

# A Lament For Power Transcript

## **SPEAKERS:**

David Blandy, John Bloomfield, Larry Achiampong

**John Bloomfield 00:00**

Okay Welcome back. And welcome, Larry and welcome David. How are you two this evening?

**Larry Achiampong 00:05**

Yeah, not too bad. Not too bad. Yeah, been a long day. But looking forward to having a chat with you, John. It's been a while.

**John Bloomfield 00:13**

Yeah. It's good to see you again. And also to, to watch the film again. Such a powerful work. And yeah, how are you doing David?

**David Blandy 00:23**

Yeah, all right. Yeah, it's been - I feel quite zoomed out today. But, you know, let's, let's do this.

**John Bloomfield 00:30**

Okay. Okay, so I wanted to start with some quite simple questions. And I thought it would be good to ask you a little bit about your collaboration just for a bit of context, and so, when did you start working together? That sort of thing.

**David Blandy** 00:47

Okay.

**Larry Achiampong** 00:48

I'll start if you want,

**David Blandy** 00:51

Go for it, Larry.

**Larry Achiampong** 00:53

So, and unless I'm incorrect, please excuse me. I'm getting older. Yeah, David, and I we met in 2013. We've known about each other's respective practices. For years. Personally, I've been told about David's work time and again, particularly from my years studying at the Slade on the MA between 2006-2008. And then I was reminded again of his practice, about a year prior, 2012. And I guess yeah, I'd always been interested in his, I guess his devotion to hip hop and aspects of popular culture that I felt in the art scene perhaps weren't being allowed to be kind of spoken about. Because, you know, whenever popular culture is mentioned, it's mentioned, it's low culture, and especially Black culture as well. So I went along to a talk that David was doing for a new work that he'd made that had been produced by artsadmin. called Biter, which involves David, trying to remember rhymes from the Wu Tang Clan's catalogue within Sigmund Freud's

consultation kind of space in West London. And yeah, I mean, I was blown away, and then kind of just like, Whoa, like the audacity of this white dude, to rhyme these rhymes, but like, I guess I was really interested in, in how this person was really into these forms of culture that I personally been told, for years had nothing to do with art. You know, and were very much a strong part of my own upbringing, having grown up in East London, you know, Where, where, when you think about Grime the history of that, and Garage and so on. Its birthplace. So, yeah, I mean, we shared some words, I think I gave you a record, David, one of the Module Project records. And then David got back in touch, like a few months later, to be honest, I didn't get it. I didn't expect that we would kind of you know, stay in contact. But it was really just like, kind of, like, showing respect to an artist whose work that I thought was was interesting. And yeah, David got back in contact. And I guess the rest was kind of history we got speaking about, about collaborating together. I think David had been approached about doing a project in in Moscow, or somewhere like that. It fell through. But like I was, Oh, wow.

**David Blandy** 03:26

I'd forgotten about that completely but yeah,

**Larry Achiampong** 03:29

It was a text message, I remember. Just came straight up no matter, and I was like "What?". So, so yeah, I don't know, David, probably you want to add more elements to where we open things up from there?

**David Blandy** 03:40

Um, yeah. And then I mean, that was, you know, really, it started as an experiment, as an experiment in collaborating across our practices. You know, as soon as we started getting to know each other, it was obvious we had so much in common in terms of our interests in terms of popular culture, hip hop, interesting video games, video game history, that kind of slippery thing between popular culture and art culture, what belongs in the White Cube, all of those things. And that was what what led us to our first collaboration, which was the Biters project, which was us being a hip-hop crew and going to different art spaces and kind of music venues and performing as a hip-hop duo. And it was during those those journeys to those places and kind of notice getting to know each other. We started talking about more the systemic issues that are going on the the things behind what we were talking about, and that's what led to the Finding Fanon project, which really kind of led on to the whole body of work that we're talking about today. Because, yeah the whole genetic automata project is like the next stage after after Finding Fanon, which was kind of a exploration of the the ideas of Franz Fanon. Who wrote, 'Black Skin, White Masks', 'Wretched of the Earth', incredible philosopher, psychiatrist, agitator, freedom fighter, and just thinking about what his writings mean today, and, and it gave us a mode for writing in a way, particularly like the intro to Black Skin, White Masks as a certain kind of mixture of the declamatory the theoretical, the analytical, which I think still sort of influences our collective writing. But yeah,

**Larry Achiampong** 05:54

I mean, even for me individually. Fanon's, writing kind of kept me through my undergrad at Westminster. And then later on the Slade, the MA, I think without those writings, I'd have just left. Because, you know, as much as there are things that worked about the

courses, I've never really felt like it was made for me, or someone like me, and Fanon just manages to cut through a lot of bullshit and make that very clear. I think that a lot of writers theorists are not able to do that, because they're too kind of caught up in language being too exclusivised, or it just goes to some other planet that it doesn't need to. But for me, as a young Black East London kid from Bethnal Green, I was able to relate my own experiences of you know, being stopped and search repeatedly by police, falsely arrested by police based on my race, like various other aspects of treatment of race and racism. And to bring that into that contemporary moment from a piece of writing, like David said, you know that had been written decades and decades previously. So yeah, those writings, I guess, they've sat with me, and within my practice, and in just the way I live and think, in general, and the Fanon project allowed us to perhaps open things up in a conversational manner - a conversational space, perhaps similar to that of maybe considering, you know, the, the meeting between Jean Paul Sartre and then, Fanon, which we kind of, you know, bring out with within the film, and of course, with the voiceover by Hayleigh Joy-Rose.

**John Bloomfield** 07:47

Larry I wonder, did you feel like other people were reading Fanon at the time, because I know, slightly earlier there was like a Mirage conference at the ICA. And like there were, you know, Isaac, Jr., Mark Nash made a film. There was energy around Fanon at a previous moment. But when you were reading -

**Larry Achiampong** 08:10

Yeah, I mean, when I was reading, I mean, other students, they definitely weren't. They weren't into it, perhaps in a way that it's kind of like making its grammes now, like it

was, it was just the, you know, my tutor was really good. And he helped me get into the Slade, Pete Owen, who ran City Racing years and years ago in Layton. Just recommended the book to me and said, "Look, there are things in here that even I won't be able to kind of teach you or talk to you about," which I appreciated, you know, like just a white man being honest about that kind of thing. But no, at the time, no that writing, unless, you know, thinking about, you know, the Mirage conference, the Iniva produced conference and books that kind of, you know, followed, that touched on Fanon's ideas. I wasn't finding any of that anywhere. And so it just felt, I guess, yeah, there's a difference of feeling between, like reading at that point in time compared to now obviously, and in a good way, in a very fortunate sense, especially due to things like that, that the internet allowing distribution of information, which is much more easier now. And journals being able to exist online and without having to pay stupid fees, things like that, you know, seeing like, even the term, you know, decolonial, I remember when that term just wasn't - you know, it wasn't even a thing. Right. But, I will say that, you know, when I started reading, which is like, you know, what, early, early to mid 2000s. I remember coming into conversations with people, and it become an argument, like "you know, that stuff's not true," you know, just thinking stuff where you get too angry. It's like, No, actually, like, you know, that lived experience is true. And so yeah, it's interesting to, I guess, to be living, you know, later on down the line at this point in time, where, unfortunately, when I think about, you know, some, you know, students that I have that, that they're able to talk about these things, which perhaps are a bit more open, still, there are many problems, many structural issues, but I think that those debates have opened up a bit more.

**John Bloomfield** 10:18

Okay. So, I want to talk a bit about the film we just watched. And just to begin. I wonder, could you just tell us what's in the film, just in really simple terms. What did we just see, what were those images, where were they from?

**David Blandy** 10:37

Okay, so you've got a whole mixture of different computer generated images, mostly constructed inside Unity. So there's a, like a shack in a swamp. There's a kind of default city from Unity, there's a, like, futuristic science lab. And there's sort of a bunch of sci-fi corridors all of which are being kind of mucked around with and moved about and reconfigured, and then a virtual camera has been sent through them. While this black blob kind of expands, takes over, mutates. And, yeah, that's, that's kind of it in the nutshell. And then you have this whole segment in the middle, which is appropriated from Resident Evil Five. So it's part of a playthrough that Larry did of Resident Evil Five, where, and then we've zoomed into certain parts of it. So you're really looking at the figures rather than necessarily the back of Chris's head.

**John Bloomfield** 12:02

Okay, thank you. David, you told me something, you told me quite a good story actually about Resident Evil Five which I'm just going to probe you for, well actually I'm happy to just repeat it rather than performing it. But you told me that to get a specific outfit, the safari suit, I believe, Larry needed to complete it on a certain setting. And I just really enjoyed that story. Because it for me really encapsulated your relationship to the source material where you can sort of be critical, you can take from it. But you're also going at it from a place of love and it's sort of, we were talking about how it's you know, it's a form of sampling but you've got to - it's like if you were sampling a record and you had

to kind of play along in key or something before getting the sample. I just found that really, really interesting.

**Larry Achiampong 13:03**

Yeah, I mean, part of the experience of that was not too dissimilar from that of when we utilised the Grand Theft Auto video game engine for you know, for the Fanon series, you know, we did loads of levelling up, loads of playing online, loads of dying. But I guess where some of the divergences kind of happens. I mean, I'm just gonna say I'll be honest, like, I love the Resident Evil series Resident Evil Five, though, for me, it's one of the worst games in the series. And I don't really love Grand Theft Auto either, I love the first game, the first game and then Grand Theft Auto London, both top down, arcade style jump in, jump out, I guess my problems with Resident Evil, which, for me, I kind of called to mind when David and I were having earlier conversations was just me thinking about my own personal first playthrough I was so excited for the game to be released after having played Resident Evil Four, which I think is actually one of the greatest video games of all time. But also, it's one of the video games, if you look at the history of gaming, third person shooters, etc, you think of the likes of Gears of War, and so on. They took from, you know, the types of mechanics that were kind of built in Resident Evil Four which is a very different type of game, compared to the other games which had fixed camera angles, you know, you're actually moving your, your camera, your, your, your camera with the character. And this sense of, horror was it kind of, it was much faster paced, but it was such a long journey. But anyway, getting back to Resident Evil Five part of the reason why I had a problem with it apart from like, ridiculous stereotypes that didn't kind of like, you know, whether I guess, the designers, the creators didn't kind of think much about what they were producing was actually just the



racism within it. The complete kind of racism of the treatment of Black characters. You know, this was written a little bit about, when the game was like being previewed and stuff. But I think, you know, again, you know, just like the question that you asked me about in terms of like, you know, me experiencing Fanon's writing, you know, early 2000s, compared to now, not many people were talking about it, I mean, you'll see people writing or talking more about it now, but at the time, you know, there were a couple of articles and so on that were written. And I believe that, you know, Capcom, they made some changes to like a couple of scenes. So there's a scene for example, where a white woman gets dragged into this apartment in this block. So the original build it was it was these Black guys that like, pulled her in but then after the feedback that they kind of like received based on I guess, beta testing, development or whatnot, they then changed that to, they changed that to men of colour still but they were you know, more like skin-tone-wise closer to white and you know even like some of the, you know there's loads of literature of course in the Resident Evil games, you find loads of files, you find loads of, you know diary excerpts and stuff. And in my second playthrough I decided to read so much more of it, I just thought wow, like they had so much - the thing is, they could have made an incredible video game, they could have made a video game that really just flipped the world on on the virtual, let alone like the history of like zombie culture and even the, you know, the maltreatment of that within Hollywood, but they just zoomed right past it for this thing where you play this hulking, Chris Redfield who used to be skinny in the previous games, mind you, we'll not get into that. But like, the obvious gunning down of Black folk, like it's, like it's okay. And, and what because they're, they're infected, that kind of makes it or deems it alright, so, you know, it was it was strange, I guess, like playing, playing through that game to complete it to get this crazy, ridiculous Safari outfit, which we didn't film in the end. I don't think we did, we

didn't, we well, we captured but we just didn't utilise in the film, we use the regular outfit, but this really strange kind of, you know, Afrikaan kind of style of like outfit with these zebra stripes and everything. And I remembered like that you could get it and I was like, "Okay, well, I'm going to complete it. and then let's see how it works within that". But, um, you know, it's just an example of, you know, racism, and, you know, prejudice within video games history. Again, obviously, if we think about games, right now, you know, Cyberpunk, for example, is very problematic in terms of, you know, the racist elements within that, in terms of like, you know, the typical kind of like, Japanese evil corporation that, you know, plans to take over and whatnot, and then also the use of tribal symbols from communities in a way that is very, very insensitive. In fact, Resident Evil even does that as well. They do that with the Sheva character. So she has a, some people know, if they're really into it, she has a tattoo on the side of her of her arm, with an Adinkra symbol, so from my culture, Shanty culture, and the meaning of the word Gye Nyame, which is only God, only God can break these two cutlasses. You know, again, even with her character as well, you know, they kind of, they went for a kind of, like, a mixture of like, European and African kind of, you know, character. And, again, her character was really it's some of the worst kind of black sidekick character that you can create, you can see how they, they obviously tried to go for, you know, a light skin, you know, kind of like appearance of black woman. And one, obviously, with a Europeanised accent as well, because that's always going to go down well, right. Even, there are even conversations between her and Chris, the way that she talks about some of the people within this kind of West African-like region, that just, it's like, what the hell were these people thinking? So when you think about so much of that, you know, it felt like a really important place to perhaps explore for sure, if we're continuing to explore,

you know, popular culture, because it's interesting, but there's so many holes and problems with that. Right. So, yeah,

**John Bloomfield 19:42**

I mean, one of the things that's really interesting about video games, and about some of the techniques that you two use, and the strands you have in your practice, is that you're able to, you're able to take a text, which has these kind of problems, and you can find ways to hack it. So whether that's using like the director mode in Grand Theft Auto five, or the process you've described for, for Resident Evil five, you can sort of rework the material in a way that, I mean, certainly with like the Grand Theft Auto five stuff, you wouldn't be able to do that with other kinds of texts, like you couldn't do that with a film. And I think there's something very exciting about that. Because you think of, you think the budgets of these things compared to the budget you might be given to make a work. And, you know, you wouldn't be able to just like, put yourselves into, like a contemporary Hollywood blockbuster and manipulate the worlds like that. And I think Yeah, I think that's really exciting.

**Larry Achiampong 20:47**

Yeah, I agree, it's. Yeah. I think, you know, in the real world or the meat space, as it were, yeah, that just wouldn't be possible. I know. I'd be pressed that for sure.

**David Blandy 21:00**

Yeah, I think, yeah, I think that's key to it too, though, is that I think we're both coming to these things from inside the culture. We're both, you know, dedicated video gamers, I've worked in a video game shop for a couple of years, which was kind of what a lot of

the, the meat of my work, in fact, like how I came to be lip synching to the Wu Tang Clan was through that whole kind of, that process, and kind of finding myself in those spaces and kind of that dislocation between what I appear to be to many people and, what's going on inside my head. And that's kind of where all that lip synching stuff came out, came from and then yeah, led on to all the work with Larry and stuff. So it's, it's kind of embedded in both our practices, I think it's just that kind of dedication to exploration through practice. So the practice is the engagement is just the living, living inside these spaces and seeing where they go, seeing what they mean.

### **John Bloomfield 22:11**

Okay, so just to get on to a bit more of the, the content of A Lament for Powerr. So at its core, it's the story of Henrietta Lacks, and the first half of the voiceover, which directly addresses Henrietta Lacks. So just for the benefit of the audience, I'll just explain a bit about who Henrietta Lacks was. So she was a working class African American woman who died from cervical cancer in 1951. Cells from her cancer were removed during the treatment, and were then cultured into the cell line HeLa, which was the first immortalised human cell line, and maybe the most important cell line in medical research. And previously, cells cultured from humans would only last a few days. But Henrietta Lacks' cells were found to be extremely durable and prolific. So then you have this situation where Henrietta Lacks was eventually buried in an unmarked grave and her cells were taken without her consent, and without the knowledge of her family until at least the mid 70s. So these cells then went on to be used for, you know, to eradicate polio and for important cancer research. But yeah, there's this sort of terrible kind of, like contradiction at the heart of this, where, about kind of how Henrietta Lacks herself

was treated. So I just wanted to ask kind of how, how you came to this story? And what kind of drew you in?

**David Blandy** 23:45

Well, we were, yeah, we were taking part in a residency at Essex University. And we were talking to a biologist there, it was part of the thing was kind of we were trying to continue what we've been doing with A Terrible Fiction with, with Arts Catalyst, and trying to build on that and actually work with experts in the field. So we were talking to Dr. Antonio Marco. And he, we were talking about genetics and the kind of complication of genetic analysis and and how little race has to do with that. And he brought up the story of Henrietta Lacks. And that really was the start of our research and exploration of that story. And then, yeah, it was then how to, I guess, make the viewer embody that story. And that's how we came to the third person in there. But then there's a kind of essential moment inside, inside the script, where it actually turns around and starts to really make you think about the validity of us as artists taking on this story. How do we have the right to talk about this? How do we have the right to talk about anything, really, and that's, that's kind of how you lead to the black screen at the end, where it's like, you know, the image has gone. And you're left with with the voice, and your own feelings, I guess. Do you want to talk about that, Larry?

**Larry Achiampong** 25:45

What point? I mean, I guess what kind of sprang out for me from what you were saying David was, I guess, the point in time in which we were making this work, mind you, like COVID is kind of it's doing its rounds. It's doing it slowly. So, I guess, you know, to answer part of your question about like residency there isn't really a physicality to it you

know, the way that David and I will usually work, like David will come to, he used to come to my studio space that was in Somerset House when I was a resident there, of course not there anymore. I'm based here in Purfleet in Essex. And, and then, of course, you know, Coronavirus, made the rounds, across, you know, the UK, lockdown ensued and so on. And we found ourselves, I guess, in a predicament that the only point at which it was affected was the lack of opportunity to be able to like visit or revisit, you know, Essex University, the faculty, like departments and stuff, because there were things we wanted to do with, you know, robotics and all kinds of things there that they had great facilities for. So that was unfortunate, but we knew we could still create something based on our approaches, both individually and then collaboratively. In terms of like, making, we do a lot of things remotely, right. So that wasn't so much of a problem, it just, I guess, it became a challenge, perhaps, for us to, you know, respond to that, like, within the, I guess, the limits that we were given, but then, you know, and I was just like, looking it up, just to, like, make sure and get the exact quote in but like, you know, when, when the virus was spreading around the planet, you know, you had like doctors like, you know, spouting like the usual kind of like racist terminology about how they're going to, like do testing on Africans, like, for example, what is it, was a doctor called Jean-Paul Mira saying, if I can be provocative, shouldn't we be doing this study in Africa, where there are no masks, no treatments, no resuscitation? A bit like as it's done elsewhere, for some studies in AIDS, in prostitutes who try things, because we know that they are highly exposed, and that they do not protect themselves, you know, so like, these ridiculous, continued approaches, which, you know, when talking about, you know, medical history, they're not really, it's not historical, it's contemporary, it's still happening. It's still going on. So, of course, Coronavirus, I guess, obviously, it just happened that at the time that affected the way that we worked, but again, there were

just so many connections, I think in relation to how we were thinking and how we intended to have or open up a conversation about this. And I think one of the things that really hit home for me personally was, I guess, just my personal, if I'm honest with you, lack of trust towards authorities, whether that's like, medical or police or whatnot, based on the treatment of Black people, and particularly myself as a Black person, right, so that made its way through, I guess, my personal approach to the the text writing kind of space, you know, again, David and I would go away, we write, it's probably almost as if we're writing to each other, because like, I always feel like I'm writing to you David. And sometimes I feel like I'm shouting at you, sometimes I'm like, come on, listen, or whatever. And, you know, and then we bring that together. And then of course, you know, we we managed to, with the help of the folks at Texas, Christ's University, where we did a show a couple of years ago, got in touch with a vocalist, an American vocalist by the name of Sharon Keaton, who worked on a range of you know, records and Grammy winning records and things etc. She was just really, she was incredible. She just kind of she got it. And I think it's the first time that we've worked with, you know, like a professional vocalist per se. You know, we work with people who just have a voice or whatnot, but she just got everything and, you know, we had a session across zoom, where she was recording live. And that went pretty smoothly.

**David Blandy** 30:21

Yeah, we essentially had two takes didn't we, I mean, well, there were more than two takes. There were the two really good takes one was like kind of, yeah, just just you know, do it full on, like how she wanted to do it basically like acting it out and be embodying the character. And the other was like, do it as like, deadpan as possible. Like kind of really, really tone it down. And so what you have in the final soundtrack is like

the the deadpan version first and then like halfway through, it kind of cuts to that more impassioned one for the final section.

**John Bloomfield 30:59**

Okay thank you. I've got a few more questions, but I just wanted to make another call to the audience to post some questions. So we can have an opportunity to hear from some other people. I mean, I'm, so I guess just reflecting on, Henrietta Lacks' story, it's a story I came across, I've come across before, through the work of another artist, Sonya Dyer, who's also really interested in genre, but the genre she's interested in is sci fi. So she takes it somewhere completely different to you guys, it's actually quite, makes for quite an interesting comparison. And, I guess you guys, you kind of, you're thinking about horror, and that for me does some really interesting things. So drawing on the Resident Evil text just really kind of makes clear kind of how barbaric her treatment was, it's sort of using this. I mean, it's not even really a metaphor anymore. But using this idea of the zombie, like what you have I mean, just to be blunt is you have somebody whose cells are made undead, they're in a zombified state so that they can be exploited forever and ever. And that's, that's sort of, I guess, an instance where a genre like horror, which is often kind of, you know, getting back to what Larry said, like denigrated to low culture becomes really quite a useful tool. And something that actually has been probably quite useful throughout this year, because the situation we've been in is at times become, you know, like a horror movie like we're kind of told to, we have to kind of fear our neighbours and fear our even family members. It's like, you know, it's like, we're kind of at the climax of you know, a zombie outbreak. But, yeah, I just wanted to ask a little bit more about your interest in horror.



**Larry Achiampong 33:12**

Gosh, I'll go forever with this, really. Like, you know, turn the camera to look at my DVD collection like horror is something that I just grew up watching like, my mom, like, raised me, my brother, my sister, just watching all kinds of films like action films, Hollywood trash, Kung Fu, like Bollywood, the lot like and loads of films that sometimes like there were no subtitles even. So, like, you kind of got to grips with the mannerisms that people were kind of like, bringing with their body language, but with horror, I mean. So the thing for me, with horror is, you know, and I think people kind of like this, like, until quite recently, I guess when the likes of like Jordan Peele, like created, you know, Get Out or films like Us. I feel like the horror genre is kind of, in some respects, like been quite dismissed as like a thing of like, Oh, it's just cheap, fun or whatever. Yeah. In some respects, of course, it is. But I think that there are things within horror that like exposes some of the ills or the madness within society, or that is introduced into society, right? That you know, if you think about like John Carpenter's films, like They Live, you know,

**David Blandy 34:29**

I was gonna say that.

**Larry Achiampong 34:31**

Sorry, wait in line. (laughs)

**David Blandy 34:35**

And then you know, yeah, like Dawn of the Dead or something like anyway,

**Larry Achiampong 34:39**

yeah. George A. Romero's, yeah, Dawn of the Dead or even Night of the Living Dead, right. And even that, as a film was quite incredible in that, you know, they had a, you know, a Black lead within this kind of film, like, you just didn't have that. Conversations that relate to race, to gender, sexuality, and so on, they become so much more possible because in that culture of filmmaking, the conversations are just much more straight to the point with added element of certain tropes within cinema that people see at face level. It's like, Oh, it's just like some silly prosthetics or whatnot. So you know, like, I've always, I guess, my, my taste or kind of like feeling about horror, though, as a kind of, like genre has. It's gotten more sophisticated over time, in the way that I think about it, so, you know, I developed a film, which I released in my solo practice in 2019, called The Expulsion, which looks at the experience of like doing cleaning jobs, with my mum thinking about the experience through my mum and dad of like, you know, my Auntie's and other people, people of colour, Black people who are just like, they're not seen they're invisible. You know, there's a horror and reality to doing that type of work, I've seen it. I've lived it. I wouldn't like to go back to that, again, you know, the horror of not being seen the horror of violence of being in these these massive kind of spaces that like if something happened to you, no one would hear you. You know, it's like that quote that is used in what is it, the first Alien, No one can hear you scream, you know what I mean, that kind of thing. So I think, you know, following that, for me moving into the conversations with David talking about this, it became very easy to consider those possibilities, because, you know, because unfortunately, that reality of horror continues for oppressed people and especially Black people. So, yeah, I don't know if you have anything to add to that, David?

**David Blandy** 36:45

Yeah I think maybe, you know, what's happened during this pandemic is that kind of marginalised oppression has expanded out into the whole of culture that people have felt that pressure that, you know, you're undervalued, useless, whatever. Like, just because of who you are, and that's become everyone, because it's, you know, we're all we're all part of the virus chain. So we all have to be kind of, you know, restrained and constrained. And our bodies are kind of, yeah, they're worthless, because if they were worth something, then surely they would have stopped this virus before it got spread. So like, you know, what came first economics, and that that's the other side of the film is the idea of disaster capitalism and the Sovereign Individual, this book that William Reese Mogg wrote, Jacob Reese Mogg's dad, about how the world's going to hell in a handbasket, or whatever it's called. And that we've got to all make as much money as possible and create our own silos so that we can kind of profit out of this destruction. That's what the book is. And that's what William, Jacob Reese Mogg's doing now, so yeah, bingo,

### **John Bloomfield 38:10**

Yeah. I mean, when I was watching the film, I was trying to, like, specifically on horror, I was trying to make sense of what a zombie would mean today and just thinking about how, like, what, you know, it's one of the kind of tropes you haven't heard that's, it's actually quite, quite a slippery sign like zombies mean different things at different times. Usually, it's like a, it's like an other that we're supposed to be scared of. It's an otherness which is contagious, but that's been like, really, really different. It's been kind of, you know, communism, it's been AIDS, it's been like loads, loads, loads of things. And today, like what, like, how does that function? Is it just that like, within a pandemic, everybody

becomes that other, and you just have to kind of retreat? I mean, how would you make sense of that

**Larry Achiampong 39:07**

Well, I'd personally like to think perhaps a bit more perhaps about was it George A Romero's? I think it's Land of the Dead. I think it was made like early, late 90s or early 2000s. It had Dennis Hopper in it, I believe. And like, if you want, I highly recommend it like it's one. It's so weird, because like, I think it didn't review well, but as far as I'm concerned on a social, I mean, all of the films they did of the Dead series are social and political, some are just better than others. But this to me, is very, you know, in terms of the Living Dead films, there's Night of the Living Dead there's Dawn of the Dead and then there's what is it Land of-- I think that that's what it is, I remember it. But you know, like it explores race and class and that's the thing I don't, like, with this virus, like we're not really in it together, and not the way that it's either been written about or spoken about, you know, I can tell you for a fact based on my own experiences, of having lived in flats all of my life and thinking about the fact that people who do live in in blocks of flats, right, those people are more likely to catch the virus right, than people living in houses because we think about the cramped conditions. And then you think about statistics such as the fact that, you know, Black people make up like, what 3% of the UK population, for example, we're four more times likely to catch it. I remember talking to someone about it the other day about that, and they were like, Oh well maybe it's to do with like, you know, there being like unhealthy Black people and I'm like, What are you talking about? Like, do the numbers, think about it? First of all, don't say something stupid like that. But really think about what it is that's being implicated here, right? Um, so that film like, it explored the way like, the people who get hit first when

this big shit kind of goes down, you know, and you had this kind of like Dennis Hopper was playing like a Trump type character, who's like, you know, runs into his tower and all of that and stuff. And, you know, and the chaos, like makes its way through the building. But it was just really interesting, it's really interesting to see how, how that opens up, again, in relation to what you said about, you know, horror, John. But we're not in this together. Like this, let's just not, I'm tired of kind of hearing that, like, even when I think on a friendship based level, friendships of mine that have broken down, and like this virus is kind of added to that, because it's added to the angst, it's added to the anxiety, but because of the different positions and privileges that we have, or don't have, um, that creates different kind of bubbles of experiences, and thus, people respond differently to said situation. So I think, you know, again, coming back to how that that relates to A Lament for Power is, it continues to talk about the difficulty held within mine and David's relationship as much as there is love and there is respect, there is, you know, there are economic, you know, divides, racial divides all of that. And they're real. And, you know, it's not about running away from that, as far as I'm concerned. We haven't been but you know, so. Yeah. Yeah, I think I think we've got into it, in a way this, through this project, the Genetic Automata project, both Terrible Fiction, and this film, we've gotten deeper into that, like, Finding Fanon was very much like, you know, trying to form a conversation trying to find a place, trying to do the Stuart Hall thing of, you know, the unfinished conversation to get to the root of things, but it feels like in this project, we're really kind of delving deep into those much more difficult parts of where that is how we deal with history, how we deal with our present position, and trying to face up to that. And, yeah, I can't stop thinking about Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower actually, it's such a key, you know, it's a work of horror, I suppose, in a way, but you know, it's kind of post-apocalyptic fantasy. Well, you know, if

fantasies are bad. And, but it's, it just touches on so much of what we're dealing with right now. But also, yeah, you know, maybe where we're going,

**John Bloomfield** 43:42

Loads of us at Wysing, were reading that over the summer. Anne Duffau, who was working with us kind of was raving about it. And we all started reading it, there was a period in like, late summer, I was going into work listening to that on an audiobook in the car, and then to relax playing, playing the Last of Us 2. And I was like, actually, I don't think this really works.

**David Blandy** 44:08

Yeah, that's hardcore, kind of escaping from the escape with the escape sort of thing. But yeah.

**John Bloomfield** 44:15

Okay, I'm gonna open it up to some questions from the audience. So there's one, that's just come in to kick it off. So they've asked, "I would like to know what your process is for creating a work like this. Would you start, where would you start? Would you start with script or the visuals?"

**Larry Achiampong** 44:35

I think we start with a conversation, first of all, I know that kind of sounds, you know, weird, but like, the conversation really kind of links itself into so many things. So with every film, and I don't know how many films we've done now, 10, whatever, like, we've done loads, we've done a lot. We're always, we always have conversations about the

things that we would like to talk about, some of the things we perhaps hope to maybe achieve or open up, how it might sound, how it would smell if it could smell, how, you know, what it tastes like, all of those things. And then when we bring up those key words, and we bring those into like our (inaudible) or especially messages through, sorry, I've pulled David into Signal used to be a WhatsApp guy, I don't know, are you still a WhatsApp guy, but you know, like we have -

**David Blandy** 45:22

I'm straddling the divide right now Larry,

**Larry Achiampong** 45:24

There we go. You know, we have our conversations, you know, through social media loads of like voice notes, and written notes and stuff, the sending of links, and then that really kind of like gets the juices flowing, I guess, for the written kind of aspect of it. The sound aspect for me is pretty straightforward. Like sound is my thing. It's what I'm into so I'm always kind of imagining different kinds of audios or things that would layer or work so like, I build, I guess, a library of sounds and then we just make decisions. Or sometimes I'm like, Okay, well, I think this is gonna work better. David has a focus perhaps on the editing aspect of where the visuals might go with the sound. And, you know, in terms of like processes of like selecting, you know, people to voiceover I think like going as far back as, like Fanon, the Fanon project that was, it was really important, personally to hear the voice of a Black woman speaking, I guess, because when I think about, again, histories of like, voiceovers or whatnot, you tend to hear like men or white men especially. And that just wasn't cutting it for me. And if David and I were going to like, collaborate together and bring together all these skills that we have, then you

know, that, again, the conversation has to be opened further, as well, again, to think about our privilege as men, right? So there are a range of different things, I guess, that take place, but the conversation has to be at the heart of that. And that just, that feeds back and forth with loads of different things that we do. Later on that kind of, you know, bring this this jigsaw puzzle of sound, visual, you know, the written word or the monologue together?

**David Blandy** 47:15

Yeah, I guess it comes from like, you know, the research brings us stories, and then we have particular images, or perhaps games, or, you know, some sort of artefact that's in the world that we want to bring into the thing, like, and then it's just a matter of how do these things tie together. And it's a very organic process. I mean, we both have quite organic practices anyway, both of us are not really high, you know, figuring out every single part of the film before we've made it, we make it kind of through the process. And yeah, I think that's, that's why it works, and why the work remains fresh, I guess, because it's not all tied down until, you know, you finally finished that edit, and it's done. And then it's gone. And then, you know, we see what we've made.

**John Bloomfield** 48:03

Okay, thank you. I've just got two more questions which have come from the, I nearly said the floor, but it's from like, what's behind me, isn't it just cyberspace, like a cheesy photo. So the first one, asked, whether you're able to get a reaction from the research staff at the university, how they, what they thought of the work?

**David Blandy** 48:29



You know what we haven't, I mean, we shared the script with Antonio Marco. And, yeah, they had lots of thoughts about it, we incorporated some of them, and some of them, you know, they were scientific kind of quibbles rather than necessarily like, I don't know, poetic quibbles, or whatever. So, but it was really interesting to get their feedback on the script. But I yeah, I don't know, if Jess, who runs Art Exchange managed to get the actual final film to them.

**John Bloomfield** 49:08

I mean, it's the kind of thing that might, you know, if you were, if you'd been able to put on a show in the traditional manner, probably, yeah.

**David Blandy** 49:17

That's kind of, you know, the normal shape of things would be they would come to the opening or like, you know, you'd have that fanfare, it's been really, it has been really weird kind of making shows, knowing that it's there, in a kind of physical reality and never actually visiting it. I mean, I don't think I've done that before with like, a solo show like this. So yeah.

**John Bloomfield** 49:41

Okay. Um, okay, so there's a question from Juha, in Amsterdam. So, what career advice would you have for art students graduating this year?

**David Blandy** 50:00

Hustle

**Larry Achiampong** 50:02

All right. All right. So I think also, there's, I would like to pull that question for students who perhaps like, you know, thinking of like, repeating, or people, you know, and it is a really difficult period, like, I tutor at the Royal College of Art I've done so for five years. And all through this period, I've witnessed students who have decided to defer or you know, repeat their year, thinking that this year would be easier and everything will be opened back up again, obviously, it's not, it's a really tough one. And I think obviously, the decisions that said students make at the end of the day, they have to use their own perhaps instincts as a result of the things that they understand. One of the things I would say is you know, it's, yeah, I don't care if I get a bollocking for this like, you know, fight, you have to fight for, unfortunately, for the things that you deserve, like I don't, I don't understand where, you know, the fees are the same, like compared to previous years and you're just indoors, like what's happening with that money what's going on with, you know, but also it's, it's a tough period to create things, don't try and force yourself to create or do things in the same way that you would do, it doesn't matter what way you try and butter it like you can't get in the studio the same way that you could, I can't even get into the studio I make physical things in, I just can't because like, it's just ridiculous, the cramped corridors, and, I'm not willing to take no risks, and then take any of that stuff to my kids, let alone, my mum who is high risk, or my younger sister who is high risk, or my son. So I think utilising the technology to keep communication with each other. I'm not saying therefore Oh stay on Instagram all the time, or whatever, but really try to use that in a way that's going to help you create and build those conversations with those other students who are experiencing similar. And also, in terms of like repeating years. This especially goes out to the folks that can't afford it. Don't. I wouldn't repeat, I just wouldn't, like if you can't afford it, then why,

like, you can't do the same thing as like the next person with loads of cash or whatnot. I think that is where, yeah, that, the word hustle comes into it, unfortunately, or fortunately, because even for me, when I think about building up through the art scene, so much of it has been an incredible, like hustle back and forth and learning what I have like kind of like growing up in impoverished conditions to kind of apply that to what's being done here. I think there's a connection or similarity with things there. But use that system on itself. And you're owed it, you're owed the opportunity to continue utilising those facilities when things hopefully open up at some point in time. But, you know, don't do the thing that everyone else is doing. Or if you think about the art scene, most of those people who have so many privileges to do that stuff. Do what is going to be working for you because they're not going to be there when all of the all of the institutional nonsense of art school is kind of like faded away or whatnot. So, yeah, I hope that's a helpful answer.

**David Blandy** 53:40

Yeah, I think that's it, I think it's find your people and try and form, you know, some sort of new communities to support each other because that's how we're gonna get through this thing. It's got to be together.

**John Bloomfield** 53:59

Okay, thank you. I think that's quite a positive note to end things on maybe. Okay, well, yeah. Thank you for joining us tonight. Thank you, Larry. Thank you, David, for sharing your thoughts.

**David Blandy** 54:15

Thank you, John.

**John Bloomfield** 54:16

And, yeah, thank you to our partners, Art Exchange, Focal Point Gallery. And just want to also mention, Louise Pepper who's been doing the captioning and trying to keep up with our conversation. And yeah, also thanks to the Wysing team, Lizzie, Rhiannon and Chloe, for just putting the event together. If anybody wants to watch the film again, it's on the Art Exchange website, I believe. And you can also see it outside Focal Point on the big screen if you're able to travel there safely. We are planning to archive this conversation so that should be available for viewing and downloading to listen to in a podcast in the next few days. And yeah, thanks. Thanks, everyone, and see you soon.

**David Blandy** 55:05

Thank you very much, John. I think the film's also on the Focal Point website as well. So yeah, yeah. Thank you, John, and yeah, see you soon Larry

**Larry Achiampong** 55:17

In a bit mate.