's a miracle. So this.

[00:13:30] These are some excerpts from my forthcoming book which is called M archive. After the apocalypse and I want you to know that I love you and I appreciate you and I believe that we can win.

[00:13:46] And I want you to know that because I ask the universe what I should share with you tonight and the universe has some tough love for us. One you would look at me

[00:13:59] And you would want to scream until your voice went hoarse and you reached silence you would touch me and want to cry the salt out so that emptiness could be real you would taste me and want to run so far the sweat tracks no longer led anywhere. You would smell me and remember the end of dignity. Remember the filth that got us here. You would hear me and pretend that you could not. Two

[00:14:31] It was not babble. It was not Babel because the people had not built those towers to reach towards heaven.

[00:14:41] They simply wanted to underground themselves to live on top of each other to leave the planet altogether. Admit it Earth has always been a needy girlfriend the type of woman who makes you feel obligated to show up and do stuff and handle her with care just because she's been there for you and you didn't ask for it. You didn't ask for her to turn her whole life into space for you and you can hear her not asking but expecting and ultimately she's too earthy and really don't you want something shiny. Don't you want the kind of woman who let you enjoy the fantasy without having to worry about what happens behind the scenes. It wasn't Babel it would be too much to make it as biblical as it was catastrophic. The fall was much more mundane. Just the balding midlife crisis of the species. You know

[00:15:38] The part where you turn your back on the mother of your children because you think you deserve better. You don't say that. Three. Love.

[00:15:54] If you think you would have survived without the love of fat black women.

[00:15:59] You are wrong. If you say it you are lying. If you have blocked them out of your memory it is because you do not want to know the meaning of necessary. You have failed them at the same moment. You failed the planet. Which is every moment. Say it.

[00:16:18] Say the name of the fat black woman who processed your paper or fed you or clean something on which you would have slipped say it before you die in your own filth. How dare you.

[00:16:29] How dare you say that fat means lazy and sloppy and wrong. Who cleans. Well works all the time while you are sleeping and hating yourself. Who fixes everything you don't know how to do.

[00:16:41] You are a liar. You are a mess. You are allowed to be a mess because of the unending work of fat black women. Fat black women specifically and you allow yourself to be a mess because you tell yourself whoever you are. At least I'm not a fat black woman even if you are a fat black woman. You lied and said you weren't or compared yourself to someone else. It's failure. It's a lie from the devil. It will never work. It is killing us all. How many statues of fat black women do the ancients have to hide for you to dig up and understand what God looks like. How many times do fat black women have to save your life in song.

[00:17:32] What are you paying attention to. This is why you can never see God in yourself. You are damned by your hatred of fat black women and no part of you could ever live without them. This is why the universe huge black, unfolding expansive shakes and shakes her head.

[00:17:54] You fools wasteful fools. Four.

[00:18:02] There came a time when they couldn't distinguish between themselves and the walls they clocked through days to make enough money to go home nights. Two sets of walls. They paid for with those same ticket marked and taken over days the luckiest among them signed 30 year mortgages when their lives are probably already half over. They were the walls. They became the projected image the wall sent out to earn their right to exist which wasn't a right but a privilege that lasted as long as the state didn't want to knock those particular walls down. And where did they send themselves to feed their necessary walls into other walled structures of making and doing and pretending to know the luckiest among them had built their own businesses out of charisma and timing. They had signed papers bolting themselves to those daytime drywall daydream treadmills that they had to keep running in order to pay for the nightmare nighttime walls to be there waiting they got experimental they knocked walls down internally changed the cubicle into a workstation they went open concept standing desk. Built tiny houses rented collective basements rate revived the revolutionary building fund crowdfunded crowded space for dreams to live commissioned graffiti muralist.

[00:19:29] Do you know what it feels like to love a wall with all your waking days and dreaming nights you will do anything to keep it. Stay when you should leave. Bang your head at work. Sign your very life away so when everything imploded it was not the breaking bones and the last flesh that shocked them. Everyone knows the human body is fragile. What shocked them was. How fast a wall could fall. Four. Hold water

[00:20:03] Mother Weaver said as she walked up and down the rows. The students looped the grasses up and down and over and around a basket. She'd be able to hold water and some of them thought about how the others in the camp called this woman a basket case or called them basket cases for sitting here weaving with her as often as they could. The guards allowed it because it was supposedly therapeutic. But something else was going on in their Moses was here mostly for the

stories the basket weaver told. They pass the time the focus required to loop and thread quieted the racing in her heart about where her people were right now and when would she see them and how could she find them.

[00:20:51] She had learned the first day that if she didn't focus she would stab herself under her own fingernails. That had been lesson enough for her the weaving sessions were a meditation. She tried not to imagine living without it. She was already living without everyone and everything she had known she focused on weaving the pieces of straw and grass together like the teacher said. Tighter tighter in the end than her close knit community she thought. The stories were about the world Grenada and the spice trees the many people who had made baskets in their times. Charleston and the Kombi he Eastern Shore and the Northern Star. At night after weaving days she could see maps in her dreams of pieces of land connected by water wet land blessed by the breathing and blood of rice growers spice cleaners cloth diapers and of course basket weavers she woke up with felt geographies different from what she had learned in school about solid land marked by lines drawn by property deciders they had blindfolded her when they brought her to the camp but she had heard the water she could smell it even now. Out of her reverie of looping and threading and pulling tight she caught the eyes of Mother Weaver as she walked back through the captives with their slumped shoulders the piles of grass beside them. Hold water. The teacher said a basket that can hold water can also float hold water. Moses whispered catching the rhythm as the teacher continued peacefully below the listening range of the guards and if you can make a basket. You can make ...boat. Moses blinked and bit into the next piece of grass and tried not to smile looking down Mother Weaver turned her back to her as she went around the next row. Loop and thread. And loop and thread. And pull.

[00:23:13] Applause. Thanks for giving it up for Alexis Pauline Gumbs. And our next reader is Kai M. Green. Thank you. Good evening. How are you all doing? Good.

[00:23:32] Cool.

[00:23:39] I'm gonna read three pieces well maybe they're not but some. So this first piece is about traveling

[00:23:51] While black and queer. It's called Black

[00:23:55] Queer Fly she walk through airports. This is so hot.

[00:24:02] I stand back here. She walked through airport security lines tall black in fine smile so bright and black joy. Marley locks hang and wrap around head. Blue jeans become altar where hips be hugged and I say yes.

[00:24:21] God Black dies do matter.

[00:24:27] She she walked like black love groove footwork Muhammad Ali smooth she fly and float she provokes securities compulsory desire to search and scan her body just a little bit more. TSA

wonder how it is possible she put herself together this way she TSA casually motions her black queer film out of the machine that seeks to see and seeks to know not just where but how it is her black magic move and how would grow you know what's coming next.

[00:25:04] TSA say yes we do smile not returned I watch her turn to face this woman TSA she don't know Pat locks down but she TSA don't find a thing that she's looking for.

[00:25:19] Maya Angelou phenomenal woman stanzas start to moonwalk through my mind as I watch my black lover stand still and be touched by not a lover's hand nor heart. The span of her hips the stride of her step the curl of her lips they try so much but they can't touch her inner mystery. I follow her. Me black trans man I step out of the Unseeing machine your crotch area is setting off the machine TSA agent reaches out to touch me black

[00:25:57] I will have to pat your breast area I do not have that rest I respond she quickly pulls her hand off my chest realizing she should not be touching this body this black trans man body baffled she tells me to go through the machine again I obey but my black trans body does not submit it breaks the machine my body does not come together for their eyes nor their technologies my body is undisciplined but I walk through again nonetheless I stand pose hands up feet facing forward they scan I exit the machine and face the TSA agent. I am forced to look away from the machine which unclear Lee reveals something something that I do not wish to explain. They tell me that's better was better I wonder what do they see when they look at the machine body me a body scan don't reveal black but clumsily stumbles upon queer unable to process this black but they don't need the machine to tell them that black queer film and black trans man long to take flight and they do despite the surveillance they use their words like sage to cleanse their black beings after this unwanted touch they hold each other and whisper in ears black spells prayers love release they affirm their black magic is was and always will be. As so

[00:27:42] Usually I do a lot of moving around so I'm like be here on this podium. So, well I gotta be on this

[00:27:52] Well I gotta I don't think I'm gonna be honest so this piece is about my time in Chicago and this is an incident that happened one morning on John Quill terrace on John Quill.

[00:28:09] John Quill the block is the block is hot on John Quill. John Killer.

[00:28:17] Woke up before the sun to the sound of war. Look out the window to the west in that part of the block. Don't walk on that side of the street after dark. Now squad SWAT military's people surrounding the building next to next door to the school. Standing standing protecting something someone somewhere not here and right here at the same time jumping out of bed put on sweat shirt and pants because they work early.

[00:28:45] I walk her to the train so she don't have to walk alone. We take the alley as the sun comes up. It is safer back there now with squad SWAT military's people on the main road. Kiss goodbye and

I'll be there when she arrived later tonight squad willing God willing SWAT. Willing God willing squad willing. Now I walk back home. Sun up more now alone in my blackness be showing be known.

[00:29:11] It is unclear where I belong. I know what I look like. I know what I looked like in his hood. I know what I looked like in this hood hoody. I know what I look like in his hood hooded hoodie black boy. No man turned the corner past a fire truck.

[00:29:23] I wonder if they will put the fire out because the cops definitely dropped the bomb and the sun is getting bigger stronger. Even through the chill and stillness of the streets this time of morning.

[00:29:34] Morning this hour bombs make space for white men and dogs to walk and play. They smile into each other and walk in through me. I am thinking I am thinking I

[00:29:46] Am thinking. Who was in that building right next to that school and who will learn today. With that rumble echoing I turned a corner to see man big white greasy hair puffed up chest vest on smiling smiling looking looking looking at me looking at him wanting a reason looking smiling daring behind puffed up chest vest on surrounding the block I see more not just cops but camouflage war in the streets.

[00:30:17] War in the streets he smiling at me tauntingly. I know he wants me but I'm just outside the perimeter of what he is allowed to touch. Today bombs going off next to schools. It is important that we make this area safe for dogs and their white men. They need to walk children will learn all they need to know at home in war. The problem look like you black boy black girl. Enemy of the state of being a whiteness Supreme and in just one hour was Sun real fool. Now all squads SWAT military's people and fire trucks. They then disappeared somewhere with somebody.

[00:31:00] Somebody somewhere with somebody somewhere with some bodies.

[00:31:04] some bodies and this is the last last piece of how heavy a load the hashtag black lives matter carries I mean how many names I mean I mean I mean.

[00:31:28] I mean how many names follow the hashtag.

[00:31:30] Justice for. Justice for Mike Brown. Justice for Trayvon. Justice for Elon. Justice for Rakiya. Justice for Eric.

[00:31:40] Oh and remember Troy Davis. Oh and remember Emmett Till. Remember the names of the black women who carried their babies bodies dead disfigured. Blood staining dead. But the evidence could hold no persons responsible for these black bodies. Yes they are dead. Yes we know who shot the gun that would place the bullet in her face in his chest in their head. But that is not murder.

[00:32:06] And there will be no indictment. And if that is not murder then I am only left to think that living black bodies are not human are no longer matter in the most basic sense. Do you remember the names of the black women trans insists who are also part of that list.

[00:32:23] There are so many names to remember. There are so many names to call.

[00:32:29] There are so many circles chance marches die ins sit ins hands up don't shoot demonstrations. We have a scroll of names that could graffiti every city everywhere in the world. If we use black ink would be overcome by blackness and if our name spilled on the walls of university halls and street corners and brick buildings and everywhere. If we wrote the names of the people we have lost everywhere in black ink our names be spilling over our names be spilling over like the blood of so many past or spilling over. And what if

[00:33:07] What if every name we stacked the body and how high would that structure be and how wide would it reach.

[00:33:14] How can we account for the unaccountable I mean how deep is the Atlantic as deep as it is black as deep as it is queer. Beautiful words from Kai M Green

[00:33:47] So we have two more speakers and our next speaker is Fabiano Romero and they have a video that we are going to play. So I'll have Fabian and come up and we'll decide the order you want things to play.

[00:34:00] Applause Yeah.

[00:34:10] Let's see. I'll read one poem. And this is something that's very very new. I actually wrote this last week and it was in response to a conversation about immigration and how now more people are going to be deported.

[00:34:31] My family people that you probably know.

[00:34:35] And there was this quote from Alicia Schmidt Camacho she writes and one of her essays more than one half of the adult Latino population is vulnerable to deportation to losing a close friend a family member or personal freedom on the immigration enforcement system. And as somebody that has gone through that I wrote this. Four AM wind breaks through drafty windows a teapot screams for the shadows {Speaking Spanish}. Wrap them in foil stuffed them in thermostats. On our way to the fields. We become the pears. In unison we pick our ripest selves and drop them like raindrops. We become a wave of fruit pickers turned into pollen protectors turned into trees turned into an assembly line of workers bobbing from trees we become the breeze the squeaky wheel of the supervisors truck. We the signifiers of the broken system the political pawns of the prison industrial complex become the fruit.

[00:35:51] Too high to pick. Irrelevant. Disposable.

[00:35:56] On the days when the breeze sang too loud we saw a sweep of armed men and it was then that we could have blamed the trees for betraying us that my child eyes could have blamed the fruit for distinguishing their bodies from ours. If only our voices could come could become daggers if only our pleas could become wings. But we were no longer human. We were no longer pears or trees.

[00:36:19] We were non persons bobbing like fruit from the limbs of the armed men. So I think this would be a good time to play the video. And then after that I'll read two more short poems.

[00:37:02] {Video playing} To me home is to be pulled in many directions. My mother me probably thought that I could carry on and talk on. All those last memorials unless Gaius and. The hands held throughout the years. Those I love who live and have died. And this is home. Here.

[00:37:26] If home is one place then I've never found it. I imagine it is under rubble now toppled over by construction sites

[00:37:35] Many times over. It might be under burial grounds. In lava. In layers of dirt. Maybe with fossils and dinosaurs. It might be a myth. A place in the stories I heard growing up. {Speaking Spanish}.

[00:37:55] {Speaking Spanish}.

[00:38:16] I have a friend who has home tattooed on her chest. She is her own home. I want that. I want home to be bones and imperfectly. I want home to be the intersections that run through me.

[00:38:29] The part I share with pride in the parts I wish away the privilege and oppression the trauma in the resilience the flaws the perfectionism the wrinkles and chubby belly. I want to feel home in myself

[00:38:49] The child I once was. Got used to moving before I was born. She was in a room while her mother worked. She traveled inside over across the Pacific coastline. I imagine she/I wanted to stay knowing that safety in calling a place a home. Her womb my home

[00:39:08] A place as a home. Since then it's been unknown. I have moved from city to city transferred schools felt temporary been temporary. I have felt what being in motion while still means. What packing light. Practicing minimalism

[00:39:28] Means. What collective living. Sharing a room. Without being politicized. Means. What does it mean to feel home and leaving.

[00:39:43] What does it mean to feel home in instability while seeking home in another body. We can't fit ourselves in another's diasporic body. We move differently even in love. Finding Home in each other is a struggle. Home and other bodies are signing up for

[00:40:05] They change their minds. They break hearts they move. They decide. My home is my own. You find it elsewhere. So who. If not leaving. Is here. Home is easier to feel when I accept the part of me that hurt

[00:40:27] When I love the parts of me that are not desirable in capitalism the parts of me that do not produce the parts of me that stay in bed.

[00:40:35] Out of sadness out of depression out of disability. Home is easier when I feel the connections that assimilation tries to destroy. See so then we talk. I'm. Sorry the sun the human. Soul. The races are not. Is where people she loves are. To live in diaspora is to experience this pool

[00:41:01] And I love deeply. I love money. I have many homes and they move. Some leave and as I love myself more I find. Says you can tell my gender presentation has

[00:41:59] Always been different and I am two spirits. As an indigenous person I don't follow a white man's gender

[00:42:10] And so I know that there are other two spirit folks in here.

[00:42:15] And so a few like a month ago I got contacted to write to share a piece for the trends in queer center at Evergreen State College. Yeah

[00:42:29] They're great by the way. And the director of that center is amazing.

[00:42:34] And so I wrote a short poem and a lot of what I write. As you can tell is very influenced by theory and and so that's something that I continue to do here. So I wrote this. It's really a prayer. It's a gift to our ancestors and future generations. And I use Emma Perez's theory of decolonial imaginary the rejection of the colonizers history and the practice of expanding silences into possibilities and that intended this theory to write Chicanos into history. But I decided to use it to write transgender or gender nonconforming and to spirit people into yesterday and today transgender to Spirit gender queer people we have existed since before language for our difference was created.

[00:43:20] So to remember those who have passed is to remember that there is no there has never been a time or place where we have not existed even in places where society cultural norms oppression tradition religion and family norms Seamus into hiding. We exist because wherever there is white noise in place of our names we exist pre colonial Turtle Island we exist colonisation we exist creation of the nation.

[00:43:49] We exist because wherever there is silence in our names we exist because even when we hide in the shadows of our gendered defiance when we are too scared to be seen when we shy away from telling people the specific constellation of our unique gender we exist to Spirit gender nonconforming not knowing a gender fem boy power fem transform trans Butch hard femme we exist. So I wanted to close my my setup with with a really important piece for me especially in these times and this one is called We Can Be there for each other and it's because you know as well as was mentioned earlier I too believe we can win and I believe that we in that in the process of winning it we're gonna have to show up for each other and this is a few of the things that I wrote up as to how we can show up for each other we can be there for each other we can in spite of being told otherwise we don't have to fend for ourselves in this capitalistic world we can be there for each other one remember being a child and the challenges that come with being small and relying on others.

[00:45:10] This is our common ground and the reality of oppression. We were all one small we were all once told to obey in some way and although we are programmed to forget where we once came our skin wrinkles will replay how age is our common thread of oppression.

[00:45:22] Meanwhile in the in-between of Youth and elder Our bodies remember to deprioritize pride make your need to love greater than your need to be right. Choose solidarity over notoriety.

[00:45:36] 3 Make room in your body for the uncomfortable and if you hear a demanding for you to return to not seeing the truth come out with revolution stories of surviving survival stories of the people who you may know from your bloodline they fought and some vowed to pass on to their kin story and hope to not repeat the horror of the past. That fight still makes you coldly uncomfortable with lullabies of hope songs you are meant to liberate yourself from the programming of oppression and assist and assist liberation struggles to solidarity over notoriety. It is not your struggle always but if it is your privilege then see it as a responsibility to Solidarity.

[00:46:12] For listen to the sadness and anger even if it means you do not understand.

[00:46:17] Listen. Feel how the words sting the parts of your body that hold privilege like a prize. Feel how the words make your tensions rise and see this as a sign of forgiving yourself forever believing that liberation ever meant telling others how to make it comfortable for you. Because if we are in this together we got to feel the sadness and anger and let it be as real as the love. 5 practice believing before denying practice believing go back to number one the time when we were children and believed all we were told because it was part of growing believe again. Here people when they say that they are forgotten by their skin their size their disability their undocumented status they are forgotten. Believe them when they say that playing nice is just playing invisible that our bodies are used to boost egos and prove supremacy. Believe them believe us believe me.

[00:47:03] Six. Celebrate the small victories because there is plenty of hurt. There is plenty of anger there is plenty of sadness and reasons to give up.

[00:47:13] And if you placed hope on one side and the reasons to give up on the other you would have given up a long time ago. So celebrate your survival. Treat yourself like a gift. Stop the hope genocide see yourself in your skin and your kin is enough replace hope scarcity with abundance. Remember that you pass your dreams to your kin and if you don't believe will we ever be free. Seven.

[00:47:35] Forgive yourself because using guilt to motivate change only works for so long and healing begins with forgiveness.

[00:47:42] Eight. Choose solidarity over notoriety. Being there for each other shouldn't require fame or awards. Think of the work that goes unnoticed. The people whose work is underpaid or devalued.

[00:47:53] Choose solidarity over notoriety. Nine. Identify with privileges in the same passion as your oppressions. I'm going to say it again. Identify with privileges in the same passion as your oppressions. Hold onto them for the learning and opportunities they have for you to create change. Ten. We can be there for each other in spite of being told otherwise. We don't have to fend for ourselves in this capitalistic world. We can be there for each other. Thank you.

[00:48:42] So we have our last speaker and a time to do a brief roundtable on a Q and A. But let's bring up Layli Long Soldier

[00:49:00] Hi good evening. Bailey.

[00:49:05] {Foreign language} Tonight I'm going to share a few poems from my book. Yay

[00:49:26] But specifically I'm going to share a few pieces from the second half of the book which I wrote about. Twenty eight pieces responding to the national apology to Native Americans. I'm going to start off with. A little introduction that I wrote too there's too this response. On Saturday December 19th 2009. U.S. President Barack Obama signed the congressional resolution of apology to Native Americans. No tribal leaders or official representatives were invited to witness and receive the apology on behalf of tribal nations. President Obama never read the apology aloud publicly although for the record Senator Sam Brownback. Five months later read the apology to a gathering of five tribal leaders. Bear in mind. There are more than 560 federally recognized tribes in the US. The apology was then folded into a larger unrelated piece of legislation called the 2010 Defense Appropriations Act. My response is directed to the apologies delivery as well as the language crafting an arrangement of the written document. What I did was I basically took that document and I mirrored it. My personal challenge was to match the effort of that document so there. If you read the apology you will see there's 20 whereas statements. So I have 20 of my own. There are seven resolutions. I have seven of my own and it concludes with two disclaimers and I have two of my own. I'm going to read a few of those pieces tonight. The whereas statements I've chosen a few. That have to do with feeling I felt like maybe I wanted to feel so. Whereas

[00:52:00] At four years old I read the first chapter of the Bible aloud. I was not Christian whereas

[00:52:10] My hair unbraided ran the length of my spine. I sometimes sat on it. Whereas at the table my legs dangled I could not balance peas on my fork whereas

[00:52:30] I used my fingers carefully. I pushed the bright green on two silver times whereas you eat like a pig. The lady said setting my plate on the floor whereas. She instructed me to finish on my hands and knees. She took another bite whereas. I watched folds of pale curtains inhale and exhale a summer dance whereas. In the breath of the afternoon room

[00:53:18] Each tick of the clock. Whereas. I rose and placed my eyes and tongue. On a shelf above the table first. Whereas. I kneeled to my plate. I kneeled to the greatest questions whereas that moment I knew who I was. Whereas the moment before I swallowed.

[00:54:04] In the first lines of this next piece I have quoted I have an excerpt from the actual apology. The National Apology and I'll indicate that by. Air quotes whereas. My eyes land on the shore line of. The arrival of Europeans in North America opened a new chapter in the history of Native peoples because in others I hate the act of laughing when hurt injured or in cases of danger that bitter hiding my daughter. Picks up. New habits. From friends she'd been running tripped slid on knees and palms onto us full they carried her into the kitchen. She just fell. She's bleeding deep red streams down her arms and legs trails on white tile. I looked at her face a smile quivered her, a laugh

[00:55:32] A nervous doing as her friends do.

[00:55:36] She braved new behavior feigned a grin. I couldn't name it but I could spot it. Stop. My girl if you're hurting, cry. Like that

[00:55:57] She let it out. A flood from living room. To bathroom then a soft water pour. I washed carefully. Light touch clean cotton to bandage I faced her. I reminded in our home. In our family we are. Our Selves. Real

[00:56:29] Feelings be true. Yet I'm serious when I say I laugh reading the phrase opened a new chapter.

[00:56:48] I can't help my body I shake the realization that it took this phrase to show my daughters quiver isn't new but a deep practice. Very old she's watching me. Now one about feeling I suppose whereas. A woman I know says she watched a news program a reporter detailed the fire. A house. In which five children

[00:57:41] Burned perhaps their father too. She doesn't recall exactly but remembers the camera on the mother's face the mother's blubbering her hiccupping and wail.

[00:57:55] She leans to me. She says she never knew then in those times in that year this country the northern state she grew up in. She was so young. You see. She'd never seen it before. Nobody talked about them. She means Indians she tells me. And so on and so on that. But that moment in

front of the TV she says was like opening a box left at her door opening to see the thing inside. Whereas to say she learned through that mother's face. Can you believe it. And I let her finish. Wanting someone to say it but she hated saying it or so she said admitting how she never knew.

[00:58:50] Until then they could feel. How I laid it really heavy on you.

[00:59:05] I know that I'm going to actually conclude and close with a piece I get so cold here. By the way I have to wear this big scarf and actually conclude with a piece that I like to usually end with all the time. Anyway this is a resolution one of the resolutions I wrote and it's resolution to end in this piece. Actually all of the resolutions I wrote I use the text of the actual apology itself but I have reworked it into my own. I commend this land and this land. Honor this land. Native this land. Peoples this land for this land. The this land thousands this land. Of this land. Years this land. That this land they this land this land. Stuarded this land.

[01:01:24] And this land protected. This land, this land, this land, this land. This land. This land this land. This this.

[01:01:49] One more round of applause for Layli and we're actually doing pretty good for time.

[01:02:23] So what we get to do next is I think we have time to do. Questions. We have Mike captains who are going to be starting from the top and working their way forward.

[01:02:35] And we'd love to take live questions for the audience for our speakers one you did a beautiful job tonight.

[01:02:42] And if you could do us one favor you can clap for them so far.

[01:02:54] Amazing poets if you could repeat the question from from the crowd when you answer it. And I think just in terms of time. Feel free to answer a question if you really feel like you want to answer the question but we do have four panelists so if we can move it around that will allow us to get more questions and so if we can just tax him a little bit and you'll be sharing the mikes any questions in the back.

[01:03:18] And if you can raise your hands high. There is a question on this side on the left hand side.

[01:03:24] This is for all of you would you please talk about your sources of inspiration or the elders that you look up to and if you could repeat the question What a beautiful first question about our sources of inspiration and the elders we look up to we could just talk about that the whole time. I know I just I could I'll say I'll specifically honor it. Elder M Jackie Alexander who is a Trinidadian feminist transnational feminist genius and what I read tonight came out of a writing process where every morning I would take a prompt of one of her phrases that inspires me and wrote with them for an entire year and I could have I could keep writing for it for the rest of my life because that's how inspired I am by her so I'll name her as my elder other folks who'd like to answer the question Who

are your inspirations including elders. So I would say one of my inspirations is E. Patrick Johnson Alexis de Vo a little bit only Alexis Pauling gums

[01:04:32] Not my elder but inspiration. What kind of elder mobility.

[01:04:39] But yeah I feel like you know whenever I really you know a huge inspiration on my students that's where I get a lot of inspiration. Oh

[01:04:51] Okay. I just need to speak directly into it. Um maybe I would say to the elders that are um probably leaving if you could speak directly to them. Okay can you hear me okay.

[01:05:07] Um two of the elders um that come to mind first I would say. Simon Ortiz um I am a poet.

[01:05:16] I think um I have always learned a lot from his ability to be so direct and fearless in his directness.

[01:05:27] Um and then another is Joy Harjo uh which comes she comes in through the side door. Um but still there's uh uh your.

[01:05:39] Okay. Hi. Can you hear me now. Yeah.

[01:05:42] And then maybe to um uh. There. I would consider them kind of elders but they're also peers but more contemporary. Sherwin but Sui airport and DG. DG OK. Pick uh in you a poet. Um to um people I. When I'm writing I always open up their books uh to keep me going. There's there's definitely a lot but um I think right now the two that

[01:06:16] Are in my or the three that are in my head one of them I write a lot about and actually almost read a poem about my mom but I decided that that wasn't what I was supposed to do tonight I write a lot about my mom and um she's a big source of inspiration and I also lately have been really inspired by Dr. Dionne Milian who wrote the therapeutic nations and and also felt theory um and that really inspires my my poetry and and just trying to convey history through them through experience and which is a big part of my poetry.

[01:07:05] We go to the next question. Towards the front towards the front you hear me high.

[01:07:16] So my question is for Lilley. So you said something at the beginning and it sounded like it was another language. I'm just wondering what language was that and can you tell me what you said please.

[01:07:26] Thank you I just introduced myself in our name in Lakota language Lakota language Lakota and I just said I just said my name. Mainly a kitchen a key to horns. That is um one soldier in our own language I greet you with uh like good heart I guess. And a warm hand or something like that. And I don't know why we say that in our introductions but everybody says it so.

[01:08:07] Next question.

[01:08:09] It's the front. How are you doing.

[01:08:15] It's like nobody has any questions.

[01:08:17] Um so I was wondering about the poem you read about that. MS I perceive it as a fact them. I don't know if that can't read right now. That was in the poem. Can you tell me how that poem was developed and um how how how has it been received so that.

[01:08:35] So it came out at this writing practice of working with Jackie's prompts and it was It was however not a prompt that necessarily mentioned anything that is in there so. So I take full responsibility for everything. Everything in there. But the thing about it is that the projects is not necessarily my expression of things that I know. It has been showing up showing up as a portal and showing up and being open to certain certain messages. And so and some of those are in the second person like some of the ones that I read tonight and I'm included in that. You write that's being spoken to for sure. And so it and it it flowed just like that. Like I wake up early in the morning and it flowed out just like that and I was like Well all right. Look

[01:09:31] That's clarifying and you know that is important.

[01:09:35] And when I write like that I don't always share sometimes what comes as a message. Just specifically for me right. And I don't necessarily share that with the entire community but that was something that was like oh no this is actually for everybody to go ahead and recognize and this is the first time that I've shared it publicly. So you all have 100 percent of the response. I appreciate that I appreciated your response. It encourages me to share it more and and yeah it just was one of those bottom line pieces like if where if you're going to love the universe. Really recognize and understand that.

[01:10:18] And it's repetitive in that way because it's something that is just over and over and over and over and over again insidiously and the narratives like how often do we see something in the media. How often are these internalized messages happening.

[01:10:33] What would it be like to just fill one minute with the truth in it as equally a repetitive way. So I'm interested in what people think about it.

[01:10:43] But I stand behind it 100 percent.

[01:10:53] And we're going to the next question in the front what is a common problem that you encounter in developing your work. And what are some techniques that you use to overcome that challenge.

[01:11:04] Writing at all.

[01:11:14] I have been a poet since I could write and. And some times I am prolific and sometimes I am not.

[01:11:24] And being patient with myself during the times that I am not being in community with other poets who I can talk poetically until I am ready to write it down I think that's one of the ways I move through that okay.

[01:11:42] Well I'll say quickly that yes same thing. I wake up really early. I call myself waking up before my fear my fear gets up like eight. So I get up at 4:00

[01:11:57] And I'm like not literally not awake enough to be afraid. So by the time I wake up all the way I'm already writing and that that

[01:12:06] Is what I do. And the other thing is like you were saying you know you open certain people's books to keep you going when you're writing that that too very much having the words and inspiration of those elders who who inspire me is what moves me through.

[01:12:22] We have another question in the back so this is actually kind of falls up on that question. I've had a lot of friends tell me in the past couple weeks since the inauguration as they felt really stuck right that they haven't been able to write or saying or do any kind of creative work they usually do. I'm kind of wondering how how what's been going on has been affecting you and if you felt like you've been able to write and what you've been able to do to get unstuck if you are unstuck.

[01:12:52] Well for me this moment actually has opened up a lot. So it's actually been really fruitful because it gives me a lot to write about and to think about. I think one of the challenges for me as a writer has has been the someone spoke to this earlier today the loneliness of writing I really love to interact and engage with other folks and share.

[01:13:17] But being in the process with the with with your words when it's just you can.

[01:13:21] That can be kind of challenging.

[01:13:26] I think we have time for two more questions and one more reply.

[01:13:31] I was just going to say the last two poems that I shared.

[01:13:34] I wrote recently so and I think it's because there's this opening that I feel in the world. It could be a wound it could be an opening I'm not sure. I think it's both and there's a lot there to heal. And poetry is one way that I heal already got to ask this question but as for everybody else.

[01:13:58] As for Alexis you talk about the beautiful art up there and can you describe it because it's a podcast so people can imagine.

[01:14:08] So the question was about the a collage that's projected above us here and it is a collage that I made called Message received in honor of Audrey Lord. So there is the image of Audrey Lord breathing my name into a glass with a heart. So I feel very loved by it. I created that image that I could feel the love that I feel it has envelopes it has pillows it has a typewriter it has the ocean it has brick walls and it came out it came out of a process called Black Feminist breathing that I created in order to breathe and there are

[01:14:51] There over 20 more images with different different ancestors who have inspired my practice of black feminism and the process was I actually just wanted to have people know the black feminist breathing process is a repetition of words that these folks have said as healing as prayers as mantras. So from Audrey Lloyd I am who I am doing what I came to do and I would repeat that over 100 times in the morning to myself as as a way of doing the same thing I just mentioned before how can I have the repetition that I have within me that's like I have something to prove or I'm not good enough or I'm afraid how can I replace that with these sacred words that these folks want to say and to leave here for us. And I just wanted there to be an image so when I shared it with other people they would know like this is what Audrey Lord look like. But then when I actually started doing it I was just so overcome with love

[01:15:55] For Audrey Lord of Virginia or a number of other people that I started to imagine OK if they were here you know if they were still embodied what would I do.

[01:16:06] Oh I would put pillows I would put all the letters I would have the coolest typewriter I would like. This is basically the fantasy for the ceremony of honoring that I wish that I could do and that in fact I can do in this way for Audrey Lloyd and for these other ancestors.

[01:16:23] So thank you for asking about that.

[01:16:24] And thank you so much for sharing it and putting it all over the library. Audrey Lord was a librarian by the way. And so she's home.

[01:16:40] We have time for one more question.

[01:16:44] Maybe even two of a really good. I think I saw one in the front. Do we have any questions in the back. And if you can keep your hands up so we can see the Mike captains can get to you.

[01:16:55] Thank you all so much for those amazing incredible performances. I wonder if you could say something about the performance like some decisions that you made in the performance or the process of making them into performances or how did it feel. It seemed like there was a lot of intention a lot of a lot of decisions in the way you performed those pieces just not answer.

[01:17:23] I think there is something about being tired right. So we had a very busy time starting from yesterday. The last night and then this morning all day and something about um. By the time this evening came and when I say I'm tired it doesn't it's not a complaint. There's also something beautiful that happens when your um your guard is lower. I think maybe that was a part of when I stood up to read I wanted to just read what a some of the pieces that ordinarily I wouldn't. I think sometimes I worry about audience. I don't want to burden them. And tonight I said I'm just going to do it. So

[01:18:16] I'm just going to read it. Oh that was a part of my decision um because my guard was down and I wanted you to be part of that. I had somewhat made a decision before I got here but really as I listened to the poets before me I was like moved to find pieces that. Were as heart centered and and that I that projected the kind of love that I saw and so that

[01:18:56] It was a thoughtful decision beforehand and then very very much organic from what I felt here.

[01:19:04] And so thank you. Thank you. Thank you all of you. This is amazing.

[01:19:14] I'm so one of the things that I've been all the pieces that I shared are all works in progress. And one of the things I'm really trying to think about is rhythm and how to really with sometimes simple words make them mean different things by seeing them differently. So what happens when you say things really loud. What happens when you say them softly slowly so playing around with how to in a way choreograph a poem the decision.

[01:19:48] You know sometimes I think it's my decision and then I get there and I'm like oh you know who does that video showed. I was like Oh okay. The universe has some tough love not only through me right to be shared in the space tonight.

[01:20:01] And what I noticed in the enactment of it was that I trust this space that I trust the people in this space like that this was a space that could actually hold what the energy that we brought through tonight which is not necessarily easy to hold. And I think that

[01:20:22] Part of that has to do with the crew here at the library Davida's specificity and how to create the space.

[01:20:29] Some of it may have to do with some ancestors like like John Coltrane bringing energy into the space beforehand. Maybe with Audrey to you know being here visibly.

[01:20:41] But I do want to say thank you for that and honor you for that and also say that it's important to also honor the work that it is to stay present to what we are present to and working through in our work. And to honor that you know what does that look like. Does that look like some silent time does that look like some writing and journaling of your own. Does that look like a conversation where you can where you can process some of that

[01:21:08] But yes. Yes. Yes. Thank you for holding that. And I've

[01:21:12] I felt held when I was sharing the words that I was sharing that you all didn't shy away but you stayed present.

[01:21:18] So thank you for that. May we have one warm round of applause for everyone.

[01:21:46] Applause Thank you so much to University of Washington and our community curators Sara amaranth and Michelle. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. We could not have done this without you. And again thank you to our artist.

[01:22:06] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.