

Desire Lines: Setting a Tone

Setting A Tone: Pamila Matharu, Makeda Silvera, Andrea Fatona

Respondent: Faith Paré

Organizers: Felicity Tayler and Michael Maranda

Transcript of a conversation that took place as a live broadcast online video event on 26 March 2021 as part of the speaker series *Desire Lines: Mapping the Metadata of Toronto Arts Publishing*, hosted by the AGYU in coordination with Artexite and the SpokenWeb.

Note: This transcript has been edited for clarity and published without a Q&A section in keeping with the other event transcripts of this series. Technical difficulties in the recording has led to certain sections being excised, and we will not be publishing the video recording.

Michael Maranda: Hello everyone. Thank you for coming. In recognition of our place on the traditional territory of numerous Indigenous Nations, the Art Gallery of York University thanks the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabek who have and continue to care for this land. This land is subject of the Dish With One Spoon Covenant and Wampum between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Three Fires Confederacy, and other allied nations in an agreement to share the land and its resources. The gallery occupies land referred to Crown Treaty 13, also known as the Toronto Purchase, which was originally signed in 1805. While the government of Canada and the Mississaugas came to an agreement on the claim arising from this treaty in 2010, we should also acknowledge the treaties are not isolated in time and the obligations outlined in them should be understood as part of an ongoing relationship, not a one-off historical exchange.

The land which we are acknowledging here is not an area to be found on a surveyors' map. It is a set of interrelationships between ecologies and subjects. It is an understanding of a set of responsibilities to others. I would ask that we all consider the territories in which we currently find ourselves in. Feel free to use the chat for your own personal acknowledgments.

Thank you, and welcome to Setting A Tone, the second in a series of online conversations on art publishing in Toronto. It comes out of a project that Felicity Tayler and Tomasz Neugebauer are engaged in, a mapping of the metadata of a series of magazines active in the seventies and eighties to establish a network diagram of the social relations within the pages and the offices of those magazines. These maps are not endpoints however, like the land of our land acknowledgement. These maps stand in for these social relations, which we are attempting to document. If you haven't familiarized yourself with this project, I would encourage you to visit our website for a fuller description. While there you can also watch the first conversation with the Lillian Allen and Clive Robertson. Before turning this discussion over to Felicity, I would like to thank her for all the work she's putting into this project. It's been a real pleasure as it has unfolded over the past few months, and I am sure we'll continue to surprise in the coming months as we continue. I would also like to extend thanks to both Faith Paré and Josie Spalla, who have been key in helping us keep on track, and of course, I need to thank the two organizations whose resources have been vital on supporting this endeavor, Artexite and the SpokenWeb Network.

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Finally, we have to acknowledge the support of our funders, the Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Toronto Arts Council, York University, and our donors, friends, and supporters. The staff of the gallery has been unfailing in their support of this series and I want to thank them publicly. Finally, of course, the participants in these conversations, whom all have been generous with their time, their experience, and their knowledge. With that please welcome Felicity Tayler, who we'll be introducing today's conversationalists.

Felicity Tayler: Hi everyone. Thanks Michael, for the introduction and for the chance to bring everybody together here today. I'm speaking to you all from unceded, unsundered Algonquin, Anishinabek territory. I live here with my family and we're very grateful for the many generations of stewardship of this land. Ottawa is a meeting place for many different peoples, and I'd like to also acknowledge the members of black communities whose ancestors arrived here forcibly, and also the experience of Asian communities, all of whom were living with an amplification of historical inequality and racialization in the pandemic moment. I'd also like to acknowledge the generosity of Makeda, Andrea, and Pamila for their trust in me and in this series, for taking the time to meet with us today and share their experiences. All three of them have strong long-term engagements with oral histories as an embodied method and aesthetic genre. I look forward to learning from them in practice today.

I also thank Faith, our respondent for today, who will share her reflections with us at the end of the session and in future texts. I'll give a brief versions of their bios now, but I encourage you to go to the AGYU Desire Lines webpage for longer descriptions of their long-term brilliant works. I also noted that we started about 10 minutes late, and I am going to be timekeeping for myself and for everyone on the call, and I suspect that we'll go 10 minutes over just to let you know ahead of time.

The bios for today, we have author editor, publisher, and activist Makeda Silvera who currently makes Toronto her home. In 1985 in response to a lack of publishing venues for women of color she co-founded Sister Vision Press that was active until 2001. Makeda has published collections and short stories, novels, collected interviews, and groundbreaking anthologies, most notably "Piece of My Heart" in 1981, the first North American anthology of literature by lesbians of color.

Andrea Fatona is an independent curator and an associate professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design University, recently named a tier two Canada Research Chair in the center for the study of Black Canadian diaspora at OCAD university. She's the driving force behind The State of Blackness from Production to Presentation, a website and a repository for information about ongoing research geared towards works by Black Canadian cultural producers.

Pamila Matharu is a settler Punjabi descent from Northwest India, born in Birmingham, England, and based in Tkaronto. Pamila has shown nationally and internationally, served on boards of several artists run centers, and is the recipient of grants from the TAC, the OAC and the CCA, as well as numerous awards, including the Contact Festivals 2020 Burtynsky Photo Book Award. Currently she is artist in residence at Archive/Counter-Archive, where she's working on a new project, "Where Were You in '92," slated to begin in October 2021, iterations of which shall continue to unfold at Or Gallery in Vancouver and Agnes Etherington Art Center in Kingston through 2022 and 2023.

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Our respondent today is my dear colleague Faith Paré, she's a poet and performer of Afro-Guyanese and Québécois ancestries. She's a proud alum of Our Bodies, Our Stories, a mentorship for emerging artists who are queer and trans, BIPOC, led by Kama La Mackerel, and was the recipient of the Quebec Writers' Federations 2020 Mairuth Sarsfield Mentorship. She's a co-founder of Volta Collective with Meredith Marty-Dugas and Paige Keleher addressing anti-carceral action and transformative justice through creative intervention.

I'm just going to talk a little bit about Zoom etiquette points as our call unfolds. I want to thank you all for coming and I want to remind everyone once again that this the event is being recorded and will be published and transcribed for accessibility after the fact for future reference. We have many participants with us today, and I'm really excited to see you submit your comments and questions in the chat throughout the event. I'll be keeping an eye on the chat as much as possible because there's no Q&A session at the end. Instead, when I catch your questions, I'll ask them to the speakers as the call unfolds. This means that your text, statements and your questions might appear in the published version of the video and transcripts that appears later on.

I also want to note that many of the people in the audience today have their own lived experience that corresponds to some of the events that will be discussed today and I want to thank you for coming and also just to express that we would be interested to hear your own responses as well.

I will also be pasting supplementary materials into the chat box, so, you can keep an eye on that. For example, I just put a link in that takes you to an online repository where some scans of some materials that will be discussed today are available to you. You can scroll through them. The network diagrams that we're looking at today are also in that repository, in their static image form. But for those of you who were on the call last time, you'll be as interested as I was to see that there's a interactive version of the visualization diagram that Tomasz Neugebauer put out recently since the last call. Thank you, Tomasz! It's a lot of fun to play with, and I'm going to share my screen right now so that I can talk to you about it while we are here together.

If you weren't able to join us last time, I do encourage you to watch the recording of the event with Lillian Allen and Clive Robertson. As Lillian raised crucial dynamics of what it was like for her and her poetic community to work within fields of art publishing that was dominated by the aesthetics of Euro-Canadian whiteness and the 1980s. I also gave a bit more background there on why working with periodical metadata and this network visualization method offers a shift in a readerly gaze away from the cultural networks of publications, such as *Canadian Art* or *File magazine* towards the fields of production around three magazines published in Toronto between 1978 and 1987, *Fireweed*, *Border/Lines*, and *Fuse*, which began as *Centerfold* in 1976 and then changed its name later.

All of these magazines have been acknowledged as spaces where cultural race politics or intersectional feminism or worked through as a modes of activist cultural criticism. The computational algorithms that produce this network emphasize connectedness within the network through co-contribution relationships to these magazines as people occupied multiple roles, writers, editors, even as typesetters, illustrators or photographers. This means that the dots get bigger in the diagram the more that an individual connects other people together through contributions to magazine issues. For example, in this network around here, I'm going to do a search for Makeda's network.

Here you see a subsection of the network that is clustered around Makeda. Makeda is in here. This is Makeda's dot. The green is Fireweed, the computer has recognized it as the Fireweed magazine issue "community." We'll talk

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about some of the names that are in this network today, but I just want to point out how it works in terms of visualization. You have people like Pamela Godfrey or Stephanie Martin is up here and they have dots, relatively large dots, but it's not immediately obvious to me why when I look at Fireweed as a [physical] magazine. In thinking about it and in speaking with Makeda, I think that the dots are big because they have contributed to many, many issues in a production role. In the case of Pamela Godfrey, she was also on the editorial collective of Fireweed at the same time that she was a member of the lesbian type setting, collective Pink Type, and I think we will hear more about Stephanie Martin's role in production today as well. In the last Riddim an' Resistance event, there were several prompts from the audience to add Parallelogram magazine to this network, and what I've learned from this series so far is that prior to the end of the 1980s, it could be more interesting to reorient the network in other directions than the national framing of *Parallelogram* and ANNPAC. We could, for example, just as reasonably include the contributors to Contrast, Spear, Share or Tiger Lily as significant spaces for the development of critical voice and publishing skills in the Black communities of cultural producers, we'll talk about today. Likewise, including the networks of *Asianadian*, *The Body Politic* or *Broad Side* would shift the weight of connectedness in other directions opening up different narratives for arts publishing and community that is grounded in the material realities of Toronto, but that reaches out to readerships across multiple geographies, diasporic, transnational activist or otherwise.

Feminist thinkers about data aesthetics, such as Johanna Drucker, have pointed out that network visualizations only gain meaning through the narratives that we project upon them, and this is where the ethics of Desire Line Speaker Series begins. In the act of searching for a tone, with which to tell stories about relationships between things we know, but might not be able to see how they fit together, or that may resonate with unresolved issues into the present day. In the process I'm actively thinking about my own listening positionality as a white settler, second-generation librarian, and sometimes art historian, who has stewardship responsibilities for the *Fireweed* archive and related fonds at the University of Ottawa.

I'm thinking through voices, such as Stó:lō scholar, Dylan Robinson, and Black lesbian feminist activists, Audre Lorde. Whereas Robinson calls for an undoing of normalized and unmarked settler colonial forms of perception, Lorde's in 1981 address to white women academics calls to me to be attentive to tone as a source of radical generative possibility, to train my ears to brilliant responses of Black women and women of color to systemic oppression, and to be reflexive in the privilege latent to my own tone. Why do I think it's important to listen to the history of Black arts publishing in Toronto? As Makeda has written, the act of writing or talking about the publishing and editorial histories of women of color is itself a gesture of activism, because these stories are not documented or widely published. These are stories of exceptional courage that touch people who I deeply care about as colleagues and as friends and who I find community with, when they invite me in. Like Lorde, Makeda's voice calls to me through time to think about publishing and editorial work as necessary activist spaces, where it's possible to rewrite the terms of racialized gender and socioeconomic oppression.

When I first showed these networks to Pamila they resonated with her own personal practice of creating counter-archives of artistic lineages, grounded in community relationships with women of color. Her experience of intergenerational mentorship through Fresh Arts and Sister Vision Press will be shared with us today. I was also

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fascinated to see names such as Lillian Allen or NourbeSe Philip, Nila Gupta, Dionne Brand, and Aynna Black, and Himani Bannerji jumping out of a network as they are influential figures contributing to a sustained tradition of critical voice from Black women and women of color. In the early 1990s, both Dionne Brand and Himani Bannerji noted this absence of voice as a silencing due to colonial cultural bias. In this sense, Andrea Fatona has been an important interlocutor for me as well, as she prompted me early on to find Tiger Lily magazine and learn more about Anne Wallaces', Williams-Wallace Press and Sister Vision Press. All of these relations I'll try to honour in this panel.

Very soon I will stop speaking, but we'll begin today with an article in the online repository that I linked here, the summer of 1987 issue of *Fuse*, thematically titled Black Ink. It's Lila Heaths' detailed overview of the historical Black press in Ontario, and it concludes with a hopeful acknowledgement of "an emerging Black women, women of color, feminist Black press" suggesting that the 1980s was a transitional moment in print culture and publics of social movements, the long history of community building and transformational politics.¹ So, this panel takes Heaths' hopeful observation as a framework for early history questions about the emergence of Sister Vision Press and Fireweed magazine.

Faith, I'm going to turn the microphone over to you because as someone who writes from the social media generation, you had some really interesting observations after reading this article from Lila Heath, and do you want to start with a question for Makeda?

Faith Paré: Yeah. Hello everyone. Thank you so much for being here. I'm really grateful to be able to share the space with Makeda and Pamila and Andrea. It's a real humbling moment to ask these questions and to engage as a young Black writer from Toronto, where Toronto's art scenes are really my bones. I'm really grateful to be here. Makeda thank you so much for being here as well. I just had a couple of questions to maybe get us started, see where we want to go from here. I was really surrounded in my own childhood with papers like Share, for example. So, I've never really had the same experience as some younger people about feeling absent or disconnected from the sense of a Black press. I want to ask a bit about your experience working for newspapers like Contrast and Share as a typesetter and later writing articles about domestic workers. Can you recall the first time that you realized you wish to be a publisher and that you realize you need to create your own access to print media?

Makeda: Okay, so before Sister Vision was founded in 1985, I spent many years in publishing. My first part-time job was with Contrast, of course, as a typesetter and proofreader. This wasn't good at all because I got a lot of cussing because I couldn't really proofread. I must say that this was a time when you didn't have unions in small presses, so the publisher could say whatever he wanted, cuss you and I got a lot of cussing. He cussed men and woman. He cussed anyone because there was no union and it was basically a one man show, and if you didn't like what was going on, you left, you either suck it up or you left.

¹ Leila Heath, "Black Ink: An Historical Critique of Ontario's Black Press," *Fuse* 11, no. 1&2 (Summer 1987): 20-27.

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I think Royson James, who was a past editor of the paper, said it best in an article in the *Toronto Star*. So, he says, “At the time, when Black folks were dismissed as troublemakers, *Contrast* was a bulwark, a shelter against a storm of media criticism and unfair representation” and *Contrast* was before many other community agencies took their route. *Contrast*, besides being a newspaper, it was an information center, it was a hotline, and it was a human rights provocateur. And still, despite the male chauvinism, that goes a lot with journalism I learned a lot and I also learned interviewing skills which led me to the domestic workers.

Faith: Absolutely. On that thread then, as me and Felicity were discussing some of these questions ahead of time of this I feel it’s a very recurrent experience, particularly for Black women writers to have to learn in essentially the shadows of very particular kinds of presses with particular kinds of values. You have to sneak with skills you can take out with you because you’re always under the boot in many ways, so it’s interesting to hear you talk about, here are the skills I grabbed, and managed should take with me because this I realized was not necessarily the place. I was curious on that line then, what the stakes felt like around creating a Black women’s and women of color press after these previous publication experiences. Were there other examples of diasporic or transnational feminist presses that were inspiring you.

Makeda: Well, first of all, I have to say it was Kitchen Table Press in the U.S that really got me going, because when I saw that woman could actually publish and hold a press of their own, that really got me going. With *Contrast*, what I learned was the long hours and the dedication, even though it was a male dominance environment, and there were no rules and—
There were no rules and sometimes it was uncomfortable as a woman. But, I still learned a lot and it enabled me to work reporting on domestic workers because, of course, in retrospect, no man wanted to be doing that in *Contrast*. So, even though I begged for it, it was easy because there were other important things to deal with in the community, besides women. I’m grateful for that, but my inspiration came from Kitchen Table Press.

Felicity: Thanks for that reflection on working at *Contrast*. Really interesting. I guess, what I’m hoping we can do is kind of take the time that you spent at *Contrast* and the skills and the environment that you worked in there and then your growing interest in being able to write about domestic workers, which shifts us into the space of doing the oral history and writing *Silenced* which was eventually published by, was first published by Williams-Wallace Press and then had multiple reprintings afterwards. And I’m just wondering if you would give us a little ... My copy actually came with this review of the book in the *Toronto Star*. And I’m just wondering if you would talk a little bit about what it was like working with Williams-Wallace Publishers on the manuscript for *Silenced*.

Makeda: Well, you know what, nobody would touch the manuscript. I first took it to feminist presses, they wouldn’t touch it. I took it to alternative presses, they wouldn’t touch it. With Williams-Wallace, I actually had to beg and insert another person that was published with Williams-Wallace to take a chance on this. I suspect that it had to do with writing from a perspective of the receiver. So, writing from the perspective of domestic workers,

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that's one. They were talking about ... so, they were talking Patois because at that time, there weren't any Filipinos domestic workers. There were Caribbean, and mostly live from Jamaica and other countries, Trinidad, Grenada.

They were mostly talking in their own language and that's how I began the whole history of oral English. Nobody really wanted to print a book about sexual harassment of domestic workers, the long hours they had to serve, their kids calling them the N-word and all of that. So, *Silenced* was a hard sell.

With Williams-Wallace, who, I have to really say was a pioneer publisher of Black histories and Black poets, particularly. I mean, I'm not dissing her at all because she was a pioneer. But when this book came to her, I had to beg and ask others to beg for her to publish it because it was a whole different book. It was domestic workers, exposing sexual harassment, exposing having to work overtime in a little hovel in the basement and all of that. So, nobody wanted to touch it. I don't know about white people at that time, whether they had domestic workers and they didn't know how to come to terms with all of that. I'm saying, it's okay to have domestic workers, it's how you treat them. I mean, all of us, many of us who can afford it because of class, have somebody coming in to clean our house, but it's how you treat these people who come into your house.

And that wasn't the case with domestic workers. They lived in the house, they weren't given time off and there was a sexual harassment. I'll just end there. Too many things. A lot of people at alternative presses found it really hard to publish the book. And Williams-Wallace, although she was a pioneer, asked me, "can you think of some good stories?" Well, I can't, these are what the women give me. I can't. I can't make up good stories. Anyway, I must add that we decided to go once I got her okay, that she would publish it. We produced it and gave it to her. So, it was Pamela Godfrey, myself, and Stephanie Martin who produced the book and gave it to her to publish. And later on, we took back the rights and Sister Vision published it and we have reprinted four times and it's also used in universities throughout. So, that's it. Obviously valuable.

Felicity: It's a definitive text. I think, it's a text that's referred to in many different women's studies courses. It's been reprinted an exceptional amount of times. And, to think about the kind of labour that had to be put in on your end to supplement the type of support that the publisher was able to bring at that moment in time is, I think it's really significant and to continue on this thematic of absences, I'm just going to share my screen again. I want to show something that I found in ... I was really interested to find in the first issue of *Fireweed* because I believe that, after *Contrast*, you started to become involved with *Fireweed* in the early '80s.

You published an article with them in '81, I think, about domestic workers. It was probably an excerpt of *Silenced*, but what I was really interested to find was this advertisement inside the first issue of *Fireweed*, that kind of aspires for *Fireweed* to publish a historical and contemporary contribution of Black women to the feminist movement. And it was proposed by both you and Dionne Brand.

I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about where this aspiration went and what drew you to *Fireweed* at that time and why you decided to join the Editorial Collective later?

Makeda: Well, that's complicated. Let's just say it never happened. The book or the article never happened, that *Fireweed* withdrew. It was then I don't know how much about the old Collective before the new Collective of said

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woman that vetoed it. So, it never really happened. Neither Dionne Brand, or I was connected fully with the old Collective before I joined the new Collective of white woman. So, it was just dead.

Felicity: Following, I mean, I'd also like point people who are listening today to the issues of *Fireweed* that I uploaded that appeared in 1983 and 1984, I believe, issues 16 and 17. One of them was the Women of Color issue and the other one is Writing, and both of them were sort of watershed issues in the history of *Fireweed*. Some of the background to what Makeda is alluding to might be more visible if you peruse to the extracts that I put up there.² But, I'm also wondering if you would just be able to talk about what it was like, given this idea of Editorial Collectives and the shifts between the old and the new or different configurations, do you want to speak a little bit about what it was like working with Ayanna Black, Himani Bannerji, or Nila Gupta in that editorial collective capacity?

Makeda: Well, Ayanna wasn't in the issue 16, but, she was just a great soul. I don't know how to describe Ayanna. She was into jazz a lot and she really supported the arts a lot. I don't know where the generosity came from other than she used to be a trauma nurse in her other life before she got into the arts. But she was a great supporter of the arts. I forget. What was the next part?

Felicity: It was just, if you had other memories around working with Himani Bannerji, or Nila Gupta, or Dionne Brand?

Makeda: Nila was, I don't know, at that time, a calm in the storm. Because at that point, I was the only black Collective member on *Fireweed*. And she came in and she was incredible. That's all I have to say about Nila at that point. I mean, she eventually left before I did, but, she was there for issue 16 and she was wonderful in bringing up all the racism and acknowledging racism and classism in the Collective.

Felicity: Thank you for these memories. Do you mind if I do a little digression and ask Andrea Fatona to speak a little bit about Ayanna Black, as well?

Makeda: Oh, that's great.

² Makeda Silvera, "Another kind of vision: Women of color in publishing. Resistance, transgression and transformation" (Masters thesis, York University, 2005). Lianne Moyes, "Intersectional Thinking in Guest-Edited Issues of *Fireweed*," *Zeitschrift für Kanada-Studien* 40, no. 1 (2020), 74–90. Makeda Silvera, "How Far Have We Come? Keynote address to the Women and Words Conference," *Fireweed* 17 (1983): 39-42. Reprinted in *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les Femmes et les mots*, ed. Ann Dybikowski et al. (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1985), 68–77.

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Felicity: So, Andrea, this is just to acknowledge that you've dedicated the State of Blackness Project: Ayanna Black. I was wondering if you'd like to elaborate a little bit on those citational politics that you've built into the project and how that tribute might resonate with different communities?

Andrea Fatona: Thanks for inviting me here. And I also want to point out that I'm here in Toronto. This is where I'm in place. So, Ayanna Black, I dedicated the State of Blackness, a website repository, to Ayanna primarily because of my knowing deeply of the work Ayanna has done to make visible the works of Black cultural producers from coast to coast, across this country. The deep research and the deep advocacy that Ayanna engaged with the Canada Council to ensure that multidisciplinary art projects were funded, primarily because of her understanding that the works Black diasporic artists were making were outside of the frameworks of the really strict disciplinary frames that the Canada Council had. And it was actually detrimental in our ability to access funding and in our ability to actually present our work in public.

So, I also spent a lot of time with Ayanna trying to understand the role she played in this country to allow me and the rest of us, all of us here, like Makeda, to do the work we're doing now and to continue to do the work. So, I've looked at my ... I've understood Ayanna and many of the other folks in this country, people like Winsom who is on this call are actually embodied archives, they have a lot of information to share with us about our history and our present here. So, on the website, Ayanna is actually ... There's dedication to her that serves as a citation. So, I'm trying to think about alternate ways to cite those who shaped, who we are in terms of cultural producers in this country, particularly those who exist outside of academia, because the academics are always cited.

Makeda: Exactly, Exactly!

Andrea: Folks like Ayanna ... provide a citation that allows for an engagement with her. And so, when you go to the State of Blackness site, the citation is a link, and it's a link to Ayanna speaking about her own work. It's also a link to folks from the Women's Press talking about Ayanna's contribution to the culturescape of Canada, but to the Black culturescape of Canada. So, Ayanna is deeply important and Ayanna among others. I've cited her because she's passed away and isn't here to speak for herself. So that's my engagement with Ayanna.

Felicity: Thank you, Andrea. I really appreciate all of that context that you're sharing with us and also your practice of building that into how future generations will engage with these histories.

Andrea: I think that the citation is also about Ayanna speaking in her own voice. So, it takes you through to a document. I think, for me, that's really important, as well, to find other modes of delivery outside of the textual as a way to cite the folks upon which we build our careers, but our presence upon.

Felicity: Thank you. Makeda, I think I'm going to try to get us to shape the space where we can start talking about Pamila and what would it be like for her to walk into Sister Vision's offices, following her experiences at Fresh

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Arts. What I want to do is just hold up this anthology “Piece of my Heart,” which was published in 1991, but it had a very long history of, it started in 1985. From what I understand is, your work started on “Piece of My Heart” in 1985. And so, this is a really long engagement with putting all these pieces together that make up this landmark anthology. I also think that period kind of encompasses when the Fireweed offices, no, the Sister Vision formed and the offices were shared with Fireweed, but then they also moved into your basement. I’m just wondering if you can speak a little bit about what it would have been like to live this publishing experience alongside the house and the activism community of the Dewson House and your family.

Makeda: Okay. So let me just say before, which you probably didn’t know, what was exciting about being in the Fireweed office was that, Women’s Press was also in the same building.

Felicity: Ah, that’s interesting.

Makeda: So, it was this old house, lovely old house near the Ontario Art Gallery and also OCASI . So, it was a nice neighborhood. Coming from my neighborhood was nice. So, let us say that ... What was your question? Because I’m caught up in the situation of the place where they were located.

Felicity: That would have been the Fireweed offices, which I could see, the idea of coming from a neighborhood that is different and kind of like moving into a nice neighborhood and what that can feel like and what that would have felt like, perhaps, to you to do the seriousness of the work that you were doing with in the Fireweed Collective. I’m just wondering if we can talk a little bit about what it was like to move to create Sister Vision and then move it into your house at Dewson.

Makeda: Okay. Well, Fireweed moved a lot of time, so we moved out of that house. So, to get to the point, we housed with Fireweed for a while, and then we moved into the house in the basement of where we lived. What can I say? Back then, Dewson house was crazy. I think you’re asking me about the lives that lived in there. So, there were children. There were five children in there. Their mothers live in life, there were loves, there was sex, lots of sex. There was mentorship.

... and then there were writers, then there were people constantly dropping into the place. You’d walk in and you don’t know what to expect. At that point, you just go to your room because it was just crazy. You’d wake up in the morning, I’m telling you, and you’d meet somebody in the kitchen that you don’t know, okay? I mean it was crazy, but it was also exciting, okay? We did... What can I say? Okay, let’s say there was always food on the stove. There was music, there was always debates that was going on, and there were fights, and there were movie nights, where we showed political films and we also showed porn. This was the kind of house. It was totally exciting, and if you don’t want to be involved, you just go to your room and lock the door.

But there was also Sister Vision, that was in the basement. We had all these people coming in with ideas and book ideas and whatever. I mean, it was totally exciting. At points, maddening, but at least you had your room to go to.

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That was it. One memorable thing was our first book, which was Speshal Rikwes, was launched here at Sister Vision in our house. The interesting thing about it is that that book could go nowhere else because it was in total dialect. Special Request was spelt, S-P-E-S-H-A-L R-I-K-W-E-S. We published that and we were very proud of doing that, because it broke and it sent us on a journey actually, of learning to publish books that were very different and in people's languages.

Felicity: Thanks, Makeda. I think, from what I know about the history of Sister Vision, this aspect of language and the performance of language and the events and where those events took place around the books has always been important. Thank you for sharing that with us today. I'm wondering if we can... I'm just keeping an eye on the time. I just want to let everybody know that the session is being recorded and it'll be published afterwards. If you do have to run, you can always come back and have a listen at another time.

But I am going to just wonder if we can make a transition here between that family life of the Dewson House and the space of the press inside this intergenerational living environment and activist community, then just transition a bit to Pamila, talking a little bit about what it was like for her to build a practice as an artist, where she engaged with Fresh Arts and found a sense of community, and I think activist experience through Fresh Arts. But I'm going to stop speculating and I want to screen share an image of an installation that Pamila has created around those experiences and then just pass the microphone to her. Go ahead, Pamila. You can start talking and I will screen share.

Pamila Matharu: Hi, everyone. Thank you so much for having me here Felicity, Michael, AGYU. It's great to go down memory lane with Makeda there, wow. I also want to be give a big shout out to folks who are in the audience, particularly my first mentor, Winsom and Fresh Arts, and I'll give you a little bit of background, but folks who may or may not be here, but the visual arts cohort that Winsom took care of tends to not get a lot of play or props, I would say. So, I just want to mention Devin Berkeley, Delroy [-----], Nadine, Netifa, Jumo, John Paul, Kareem, Lemont, Jabari, and Melissa d'bi.young—who then created the Watah School—Jacqueline Telfer, Sunilda Teak, Eddie Braithwaite, Ian Lamont, and Emily.³ And Winsom, I know you're in the audience.

Makeda: Althea Trotman?

Pamila: Makeda, I'm talking about the visual arts, but yes, you're right. Althea Trotman, Michael St. George, Koba.

Makeda: Lillian [Allen].

³ Due to technical difficulties in the recording of this session, we regretfully cannot complete the names of these Fresh Arts members at the time of publication. Nevertheless, we recognize the importance of proper acknowledgement of presence, so we would kindly encourage anyone who is able to contribute these acknowledgements after the fact to contact us with clarifications/corrections.

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Pamila: Lillian's a co-founder, but in terms of the artist led component there, that's the names. There was also television, film, music composer, Orin Issacs. Often, Fresh Arts gets a lot of props for the performing arts, I would say, and you might recognize names like Jully Black and Kardinal Offishall and Saukrates and whatnot. In the summer of 1992, a young Black man was killed in broad daylight by a plain clothes officer, his name was Raymond Lawrence, and that same week, there was the trial of the Rodney King situation, which happened in March of 1991. The verdict for four LAPD officers were coming out in a matter of days in which the shooting happened, and because of that shooting, there was a demonstration, a peaceful demonstration that I was at that was organized by the Black Action Defense Committee.

There might be people in the audience who were there, and that summer, I left sleepy North York and came downtown. My mom was just like get your butt home, because by the evening there was an uprising that broke out with the young folks that were there. Then, Fresh Arts was basically born after Stephen Lewis had written a report about the state of young Black and Indigenous males, and the really alarming unemployment rate and the alarming dropout rate. Now, here we are 50, some odd years later in which TDSB, I worked for this public school board, they can't really say that much has changed. They can't really say that much. Sorry, Michael. They can't really say that much has changed around that piece, and I guess, when I made the show, it was this room that you're looking back at.

So, this space is a homage and what's called a shradhanjali to one of India's first modern painters, who happens to be a mixed race and woman named Amrita Sher-Gil, and this installation was called "Dear Amrita: How can I forget history when I was just starting to remember?" And what I was doing here was I was giving my, I guess I would say my thank you or my honorable thank you to my "femtors" I'm going to call them, in which I created an installation called "Index," which is on your, would that be your right side of your screen? It's right side of my screen, and in that, I made this little homage, if you want to show that now, to Black feminist cultural producers of Toronto. This is the first time that I installed "Index"'s sum of all parts. Now, there we go. These are all materials from my archive. Yes, I archived newspaper as well as objects, and you can see a text there and then a recording of an album. You see a VHS tape and an audio tape, and then two articles, and then where I use some vinyl, my collaborator, Marilyn Fernandes, is a graphic designer. I asked her to do this, and the idea here is that I am basically coming out around my affiliation with Black feminist cultural producers. How do you actually visualize intersectionality as a visual artist?

So, I really thought long and hard of this and the archived article that I had, I just decided to get it mounted and put it up in the installation because Julie Crooks had just recently said in February during the Black Futures issue of *Now Magazine* that this is what we need to do in the visual arts sector around looking at the canon and how to basically motivate institutions to really change their thought around what is Canadian art, particularly looking at it from, a point of the fact that, here we are in Turtle Island, here we are with Indigenous and Black communities. This is how long we've been a presence, but yet why is there no cultural affiliations in these institutions around our communities?

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As a member of the South Asian community, I could say the same thing. I don't like, when you talk about the canon and what I'm doing around art history, well, are you going to tell me that I come after Ken Lum because he works with texts and photo? In some ways, yes, you probably could, but I'm thinking, Sarindar Dhaliwal, and Jamelie Hassan and definitely Jin-me Yoon, but those kinds of affiliations are not drawn by Canadian art institutional curators.

I took my experience from an organization like Sister Vision Press and Fresh Arts and Theater in the Rough where I met Makeda's daughter, and she is who introduced me to Makeda and Sister Vision Press. Then, Makeda helped me get a youth employment services stipend or job or something, that's how I got my foot in the door with Sister Vision Press, which was then at 401 Richmond. Really, I mark that period as the start of, I've been affiliated with five boards all at 401 Richmond Street. So, let's do a show about 401 Richmond Street. That would be interesting too, because you know what happens at 401. It's like Las Vegas, what happens 401 stays at 401, and those of you who know what I'm talking about can attest to that.

When I entered Sister Vision Press, I started off as interning and assisting Makeda, and I worked on a very, at the time, prescient and fresh publication called *Black Girl Talk*. What I found was it would really reminded me of you know, melting the silos that Fresh Arts did. Similarly, how do we take a text like *Black Girl Talk* and then animate it? Makeda showed me the ropes around these poets and writers and these prose writers and these thinkers are not just to the written word, they have other parts of themselves.

It really helped establish, I would say in terms of my formative years from 1994 to 1997, before I count 1998, it was my official start in the art world and working then, and then Winsom would come back into my life once in a while, while she's traveling and doing her shows, and she says, I didn't know I was at a crossroads, so I say to her what do I do? And she's like, "go learn artists who are in your culture" because York University was not providing anything that looked like me, sounded like me in terms of content and art history, nothing. So, you have to wonder why the dropout rate is so high with BIPOC students, it's because you're not really reaching us. We have to do that. You have to back fill it, right. If you don't have the initial cultural education from your family or perhaps your elders, then you're going to find your way home by yourself.

Between Fresh Arts and Sister Vision, I was being exposed to fantastic, as Makeda talked about, domestic struggles with the domestic workers, to black feminist thinkers across, basically all up and down Turtle Island. I got to go to queer publishing events and people like being introduced to Gloria Anzaldúa, June Jordan, Sojourner Truth, and it was interesting because I was very much into this. I was very tied to my affiliation of being born on British soil, and Makeda used to cajole me about that. It took me a long time to understand around my proximity to not just the colonial system, but whiteness and how I demonstrated that through my choices.

So, here I am coming full circle where I don't find the margins so alienating anymore. In fact, it's probably better and I could probably breathe better because I am working in the margins for the margins, right? That's the thing, as Makeda taught me, initial conversations around a kitchen table, how that nourished and challenged us around dialogue and activist struggles, how they're necessary to cut across the lines of historical geographical, disciplinary borders. That's the thing I think Western hegemonic institutions really force you to think in silo thinking, and when you go into your community or if you do cross-cultural work, I'm thinking of someone's work like Courtney

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McFarlane's recent show at BAND,⁴ how so much of that interactivity around like receiving and there's a reciprocity in cross-cultural community cultural production.

So it was very, very interesting to not just be in between spaces of protest, but then also in cultural production. You shared resources, much like what Makeda saying, with Women's Press and Press Gang and whatnot, and I would see her have conversations with other feminist publishers. Definitely being introduced to someone like Audre Lorde through Fresh Arts and Sister Vision, where Lorde talks about the historical amnesia that keeps us working to invent the wheel. So, often, we are just replicating and replicating generation after generation.

When you come across young folks who are making and playing in community perhaps, or in the fields, you're like, wait a second, do you not know Sister Vision Press? Do you not know *Fuse*? Do you not know Press Gang? Do you not know that these things have existed? You are not the first young press publisher, they think that there's nothing before them, and it really, really, you start to think how the history can become a tool and a weapon around that and triggering, in a good way, where there is this big conversations around let's get into intersectional, let's get cross-cultural and definitely let's get intergenerational, but then there's no action.

So, I have often gone back to Winsom and Makeda, I talked to Julie Crooks, Andrea, when she has time to fit me in between her busy schedule, but you know how to close those gaps, because I work with 16 to 21 year olds and they don't necessarily want to go to art school or writing school or any kind of commercially driven program. So, how can you then become a nurse aid or a personal support worker or a special needs assistant? The first thing Makeda did was tell me to write, and I was like, what? And she's like, you have stories, you must have stories. And I was like, holy smokes. I can do that. And she's like, sure you can.

It was almost like introducing myself back to my own identity as someone who could do that, who could slip into different identities, and I didn't necessarily have to share that with the world. It took me time, much like what Makeda said around publishing *Silenced*. I also have been laboring for the visual arts sector in Toronto for well over 25 years, and in the last five to seven years, I started to really think about what's the point of joining another board? I understand that you're filling your diversity quota, but what am I getting out of this?

Yet again, here we are 15 years later, okay. What, you're going to be the sixth or seventh board to have my name on it? Faith, I see you shaking your head, but this is the situation, right? So, don't second guess me and don't fence me in, this is what I learned from Makeda. As a publisher, she took some serious, serious chances on unheard of writers, and then I don't want to name names, but they are stellar examples in the nonwhite literature world, right? There's my issue of *Black Girl Talk* with Makeda's notes in it, and you don't even know that I have this.

Makeda: No I don't!

Pamila: Yes, baby, I do. Look at this, you made me annotate everything. Pre-internet, no email, I had to pick up the phone and call these writers.

⁴ BAND — Black Artists Network Dialogue, Toronto, *Legacies in Motion: Black Queer Toronto Archive Project*, 14 March–7 April 2019. Curated by Courtney McFarlane as part of the Myseum Intersections festival.

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Makeda: Those were the days! That was the old days.

Pamila: And I was like, what, I have to talk to them?

Makeda: People are afraid to talk to writers. They'd rather email.

Pamila: The thing is, yes.

Andrea: Can I jump in on that?

Pamila: You sure can, but this is my issue of *Growing Up Black*. Why do I have this? Because I was complaining to Makeda about very, what I can now name as covert structural invisibilized forms of racism, not just at York, but in the artist-run center community. And she was like, here take this. And I was like, why? She gave me tools, Felicity. Yeah. She gave me tools.

Felicity: I hate to be like the "Zoom moderator person," but I'm just keeping an eye on the time...

Pamila: No, no. That's it.

Andrea: Can I jump in on this thing about tools—

Makeda: And the time, I understand!

Felicity: Let's listen to Andrea, who has a space in her schedule for us. [laughter from the panelists]

Andrea: Thank you. I just wanted to jump in on that because there's a number of things that became really clear to me as you were both speaking, but as you were speaking Pamila, just about the fact that, I have to state that I'm on this panel, that's talking about Toronto and Toronto publishing, but I was in Vancouver at the time, and so for me, what's really interesting about all of this, that if you just let me try and drive together in terms of what our deal is.

Pamila: Ya I'm done!

Andrea: No, no, you can jump back in, but something became clear to me and I wanted you to say it because it's—

Makeda: *Kinesis, Kinesis.*

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Andrea: Not just *Kinesis*. It is *Kinesis*, but it's about the ways in which I left Toronto to go to Vancouver, to find myself and to get away from a particular kind of Black formation and community here, and then I got to Vancouver and there was very little blackness. The folks working on blackness were very intentional people, like the Black Women's Congress with people like Barbara Binns, and then I got introduced to the publishing house Press Gang. One of the first books I got from Press Gang was Makeda's *Her Head a Village*, and so I wanted to talk about the ways in which, in my life, this idea of publishing and ideas have traveled across the country and allowed me to actually be able to deal with and take up some really deep ideas around Black identifications. I wanted to say that I got introduced to Press Gang. I got asked to write for *Kinesis*, one of the first articles I wrote was that one that was on the interview with Makeda. Maybe it was the third article, I should say.

On the ground in Vancouver, because of the small Black community, a lot of the work we were doing was again, around kitchen tables, talking to each other, being on panels with folks. I was on a panel with bell hooks when I was like 22, just unable to breathe, but also being in conversation with people like Shani Mootoo, reading books from Karen Tulchinsky [now Aren X Tulchinsky], Larissa Lai, and the list goes on. It was a really intergenerational, when you talk about intersectional, right? Those were the folks whose works meant something to me and grounded me, but it was also in discussion with folks like Makeda and folks in Toronto, with Sister Vision Press.

So I guess, when I think about the visualization, Felicity, there's this other part of it for me that's so, so embodied that doesn't get captured in any of that visualization, what should be my discussions on the ground with people like Janisse Browning, who was a writer, a Black woman, is a Black woman who writes, was writing for *Kinesis* at the time.

It doesn't capture folks like Kathy March, who's no longer making work, but these are folks who grounded a lot of the stuff that shaped me and brought me into conversation with someone like Makeda. So, that information and her work could circulate within the space of not just Vancouver, but a larger space in terms of the distribution of *Kinesis*. I think it's also important to state, too, that I keep putting out the fact that a number of us know each other very closely, the way Makeda's talking about the house, intimate practices that generates a lot of us are related to each other as well, right? Or we have these close family connections that come out of our backgrounds that we treat each other like family, even if we're not related, right? We might've grown up beside each other.

So I'm saying there are these practices around kinship and kinmaking that we have, and that have informed our connection both within the Black community and Black publishing, but it also informs how we relate to each other outside of those spaces, with developing community with people like Marissa Lyons. It was really important, people like Crystos reading those texts, right? That's what I wanted to add. There was something that was really interesting, that's quite material, that's really quite relational, but I don't think this visualization or even some of the making, it just doesn't show. It's hard to show those. I feel like they're very, I don't have the language now to really use, to say what those relationships are. I'm trying to think about language to hold them, but they're much broader than a visual or deeper than a visual.

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Felicity: Yeah. Thank you so much for those reflections. You're really putting a perfect frame around what the limitations of that visualization are and why these sorts of discussions are important. These ones are happening in public, but there's also many that are happening in less public ways. Thank you.

And my understanding, too, is that this event that happened today, this will continue, and I think we're committed to that in different ways. I'm just wondering if this is a good moment now to ask Faith, our "social media generation," to bring this, moment in time to some kind of closure with a little respondent response, if that's okay with everyone.

Faith: I promise I will be very quick because I think to close off with y'all would be the best mode, and I'm completely up here in terms of feeling like we are all so spread apart right now. And yet, I'm sitting at my kitchen table right now, and I'm feeling as if, in this very strange time, in this very small slice of time, that we can attempt to convene here and be together and talking about and, as Pamila was saying earlier, really thanking previous generations of Black cultural producers who were here and also were not present, who can't speak for themselves. As you guys were talking, one of the things I was doing was just listing verbs that were coming up for me. That really felt like that I was picking them up as you guys were dropping them, and some of them were: inserting, writing, begging, dreaming, citing, laboring, meeting, fucking, watching, meeting, making, making, thanking. And I was so drawn to the ways that text here and legacies of text in creating art with each other has always been about frictions and materiality, as Andrea was mentioning, about touch really, about family, about kinship building that really breaks away from so many of the claustrophobic experiences that I think we all can testify to, in terms of being cornered and particular institutional spaces, to build kin instead of to be cloistered away in a siloed thinking around art, in a siloed thinking about values of art and particularly what is supposed to be Canadian art has been like really, really thrilling for me to be part of today. I think some of the last questions I have going away from this and what I'm going to be thinking about in terms of writing some kind of response to this, which I feel like honestly, maybe the transcript could just exist for itself without any comment.

I was really struck by the way that Makeda talked about this experience of begging essentially for a publication like *Silenced*, which has maintained within university spaces, within organizing spaces, within art spaces. I talk about it in my women's studies classes to this day, how it needed to be begged into existence. I feel a lot of anger around that, that I'm still trying to figure out what to do with, and I feel a lot of anger about that because this is not some kind of origin story of Black feminist publishing in the land we call Canada. Black women and particularly Black queer folks, Black lesbians are still begging to be published today. One of the things that I'm trying to consider in terms of perhaps not a cure to this, but at least a kind of a generative evolution from that begging is how kinship and how footage and how touching each other through texts. Also, I'll keep it very quick in being like, how do we transform literary spaces out of dominance to another and especially dominance to a text in a very particular kind of narrative, to touch and to laughter and to meeting each other in the middle, which has been the transformative thing that's gotten me through arts programming in Toronto that has introduced me to my own mentors in Toronto, the community arts programs and Scarborough and how I've survived institutional spaces and creative writing in Montréal through incredible feminist writing mentors and how I'm trying to engage in this project. So, thank you for

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letting me sit in and laugh in the background and tear up and just let me soak in your words for this afternoon, and I hope whatever I can attempt to make of it makes you proud.

Felicity: Thank you so much Faith for that reflection. I can see in the faces of our speakers, or I think I see in the faces of our speakers, that they feel well reflected. I just wanted to say thank you so much for Makeda for joining us today and sharing those memories with us and reminding us of how important it is to listen and to continue to bring those memories to the forefront. Andrea, I really, I always appreciate your presence as you engage with history and engage with memory and the embodied aspect of this storytelling. Thank you so much. And then Pamila, I am always astonished by how the work that you produce, really tells us about the life of the materials that you bring together, right?

So these objects represent this incredible network of social and social lives and economic ties and all of these things. It's so rich, and I want to say thank you to, I'm going to wrap it up now, and we actually have, despite the technological stuff that happened, we still stayed relatively well on time. So thank you so much to everyone, and thank you to the AGYU for hosting this and making this possible. Thank you to Artexte. Thank you to all the colleagues that I've worked with at SpokenWeb.

Pamila: Yeah, thank you so much.

Faith: Thank you so much.

Makeda: Fist. [Makeda holds up fist; all speakers hold up their fists]