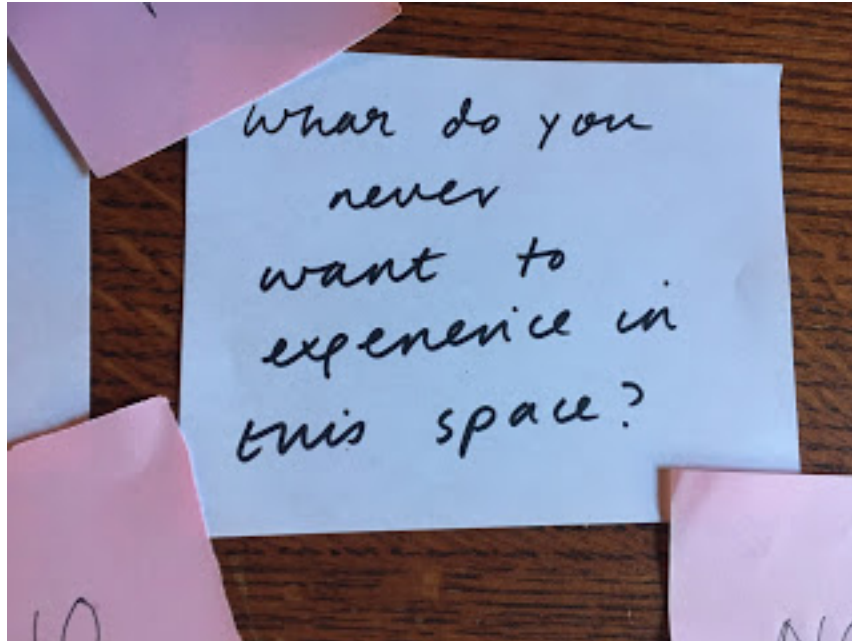


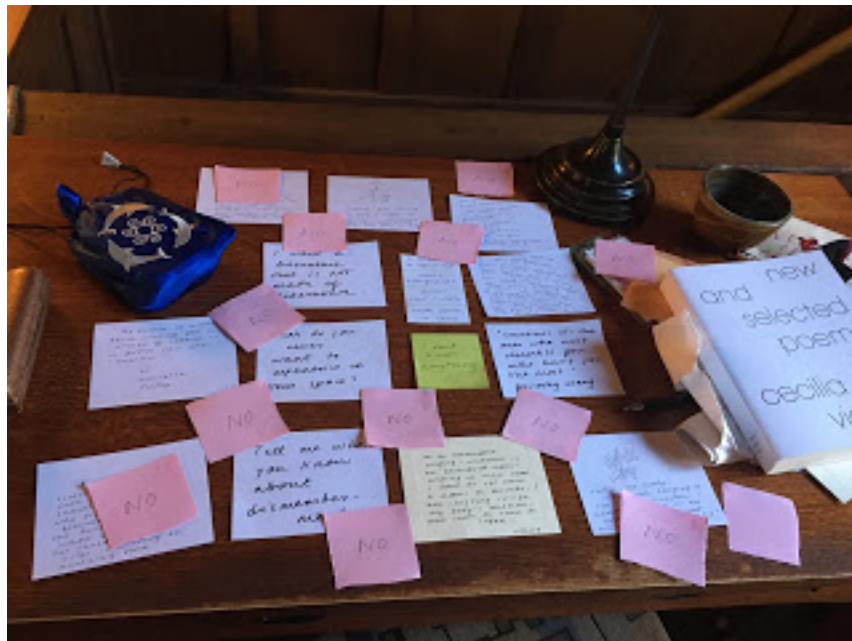
### THE POETRY GIG

In Diversity Seminar, the first question anyone asks is this:

"What do you never want to experience in this space?"



I scrawl the responses on the chalk board. The sound of this ancient writing fills the space, even as I concentrate on the replies.



At home, I swim in the blocky lake with its red mud, chalky looseness and bright blue sky. Greece, I think. Then think of the fire.

In Berkeley, for one hour, I find myself trapped in something for which the counter-trap turns out to be a variant of dignity. It's not too bad. In fact, perhaps it was remarkable. Perhaps I learned something about groups and poetry and proximity in ways that I would not have learned otherwise. It was, in that sense, a perfect event. Plus, boogie boarding at Ocean Beach with Matt and Larry (Hazel asleep on the hedge of the golden sand) has relaxed me. Also, the many teas and dinners with old friends. There's no cutting me up and eating me for dinner at this point. Community is various. Some snakes kill you instantly. Others will not kill you on that hillside. Yet others will protect you as you sit beneath the tree.

This is not a good metaphor.

I had an aunt who reached into a clay pot to retrieve some water. Perhaps she was holding a stainless steel ladle. In moments, she was dead. A snake had been coiled around the rim of the pot.

"What do you never want to experience in this space?"

*Violence*, says a student.

And I write that down on the board.

On the aeroplane I board to return to Denver, I walk up the aisle until I find a middle seat between two women. When I ask if the space is free, the woman by the window makes a bunch of sounds and angrily removes her cup from the little plastic table she has brought down over the middle seat, in order to suggest someone is sitting there. The woman on the aisle is polite. The woman by the window proceeds to get angrier, visibly upset that I am there. It's 6 a.m. I understand.

In Diversity seminar, a student gives a presentation on trauma and attachment. The way the brain forms around threatening or frightening memories more easily or rapidly than positive ones. And that part of trauma healing is to retrain the brain to retain beauty and moments of connection. Afterwards, we make a communal list. 5. "Avoid spaces in which white people congregate."

What feels very new about this week is that despite the many shocking things, or strange things, that happened, I don't, on the whole, feel wrecked.

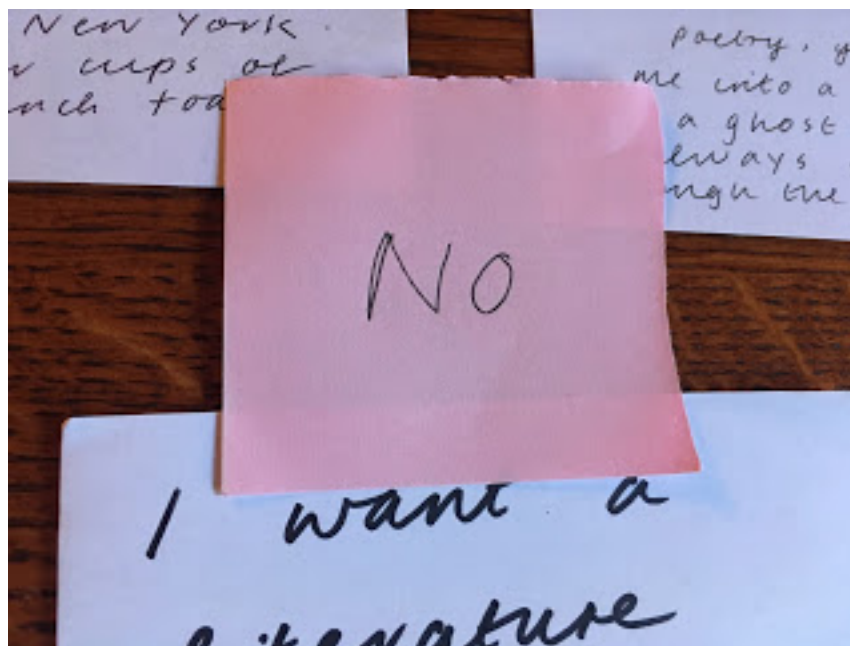
How can I turn this new feeling into a flower or food that will nourish others?

It took me most of my life to feel like this.

To feel strong.

I should also mention that my last period started on June 10th. I missed the last three cycles. It's an incredible feeling to experience surges of warmth in my body as I make the transition from one kind of FERTILITY to another. I have to say, it feels like relief. It feels as if something is changing at the level of my cells and bones. To this end, I consume herbs that come from the ground: red clover, black cohosh, vitex, angelica root. Sometimes I make a tea and sometimes, like a person who has to walk a long way, I consume these powerful alternative medicines in capsule form.

That's it.



Some stories are not meant for all audiences.

Then I'll commune with the non-audience.

I'll commune with my beloveds, who make me dinner at midnight and drive me to the sea wall and across the bridge and who, above all, read me their poetry at midnight or give me a clay bowl and in whose company I am no longer forlorn, even if all we have is an hour beneath a tree or a walk to a coffee shop in the afternoon's pall, or a bridge in the next bit of dark, our cigarettes arcing through the air like "pooh sticks," as we say, simultaneously, laughing, feeling better, feeling (at last) like ourselves.

**Bhanu Kapil** writes at the intersection of narrative and lyric aims. The winner of a 2020 Windham-Campbell prize for poetry, she is the author of, most recently, *How To Wash A Heart* (Pavilion Poetry, 2020) and *Ban en Banlieue* (Nightboat Books, 2016).