



A CONVERSATION ON HOPE

Cornel Continued

Saturday, March 7th, 1998

Cooper Union

A roundtable to explore ideas that have been discussed in a more intimate conversation with Cornel West.

Cornel West, host of A Conversation on Hope, is Professor of Afro-American Studies and Philosophy of Religion at Harvard University. He lectures and writes extensively on topics ranging from race and racial democracy to the American pragmatic tradition. West has written twelve books. *Race Matters* was a national bestseller.

Melanie Joseph: Welcome to "Cornel Continued." I just wanted to say a couple of things before I hand the mic over to Cornel and you all.

In a certain way, the whole Foundry for me was conceived under Cornel's influence from afar. I heard him speak at a Tikkun Conference a number of years ago and I taped the speech and I keep putting it out in Foundry's newsletters, it's in the program for this event, etc. I just wanted to read a couple of things from that speech which I thought were appropriate to our gathering, and which were certainly appropriate to my stepping forward the way that I did in my own life.

He called his speech "America's Three-fold Crisis," and here are a couple of extracts that I wanted to share today, *"America today faces a three-fold crisis: a crisis of vision, of motivation, and of meaning ...*

"The crisis of motivation is inseparable from the problem of organization. People will not organize or remain organized, if they're not motivated enough or feel a sense of obligation to sustain those organizations."

"This crisis of vision, this crisis of motivation, also has much to do with the crisis of meaning. And I do believe it has something to do with an existential crisis, and by existential crisis, what I mean is dealing with meaninglessness. And it's not just meaninglessness, it's hopelessness, it's not just hopelessness, it's lovelessness, for some folks, it's touchlessness; loss of tenderness and kindness and gentleness in people's lives. They're results of the creeping zeitgeist of cold-heartedness and meanspiritedness -- the gangsterization of American culture, which is the ultimate logic of a market culture in which people feel as if the only meaning to life is to gain access to power and pleasure and property by any method. That's existential crisis. Deep existential crisis."

[applause]

That's Cornel West and why I asked him to host this event with us. So, now you just go ahead. [laughter]

Cornel West: We're here for dialogue and to wrestle with this crisis in it's various forms, various manifestations, political, economic and cultural as well as the personal. And so far we've had what for me has so far been a very soul searching gathering. Acknowledging that we don't have responses and adequate answers to a variety of questions and yet being ready to linger with the questions and stay with them so I'm here for the most part just to learn and listen to the various kinds of artists. I don't get a chance to spend

that much time with artists yet at the same time I recognize that there's some affinities and similarities vis-a-vis both the market and vis-a-vis ones personal struggles. Trying to find a place in the road for gentleness, tenderness and kindness. And on the other hand everyday, working people's attempts to do the very same thing though in different contexts, in which you find yourselves. So I'd like to open it up for questions, queries and so forth. Based on what has transpired so far in our gathering together and also a look at where we're going to end up this afternoon and this evening.

MJ: Cornel, I would like to ask you to address the notion of despair, what I have heard you call deep existential despair, and case that can be made for embracing this existential despair and how our suspicions of joining or committing or representing other possibilities in certain ways may be well founded. I mean skepticism, critical thinking is a survival necessary, obviously, and I wouldn't want to lose a critical perspective just because we are trying to wrestle down cynicism but how do we begin to draw the line between he embrace of despair as a real truth and moving beyond it while allowing it to co-exist.

CW: To me the worst thing to do is to deny it. Then you end up in superficial forms of escape. The question is to try to muster the courage, which includes making links with others, to confront the despair through which a genuine hope ushers forth. I don't think you can talk about hope without despair. Last night we had a fascinating discussion ... your first name is? *Patricia*. Sister Patricia raised a similar issue saying, "Well brother West, maybe despair is not the flip side of hope. Maybe we got to think about hope in other terms." Sister, maybe you want to say a few words about that.

Patricia Spears Jones: Well, I think sometimes we get caught up in conventional dualities and that I guess I've been thinking about ... my mother just had her 79th birthday, I've been thinking about the issue of fragility and acknowledgment of mortality. I mean she gets up every day and she does what she wants to do as much as she can even though she's not as strong as she used to be and she has done that all her life and I think, I mean we are fragile. We have this human body; it breaks down, after a certain period of time, there are things that are outside of our control. I think despair is certainly probably the major one, but I don't think it is the major one. I think we should start thinking about that especially when we're making art, because art is also fragile, especially if you're working in the theatre, in performance. A lot of that is completely ephemeral, it's between you and your receiver at that moment, then it's gone except in memory. So I think we need to think about issues a little larger, I think we tend to narrow things down so much that we get caught in those conventional dualities.

CW: That's strikes me as very helpful. Because when I think of hope, I just think about being in motion, I think of energy, of force. I think Van Gogh made a distinction between passive melancholy and active despair. [*laughter*] Now you see that kind of distinction really feeds into my talk about hope. So active despair, that's someone still on the move but just wrestling, so in that regard, that to me is a threadbare notion of hope in a sense unidentified. Sometimes I think that hope [*unidentifiable word*] because with hope, I tread that path but with faith cause faith I believe is

Peg Pettit When you speak of active and passive forces, [*unidentifiable word*] being part of our choices, it makes me think if what I produce as an artist is that reconciliation between the two, there has to be a ton of reconciliation and that is my work and without going into my head about how can I take an active position in an organization and mobilize a body of people, it makes me think about the populations out there that are there to be involved on a weekly and everyday basis who are not part of the mainstream, but are part of the body we seek to reconnect ourselves with.. You speak of this energy that we connect ourselves with, what is our nourishment, what is going to keep me going, where am I going to hear that need to be told to me. Well I'm not to hear the stories that need to be told to me in the traditional way. I might find myself working in a senior center, and I might find myself working with women in transition or in a prison, I might find myself working with people in that way but then it's going to demystify that whole

perspective of being an artists because there are people out there who are invisible and who are profound artists, and live their lives as artists under those conditions so I have to put myself under the same conditions, and the best way that I can do that in a way that's going to be nourishing and leave me with my sanity and humor intact is to put myself directly in earshot of what's going on in the community so that I can help that limit, help that line of energy get out there, so that I can pass on and [*unidentifiable word*] bring it to these organizations that are going to replenish them as well. But see in this society, these are words of shame. Among people who are sold, it's okay but for those of us who are not convinced, the word values, community, feeling as opposed to negative feeling as opposed to negative emotion, but real feeling, and empathy. Those words that we ... we don't want to talk like that anymore; we can't even say I feel for you anymore. You touched me. And a lot of intellectuals, I mean you're gifted, I think what makes you unique is the fact that you have a kind of integration of yourself, where you're this heavy intellectual person, you're in your head but you have deep feeling for people, and deep compassion and it runs through your body. I mean most intellectuals, they don't want to talk about feeling, you know. And then most critics, who are in their heads, if they're touched, they call it sentimentality. [*clapping*] They don't help it. They feed the madness!! So, I mean, oh don't get me started...

Howard Goldkrand: I just want to respond to that. The sister touched me yesterday too. But I think it's about, for us, finding different kinds of vocabulary to speak in, so in the kinds of communities that we're dealing with and approaching, the sound communities, underground communities, people have no respect for the kinds of things that you want to say that you want to talk about in the same way, but they're talking about it, there is love, there is sharing that's going on and you're right, it's about an integration process in vocabulary. And once you're aware and tuning in that people are hitting each other on different frequencies, you know, and calling each other names that may or may not affect certain people in their own presence, in a personal space, all that love is being shared, that empathy, I'm seeing a lot of different things happening; I'm seeing a breakdown in people being open to frequencies shifting, changing, and that's what our goal is. And trying to hear that, I'm saying, no, that just because The Post represents a death like SPLAT when it drops off the edge of the page; that's not really where everybody's at, that's what we call the LCD, the lowest common denominator and I think that we're trying to touch people, get down with people's individual vocabularies and I say to them how do I hear you say that? How do I know when you're expressing that? And that's all. I mean, being honest with you, we found for sound, letting people know, "I don't know what you're talking about or what if you hear this, can you mix this in, etc. So I think that all that stuff is there, I don't see a big alien mass that's walking around like zombie [*unidentifiable word*] style. I see people not being able to share in an elevator or next to each other and all that stuff really

CW: I was thinking about just sharing with us some strategies, you talked about honesty and openness, some of the ways you're able to move from one context to the next. IN the same way Sister Peggy was talking about being able to be in those circumstances, but also being able to not just critically reflect but artistically depict and thereby help transform those circumstances. Now you see that's the dynamic that's taking place and I see you doing the same thing in the context of popular culture as it were.

HG: Yeah I think the strategy is not to be attached to what think you know what you like. Just because I got a feeling about it... some kid could hit me off with a tape that I may not like and he may play it at an event of ours and a hundred other people might like it so I can flow with that kid. He can hit me off with a tape and he'll say to me, you know, "what do you think of it" and I'm like "no, no you signed up for *your* time, you got your one hour to speak *your* vocabulary and for that cause. I've had people throw things at each other, chase each other out, we've had fights, we've had all kinds of situations, once I got a hard core kid from Berlin who came in and threw a drink on somebody while he was playing you know, because his energy is something else, and people didn't understand that, you know, he doesn't really hate people, he's not a racist, he's not violent really, he just like excitable. [*much laughter*]

CW He's just into throwing drinks on folks though huh? [*laughter continues*] No, I see what you're saying, that's just flow, I like that.

HG Last night I felt that too, I couldn't attached to some of what I felt shameful that I was hearing witnessing, etc. and like I couldn't be attached to like "I don't like this or that so I can't speak to... whatever." It's like when we're playing somewhere in the Midwest or something I can hear someone who says to me, "Well really I think Garth is the stuff," and we have to be open to understand why that person gets that same attachment as they do from some other band or some other music

MJ And so Howard, when they say that, I mean since Cornel's asking for strategies, when you're in the Midwest and they say Garth is it, we want Garth, do you play it or no?

HG We don't because that's not what we were hired for but the kind of mixes we do we feel that we're touching the kind of folk ways that I think Garth is touching, you know, he allows people to talk about themselves you know, and I think we're actually accumulating an alternative audience that isn't being talked to so I'll get weird kids in different places coming up to us when different ones of our musicians are playing that kind of want to tell you their stories, well just because they found you, you know, Paul D. Miller/DJ Spooky is a conduit for that at the moment throughout American if not globally because he's able to speak his own vocabulary *and* get signed, and has a college degree, and is inspiring and all of us are about that. We work with people who don't have a high school education but came up through the Harlem Boys Choir. Now this young guy has a tremendous amount of motivation for what he does and tries to not want to come to talk about certain things because he's been integrated this way or that and he can't speak but his music and what he does is such a common story that I think people know, and our strategy is not to be attached to whether we like it or not, I mean there's certain things we do step up about 'no that can't happen, no we don't like this, you know, there's real things that happen with music or performance or academics, you know, there's real responses, I'm sure Cornel gets students that respond to him in a real visceral manner and our strategy is to try to be open to that. Witnessing a lot of people today and last night, Vernon talking and Barbara really, I mean, those kind of people get to witness a lot more than us and right now we are just trying to open up to be able to witness as much, to learn as much. And for us it is all about vocabulary and some of that is race oriented, some of it is historic, contemporary oriented, but it's all about vocabulary, and that's what the strategy is really.

CW: Sister Peg, did you want to respond to that...

Peg Pettit: You see, I'm listening and I thought, I'm learning and I'm making an effort to try to be open for myself because these questions are really important to me and I'm just trying to check in with myself looking for what, to what can I connect in a consistent way on a daily basis; what is my connection, what is my structure. There are organizations I can affiliate myself with, I can do my different boards and panels and committees and this and that but I feel for myself, just on making that human connection that I need to be somehow connected with some population that has no visibility and no voice in the society and it's not like there's not work out there for me to do. And it's not like there isn't somewhere for me to go. And in the interim, in between these committees and organizations, just daily thing, making my work and my art available to those who don't have that, to teach whether it's at a senior center or at NYU, wherever I'm called to be. And I'm not talking about trends; I'm talking about a life.

CW: Not fashions or fads but a certain kind of conviction. Um Humm...

Daniel Banks In response to your questions about strategies, and riffing off of what Howard was saying about non-attachment, I'm doing a lot of teaching at NYU this semester and one of the things I keep finding myself saying is "pull back the frame, pull back the frame, open it up, where did you learn that,

who taught you that, how did you come to perceive the world in that way?” Whether it be a racist statement, a sexist statement, an implicit, you know, something that has been encrypted and that they are now aware of the inscription processor the damage that's been done to them and they respond, in a certain way, with attachment. It was very interesting to hear you use the term non-attachment in terms of strategies because I think it's really useful when you say “okay, detach, pull back the frame, open it up wider, because that knowledge is not inherent knowledge, it's not organic knowledge, it's taught, you were taught to think that way, to respond that way and is this really the way you want to respond to that situation, or is it learned behavior that is actually, ultimately not helpful, not redemptive.” That's just a strategy that I use ... with some of the people in this room actually.

Unidentified I want to say that some of what you call learned behavior, I may be wrong, are what I want to call assumptions. Sometimes we cross thresholds into formal learning environments and it's almost like osmosis. Over a period of time you see what's being valued. For instance in a school, my voice may not be valued or certain kinds of behavior might not be valued. I work in a school setting, I used to be a school teacher and I think that it's the oldest [*Unidentified word*] in education, the hidden curriculum, but I think kids K through 12 have a profound learning experience and it has a lot to do with what's being valued by adults in that environment. I don't want to be too prescriptive but I think it's kind of an answer to some of what I was hearing this morning – the appropriateness of identifying with the poor and down trodden, I could argue that that's a natural human response so it's only in a dehumanized context that we wouldn't do that, and then one asks, I think some of what you're asking “Where does that learning happen?” and I'm here to witness that a lot of that learning goes on in schools and it's not necessarily spoken.

DB And through the media, I'm also talking about representation in the media, in film, television, newspapers, history books, I mean whatever it is, it's interesting Howard, you know the only thing I would get more specific about what you said, is that I believe and I teach that racism is an institution and that it's a way for the hegemony to maintain its power through forms of oppression, by teaching us ultimately to oppress ourselves, that's how a minority of people have power over the majority so I think that we all have our prejudices that become encrypted as a result of being part of this great wonderful racist institution called democracy or hegemony or whatever it is we're living in right now, that touches us as artists because it controls the funding and where the opportunities are and what shows get produced, selected. I mean when I go out to regional theatre after regional theatre and they say there are no good writers of color out there; I mean I say are you reading the stack of scripts on your desk? They are out there but it's this perpetuation of an assumption but the assumption has an agenda behind it.

Unidentified I'd just like to use my last 30 seconds to list a few things in schools that do counter some of these problems. And again, my premise or my observation is that a lot of young people are discouraged in their humanity; I think it's viscous and sinful, and I'm not bashing teachers, because I have been one, in fact I have teachers saying “you fucking betrayed us” and I say who and they say “you parents.” This school isn't the way we want it to be, there's a disconnect between the caring nature of us as humans and somehow our connection to the schools. But media literacy, which you were hinting at, is a basic. The arts, again what I'm saying is we don't meet our clients, our precious clients, our children where they are, in their differential learning styles, in their genius and over time they get discouraged. So the arts are one way, in their manifold, multifarious, glorious profusion to engage the humanity of kids. The other thing I'd like to list is something which is a bit turnoff sounding, it's called Service Learning but it's really just about connecting kids to the community and all the multiplicity of opportunities and school is a very attenuated thing, so many kids are getting discouraged.

Unidentified What I would like to raise is how we have allowed the term liberal to become pejorative and how the people abroad in this country have become so misled by the republicans. I mean just in the medical area, it costs from \$5-9,000 a month to keep an elderly relative in a nursing home and

Medicaid pays for it and that helps the middle class as well as the poor. And the Republicans talk about tax cuts, big government and how we don't need it, how they want to reduce it, and reduce services and that's going to hurt the very people who are going to have to put their elderly relatives in nursing homes. And then when you get a tax cut, it's a couple of dollars. That was the last cut I got, they talked about a \$3 billion tax cut, and I make a reasonable salary and it was \$2 in my paycheck. Now when you juxtapose that few dollars every two weeks against the massive costs of a nursing home, I don't understand why people haven't come forward. Where the Democrats have been that they don't just say look, I'm Liberal, I'm proud of it and this is what the government does for you.

CW I hear what you're saying. But the attempt to try to explain or give an account of why there's been such a conservative assault on government and a major shift to the right, especially in the last 25 years or so, of which what you're talking about is one instance, it has something to do with the racialization of public life in the minds in the larger public so if you can associate the government with these black and brown folks who do not deserve these kinds of resources, like the debate around welfare and so on, then it's going to be very difficult to justify public action in the work of a government if you're able to push those kinds of buttons; put a black face on affirmative action, put a black face on welfare, then certainly these things are undeserved because these people themselves do not deserve this kind of special, preferential treatment and so forth. That's been a major, major issue that began with bussing all the way through taxation all the way through debates of affirmative action and welfare and what have you -- there's been a major shift. The reason why the Southern part of the United States now is not just Republican territory but American politics itself have been Southernized; with Southerners running the White House, southerners running the house; southerners running the Senate – Clinton, Lock, and Gingrich and it cuts even deeper than that. Now it also has to do with the fact that government receives the blame for the damage done by market forces. Family lives, isolation, estrangement pain suffering, what's the reason. Well, you see we don't have a left that says "look, let's look up courageously rather than scapegoat the most vulnerable and somehow think that it's government that does that. So that the Rush Limbaugh's and the whole host of others, the Promisekeepers and so forth are able to appeal to profoundly conservative sensibilities that have to do with very, very real personal troubles that people have. I mean Rush Limbaugh's social base consists of white working class brothers who have been catching hell thoroughly marginalized by corporate power. That's his social base. And what does he do with it? Xenophobic, feminazis, women hating, and so forth and so on. But he's speaking to something very real so the question becomes the conservatives have been able to shift the climate of opinion, shift voting patterns, and so forth because they've been able to come up with a set of stories linked to a some very real realities but then also linked to some pernicious vision as to how to challenge the energy to flow from the response to that very real pain. I mean those are just 2 factors, but I think there's a host of others, but that's a beginning of an account of what WE need to speak to. What I'm trying to say, if for example we had a progressive mobilization the way Christian Coalition was able to do, what millions of grass roots fellow citizens linked to trade union organizing, let's say what's going on in Los Vegas right now, one of the most important battles going on right now in the labor movement, the hotel workers and so on. We hope more and more in New York but New York is not a hospitable place at the moment, you can't even get the labor movement to support Ruth Messinger because they're running scared from Guiliani because he's so vindictive, even though he's talking about civility. You see what I mean, how do we think about linking personal troubles with public issues in a progressive way so that we can we can dismantle the conservative consensus that tends to be.

Unidentified You mentioned welfare and the majority of people on welfare in this country are white and what I learned from one of the woman that spoke at another meeting was that it's only a small part of what was the deficit, like 1%

CW Less than 1%

Unidentified: But why doesn't someone come out and say this. Where's our leadership who can get up there and say these things?

CW This is the question. Well part of the problem with the progressive movement is part of the problem of progressive leadership. People have said that. Barry Sanders comes out and says it every time he has a chance, Ron Delum's being saying it for 20 something years. There's a number of people who say it but it doesn't resonate, it doesn't have weight and gravity.

Unidentified : Can I ask you a question? Do you want an answer to your question of "how do we do this" because that's always my question too, I think us against them, there's more of us than there is of them. They still own the world and run it and I mean what the fuck are we doing. And we sit and we talk and we agree in certain frameworks, so where are the leaders, why can't we get it together, what is our strategy for linking our personal [*unidentifiable word*] to the political. So I'm just wondering, do you have some answer to the question that you posed? I'm interested in forging some kind of strategy and getting on with it.

MJ May I add to that ... About a month ago, I asked Beth Coleman, a very bright young woman under thirty, if she could recommend a leader-type from a younger constituency for the dinner party panel on Friday night. I was hoping to have someone at that table under thirty. She thought and thought and actually couldn't recommend anyone and so she looked at me and asked you know I wonder if the fact that there is no one I can think of to recommend is indicative of a problem or a new reality. Such that, and when Howard's talking about the language of attachment, it makes me think about this whole idea of us always looking for leaders, is there another paradigm to consider at all, beyond that, beyond our looking to Leaders??

Unidentified: I think there is. If you think globally and act locally. You can stop buying the shit that is running the system. I mean the Simplicity movement and things like that, that is a seed for a paradigm that I think has great power because sooner or later, they can't afford the stuff or they're going to get tired of the stuff. I may be dreaming but...

The other thing I wanted to say is, as artists, you know, I keep hearing talk about organizing like we have a shortage of rent controlled apartments or something. Shouldn't we be making art that speaks directly to these problems?

PP: That's what I was speaking of, in so ways I feel like the communities are so full of issues that are directly [*unidentifiable word*]. When we as artists go out and become involved with those communities, we can help them create work that addresses issues which are important to their communities are dealing with. And at the same time, there is a sense of empowerment in these alliances, Not only are you helping a community address itself, but you then have a community which you can address your work to, about issues which are important to you as an artist. It's a reciprocal thing. It's not just about going in there to do someone a favor.

Unidentified : Make art responsible to the world rather than make the world become responsible to us.

P Jones: I'm responding to some of these issues. I was just doing some volunteer work on a theatre project with Housing Works, which I'm no longer involved with but that's another story. One of the things that struck me about it was that a lot of the clients are deeply damaged and it's very difficult to be around damaged people all the time if you don't have certain kinds of therapeutic skills and other kinds of skills to have that level of non-attachment so that you can do stuff. Because if you do what you do, and that's very

clear, and that's my problem, because everything else becomes so enmeshed so that you get lost in someone else's problems. We have to figure out ways in which to look very truthfully and very harshly sometimes at ways in which the community manifests itself in self destructive acts as well as constructive ones. And if you do that you are not going to always be welcome as an artist. And, I mean forget the mainstream culture, we're not talking about, I mean there's ways of speaking truth to power on all kinds of levels so I think that the first thing that each artist has to do is figure out what level of commitment you have to make to your own work and then how much you can take out and do with other people and then bring it back to your work, I mean you're obviously doing stuff that, I mean more power to you, I can't do it. But I also, I mean this is where the racialization stuff comes in for me, there's an assumption that because I'm a black woman, I can. That is a problem...

CW Or that you SHOULD

PSJones: Right or that I should and that should not be the case.

Unidentified: I think what the right fears in this country is not a cadre of people going into prisons and healing, although that would be extremely good, what they fear is a Camus -- someone who would come along and speak with a great and powerful and penetrating voice about what is wrong and so I think ...

PSJones But many people do...right now. I think there are incredible stories being told all the time. It's not whether the stories are being told, it's whether people are willing to listen. We have a society right now that is working very hard not to hear. They're working hard not to hear. That's why every time you open the newspaper all this horrible stuff is out there. You very rarely see ... I mean I think of this as a moment of incredible, this is a great...

I have to say this, I was saying this earlier in the bathroom (much laughter) I have been in New York since 1974, I have been in downtown New York since 1974 I came and hung out with the Mabou Mines people - - and theatre was 99 and 44% white. This is the most integrated theatre type conference I have ever seen in this town. (*applause*) But what it says to me is that people have been doing work, we have lots more to do but work has been done, some progress has been made

MJ it's good to hear what you just said. It is important for me to understand this as part of a political effort, especially when checking the 'diversity boxes' on grant applications makes me nuts -- Talvin knows how much I chaffe against it. I think the fact that it annoys the hell out of me is because for some people it's actually underway in other terms, that there's something natural about it, when you're having a dinner party, you want to invite people who bring different things to a table of conversation ... I don't know, maybe it's because I'm Canadian ... Anyway I appreciate the context of what you said.

Taniese Brown (of the Global kids who led the morning workshop) I just really wanted to go back to what you were saying when you said you are fighting a society where no one wants to listen to you as an artist -- well that kind of goes in hand with me as a young person, I find myself fighting with adults trying to get them to listen to me just like I think we're in the same battle for different reasons. And today, like when I spoke to Melanie when she asked us to do this conference, to do our perspectives on hope as young people and do young people and adults have the same perspective on hope, I think they do but it's aimed in different directions, and we came here today to try to somehow meet at a meeting point so we can go on from here and so I find myself at times fighting with adults trying to get them to listen to me, trying to get the to see where I'm coming from and trying to let them know that I am a voice and I need to be heard, and you can't ignore me all the time -- sometimes you get oh I'm the adult and you're the child so when you get to be my age, then you can do what you want but I think we need to start teaching us as we are young, how to be adults and how to take over after you've leave because when you don't then we find ourselves making

the same mistake you made and like you said, history keeps repeating itself and we just keep going over and over again,. So I think once we can meet on a common ground and compromise, then we can start to make society better, we can make everybody listen, then the arts can stop fighting alone and we can stop fighting, as long as we find a common ground where we can come and meet...

PSJones I don't agree with you. I mean I agree with you on the common ground stuff but there will always be conflict and there will always be suffering -- that's part of being a human being. I mean we have to think about that because I think one of the problems of arts education, because I work for my part time job, I go and take authors to schools and watch all these kids all eager it's wonderful, but one of the things that's disturbing to me was we tend to think of art only as healing, only as harmonizing as sort of conflict resolution and it's not always that. Sometimes it opens wounds but I think you're going to find when you get older and you keep learning and you probably already know that now that there's a lot of conflict, there's a lot of struggle. Every time you move forward, something else is going to come out from wherever and you'll just be challenged again but you know, if you have intelligence and heart which it sounds like you got, then you'll be fine but there's always going to be conflict...

Taniese I'm not saying there's not going to be conflict but it's how you minimize that conflict...

Unidentified Does it always have to be minimized?

Taniese Maybe it doesn't always have to be minimized but if I know can prevent something from happening, I'm going to do my best to do that but if I know can prevent it from happening and I don't then, I'm just as bad as that person that's going to do what's going to happen -- I have to do my best -- I mean I know everything we do, there's going to be conflict, that's what makes us human beings, and that's what makes the world go round but if you try to minimize the conflict, then that makes it better -- I mean if I have a conflict and don't resolve it then I'm opening up to more conflict that makes it harder for me to resolve the first one and then we go over and over and over -- just because of that first conflict that I could have prevented but I didn't prevent so that's why I think "don't just sit there and think well it's not going to affect me ... I don't need to do anything.

CW: always keeping in mind that one is both an agent and also a moral agent. But there are destructive forms of conflict and there are creative forms of conflict and we minimize those destructive forms precisely because it brings out the worst in all of us but those creative forms of conflict can still be full of tension but it can also bring out the best in us. I don't really see the deeper conflict between the two of you at the moment in terms of this talk about how...

Unidentified: I just don't want to think of art as therapy --- I guess that's what I'm trying to say, very clearly. Because I think that sometimes when people cannot figure out what else to do with artists, they...

CW See that's another form of making it ornamental and decorative and putting a halo over it whereas it ought to be the most dangerous thing in a society...

Carl Hancock Rux: I was going to say that the dialogue between you two was incredibly interesting because I feel like I'm only a hop, skip or jump away from being a child and a hop, skip or jump away from being an adult but what was interesting though was when you were talking about the intergenerational conflict or the generational conflict, you know, about adults and about the responsibility of adults teaching children while they're children so they can be adults and I listen to you and I thought to myself, that's exactly where I think a lot of the danger lies. It's where there's potential for incredible growth but it's also

where there's sometimes potential for incredible stifling because if too many adults teach you how to be the adults that they are, or to be the kind of adults they think you should be or to motivate and organize and plan and do what they were doing, and how they did it and what should be done, then what happens is that there is a possibility for the stagnation of ideas and new ideas that are formed and the dialogue that existed between you two and the agreement in disagreement I think is exactly what happens whether or not you believe that all things are about conflict and art is not always about therapy, whether or not you believe, well I think perhaps it needs to be, maybe, I mean I'm not imposing an idea here but you might say, well if it wasn't, it should be now, or we don't have time to produce art that's not about feeling and whatever, that's an idea, a new idea that I think you need to cultivate and that needs to be cultivated and formed. Before I went to college, before I went to Columbia, I was part of what they called Harlem Youth Writers workshop where we had these great journalists, George Davis & Frank Dexter Brown and all these great people who were teaching us, young Harlem kids how to be journalists and how to write. But there was a lot of discussion about a lot of things, and certainly politics came in all the time and REVOLUTION, I mean just the word, which is why I still, I mean REVOLUTION and the idea of it and what it was, I mean when I was 16 and I heard it, you know the REVOLUTION of the struggle and what the meant and what it meant to George Davis and Frank Dexter Brown you know, and all those people, what it meant to them was very interesting, dynamic, something that really needed to be looked at as a model as a paradigm -- it needed to be examined, to be studied, and then when I hear the young poets that are reading around the cafes now, and they're talking about revolution and struggle and I know that somehow that if I'd gotten them in the room with some of my teachers from back in the day and we really talked about the dynamics of struggle and revolution, there would be some fierce disagreement but both of these groups feel themselves part of a revolution and part of revolutionizing society, motivating it, pushing it forward but the ideas are really different. I mean when I hear hip hop artists and the people who I know, people who rap, who are poets, whatever, when they talk about revolution and struggle, it's not informed by the same theory though it may borrow from some of the same concepts, some of which are very dangerous concepts, and I'm trying really hard ..., and being part of my now generation and being part of the same rooms with people who talk about revolution and struggle who are in my age group and I know they are looking back but also trying to bring in their own ideas, I'm trying really hard to allow my art to inject what I always thought was missing from that older concept of revolution and struggle. Because I thought it wasn't as inclusive as it needed to be.

CW: No, it was not as inclusive as it could have been

CHR And for me that was a major danger because when people talk to me about we're going to save Mumia and we're going to have this major reading to save Mumia and then I read who they brought to save Mumia and it's interesting who they believe could not save Mumia or rather, you know I wrote this poem once, I was on my way to a reading to save Mumia instead of myself and then ultimately what I thought was, when will they have a reading to save my ass (laughter) ##### _____ largely political I mean you know I grew up in the foster care system, grew up shuffled around, shuffled around, shuffled around. There's the whole thing for me as it relates to the family, as it relates to being black for me, as it relates to a million and one issues some of which I have discussed publicly, some of which I haven't but they all need to be on this panel and there's a lot of people that need to speak to that for me and there are a lot of theories that can inform that revolution that may be inspired by the old idea but it cannot be the same idea in theory and I think that when we talk about conflict between generations, some of the conflict is beautiful, embrace it love it and tell us what you mean, what you want to say.

Talking about this generational conversation and conflict, it's funny because when I talk to a lot of adults they don't know when they've grown up, when is that age when you become grown up and that 's something that seems distinctly American to me. That we're saying as people, I mean at that in-between age, I mean 25 am I a child, am I an adult? And we're already saying to the new children 'oh you are going to be my inspiration, you are going to be our hope' as opposed to 'what have we done' and I think there are two parts

to growing up one is what you know and one is action. I mean the kids today, I can speak about myself and the kids that I work with in prisons and in schools; they have a lot of knowledge, they have seen things they haven't needed to see until they're grown up but there's the action part of it. When I was growing up, the knowledge part was knowing that my grandparents barely escaped the Holocaust with whatever subterfuge -- the knowledge was when my dad would say 'the revolution is coming, the revolution is coming, this is what's happening but the actions, the things that helped me grow up were sneaking out at night to _____ a family who had a cross being burned on their lawn; to see my dad being beaten up by the police because he stepped in front of a fight, and to me seeing the action as a role model is what got me grown. That's how I became grown. And that the knowledge without the action leaves us in this stunted childhood where, you know, too much and you don't act and so I was hoping that that link would come up here.

Unidentified: I got stuck on the healing art. I'm from California where we're really stuck on the healing arts (laughter) I don't think either healing or therapy is any less dangerous than art, I think they both take a risk I think we're really involved with our narratives of despair and at the risk of being heretical, I feel that I am more interested in consciousness than in art and for art in the service of consciousness and self-awareness that we can come to with one another and I don't really, I find the distinction troublesome in a way that one is either better or worse or more holy than the other. And I was also stuck on what you said when you responded to him about the backlash of the right and it seems to me that due to the minor successes of the civil rights movement, the women's movement and the gay liberation movement the right has come back and said 'no way' and we have to choose whatever way we have, art, therapy, awareness whatever way we have to resist it and so I'm still really stuck on my own question earlier WHAT IS OUR STRATEGY?

CW I haven't forgotten about that question.

Unidentified: And to stay in something that's as decentralized as the way we're living, we're all doing little things in the prisons, in the schools, in different populations and maybe we have to live with a really decentralized approach where we know that somewhere out there that there are other people, that we're in relationship to other people or we have to find a way to get ourselves more centralized and more ... so

Unidentified Now what's your name? *Carl* Carl, you said something about the civil rights movement. Was it said that it wasn't all it should be?

CHR No, I just said that a lot of my teachers when I was younger talked about revolution and the theory of it and for me as I became an adult, I saw how it was not such an inclusive movement and then that became a problem for me. So I had to redefine it for myself.

Unidentified: I think that's one of the blessings of your generation -- I mean all these here gray hairs -- after my fifth time in jail, on the way out, I said, I don't think I ever want to go to jail again. Let somebody 20 years old go to jail now, at that moment what we were doing was the most important thing in our lives. And when my grandmother used to talk about 'I'm not going to let you do what I did' that's when I said 'I'm going to do something better' So you know we carry the cross in jail So I think this is a process. Now, hindsight is 20/20 and we're going to supply the bail money. I'm there because I think what you're talking about is that we've gone to a road, to another level but I also think that historically, we went through the reconstruction in a limited way In the case of the reconstruction times the republicans were our saviors and the democrats got in with backlash and now it's just flip flopped but it's the same philosophy of America. I think we have to struggle all the time, we have to open roads, we must resolve the conflict and also speaking as a gray haired person, hoping that there's still social security when I get there which will be soon ... I think we must be open to answer questions but I don't know, when I was young, I didn't listen to

my grandmother I had better ideas. I mean we're just guides, I mean for the young people, it's their turn. When they're 15 years old, 13 years old, they're going leave, eventually they're going to leave at the drop, you know.

CHR: I agree with you, I mean part of my struggle is not to go to jail. That's my revolution. If I can revolutionize my life so that I'm not in jail and still motivate inspire and activate and be an activist. I think I've done a good thing. Because you're right, a lot of people go to jail, sometime for some very noble causes and sometimes not you know, I mean as an African American male, jail is almost an expected thing, at least one time, at least for chewing gum on the sidewalk and being where you weren't supposed to be so part of the struggle I think for me is not to wind up there and to still be part of the struggle and to still form a theory and idealize and motivate forward because ...

CW: That's very real. They project that the year 2015, 3 out of 5 black brothers between 18 and 26 will be in jail. so we're talking about something that's very concrete in terms of the various forces that are being brought to bare levels of incarceration as a way of supposedly sustaining the peace and yet for the most part they're spending tremendous resources to curtail certain kind of possibilities. But the point of uninclusion I think is important too, the civil rights movement in all its glory and courage didn't hit patriarchy, didn't hit class inequality as strongly as it should have, didn't hit homophobia, didn't hit ecological abuse and a lot of other things and that's precisely what retrospection does, it gives us the privilege to ask what can we learn but how can we preserve their courage and also broaden ... but I know you have something to say

MJ Bebe, can I just jump in to pose one thing to end this line of dialogue -- thanks. Something I've been talking about a lot with friends lately is that it seems to me that people who fought in the civil rights movement, that whole period of time was such an extraordinary period of history, I imagine that 100 years from now, people are going to regard that period as we do those of the French or American revolution, etc. I mean there was a level **globally** that was motivating millions and millions of people and that generation is still alive and so the legacy of struggle that gets handed down by a generation like that can be onerous to some degree. And I wonder if some of the responses that some folks have to words like responsibility and words -- it may just be more incendiary to people like us who are directly inheriting that enormous mantle than it might be to those 100 years from now. That's what I wanted to wonder here.

Bebe Miller It's interesting about inheriting this language of struggle. And I'm going to put this in dance terms, because that's what I do. I occasionally work with high school students, a lot of black kids --- and dancing ... I'm in a quandary because I see what the effect is in their eyes, I see this force that goes outward, I don't see them working at who they are on the inside. And I think that the whole sense of how do we value solitude in this; how do we value taking care of our heart individually so that our skin is not always fighting outwards and how can that be respectful of all this striving that has gone down? And similar to what Patricia was saying, maybe I'm not the one who's going to go to the prisons, who's going to go and do all that wonderful work because I don't have the language at that time, I can't articulate what needs to be done but I can articulate something about quiet, and about at peace and that does not mean striving that means being -- hope as not something that's in the future that you can achieve but something that is present and living so how do we value both of those sides and still get work done still recognize conflict?

CW I think the challenge there is that so many young people are born almost without a skin, that is to say that the older generation has not been able to protect them, spiritually, socially, politically, sometimes they're not even there to care and nurture and therefore the children are on the battlefield before they even get a chance to get their amour together and therefore they're continually dealing with the external just as a way of getting through it, I'm not just talking about the bullets that they're dealing with, I'm talking about the existential bullets that's coming at them all the time mass media, negative images,

stereotypes, what you supposed to be, the peer pressure and so what often happens is the inside tends to be neglected because there's already neglect on the outside just for sheer protection. How can I make it day in and day out when I don't have enough love in the community, enough love at home, enough care, enough nurturing, people don't think high enough of me, I'm wrestling with my nobodiness because the mass media is telling me I'm supposed to be X, as a black man, I'm s'posed to be so and so, criminally oriented, sexually licentious and so forth. And you got young folk coming along who don't have the buffers. See one thing the civil rights movement had, what Martin could just assume, was that there was the black church, a black community, even under Jim Crow, you had protection of the soul. Now the soul's laid bare, you see what I mean. Three, four, five years old, you got to already know how to negotiate. See what I mean. And of course you also have to know how to deal with death when your partner gets shot in the back at 7, at 9 and at 13. And who's prepared to deal with Hamlet-like questions at 6? to be or not to be, what you think Johnny? (laughter) Well Johnson's gone, so he's certainly in a state of not being right now. so these, so I think what you're dealing with here is in part, such a hostile environment, and this is true not just of chocolate city, this is true for vanilla suburbs, white brothers and sisters out with a lot of material toys but still wrestling with spiritual poverty an still not receiving enough care and nurturing even given their career as parents and therefore they still are just barely making it through though they have a lot of extra cash, more so than those in the inner cities.

unidentified What happened to BREAKING BREAD I went to several of those meetings 4 or 5 years ago and they're just gone. you had these meetings

CW Well many of those meetings were sponsored by the Democratic Socialists of America. They were an attempt to bring Bell Hooks and I together to talk about issues of race, class and gender and it didn't die in that the youth section of DSA is growing. That is to say we had a number of younger people come in to the youth section because those breaking bread meetings like down here at the high school, that was a DSA event so it's not as if these meetings were going to have an independent life, they were part of a movement, part of the Democratic Socialists of America and there was impact within in terms of expansion and there was impact without in terms of exposure.

Chiori Miyagowa I wanted to go back to what you were saying, the question you posed. That there are decentralized efforts by artists to change the world, is there a way to centralize these efforts. I think it's really difficult in the same way the Asian American civil rights movement has been difficult because we all belong to such different cultures although I believe in it deeply. But it has been difficult. As artists, we all belong to very different cultures. There are artists who make theatre for Broadway for mostly middle class older white subscription audiences and there are people who tour prisons to do theatre. and those are different cultures and I'm not sure it's possible to centralize our efforts to change the world. And I think in one way that's happening is that question of art or therapy. because recently the climate has become so much more hostile to artists, and we're not viewed as productive citizens in this culture. In order to earn our keep, artists are quick trying to become social workers. There's a lot of good that comes of that effort but I don't think there is one structure we can build for all the artists of different cultures to come together and have a movement. I would love to do that but I think it's a very difficult thing to consider

MJ Do you think we should attempt to in any way connect those dots or is it simply enough to know that they all exist?

CM I don't know

CW: But you know what we might need is some structure that brings us together to sustain serious discussion about this and for those particular artists that are already organized to give them some support because I don't think again it's going to be ever a question of imposing some obligation and so

forth, but just being able to push one another on these issues. I think it is true that there is a tendency in certain artists to say Well I can show that I'm a productive citizen by being more socially active, that's a good thing but that's not being an artist. That is to say your art can wrestle with some of the crises but that requires some kind of disciplined time and what have you and you can also be an activist but there's other activists who are not artists and therefore you have a different kind of calling. That's why I mention the example of Toni Morrison again, someone who answers her calling by doing what she does well, and yet any time you hear her speak, she speaks politically but she's not an activist in the street. You see what I mean

CM: And also there's an effort to marry social work and art. It does not come from the art community. There has always been service from the artistic community but now that the money is scarce and it was required in order to get that grant, to say look I'm doing something good for society besides doing my art

CW Market forces working again

Linda Chapman: The issue some of us were talking about at the lunch about sort of a new kind of coalition building because over the years I have done a lot of work with different groups, usually it's been issue oriented or cause oriented and there are intersections between that and different ways of making art and I don't know what that is now but we do have a monolith that we're up against and my personal despair comes from 'well, it's all so big; they all have so much money; the media is so prolific; I can't affect that' but how do we in all of our different constituencies, I mean I'm asking that question too, Melanie, what are the common links that we can get hold of.

MJ: I certainly have no answer to that but I would like to say that in a certain way that is why I wanted to make this event happen; I think we need to ask that, just to say it out loud in front of one another; to name that desire to ... I mean that paragraph that Chomsky sent however was pretty incredible -- those are human institutions, they're not monoliths as I think in a certain way it's a matter at least first off to declare ourselves as unwilling to accept what is in our laps right now; I feel like, here we are making declarations about "this is unacceptable" what I have to fight to feel like I'm making any headway, that alone for me is unacceptable, so even to be able to say "how do we connect the dot?" is farther along for some people than ... I don't know,

Linda Chapman But is it just to be able to identify the us and the them, I mean again most of these causes I've been involved with there's usually been "well, I know what we're for and we're usually against somebody else" (*laughter*) I becomes difficult in our present situation, I mean republicans and democrats, they're all the same, you know, there's no difference (*much agreement*) It's one thing ...

Unidentified: And you don't even know what progressive means.

Unidentified: That's not good anymore.

LC: Well no one knows what that means

There's a lot of things that we're against (*absolutely*)

Unidentified: In my life, when I don't feel despair and lack of resources, I feel really great about going out and making work about those things and being that voice that's speaking out about this swing to the right because where that exists is not on 20/20 obviously we're not going to hear it on the news, it's us, I

mean it is us, that's us that's making that voice; we don't have to sit and say 'where is it?' 'where is the big voice on the left' we are the voice on the left and it's our job, some of us whose art lends, are interested in that work and it's certainly not necessarily the work of artists to do it but some of us want to be that voice so we just pick up and we do it, we make work that's accessible, we make it speak to the issues that we feel upset about of which there are many. I mean I'm not saying 'oh it's easy, let's just get out there and do it' but I don't think for example we need to ponder where the grand leadership or what should our issues be. I think we should be pondering the fact how do we continue, what do we do when we get worn down; we want to get out and protest or fight certain issues but our despair often comes from the fact that we did do it the last time and yet it's still happening. For me it's not so much a lack of what do we say and how do we say it, but how do we make it more effective is a continuing question and how do we sustain ourselves in order to continue.

Peg Pettit How do we continue something like this. I've gotten a lot from this and she's not talking about social work. But just to get a chance to see who's out there and what they're doing.

MJ This will be continued in May. People will gather here on May
I just didn't want to make a sign up sheet for this gathering.

Talvin: Melanie When you're talking about connecting the dots and what this event is, isn't this event about connecting the dots? I mean, I do have question ... I just heard something about Asian American civil rights? Is that what I heard?

Unidentified: Yes

TW: And I was like, WOW I haven't heard of that. I'm just being honest and saying

Unidentified: That's because it's been very difficult, culturally ...

TW: But I'm just saying that placing that bomb in this room as a way of alerting and making me aware of something. I mean is this a movement that wants particular alliances, reaching out for connection, is it connecting to the civil rights movement of this era, does it have leadership, it is a language of its own, do we galvanize it, do we make those connections, and do we start that from here. I think that this event itself could be a beginning, hopefully, for relationship, I see a lot of people that I'm working with that hopefully will continue this discussion and work and I think that in a way, it's about being acknowledged and having a place to come to make people aware of what's going on so we can connect to it, so that you can reach that point where you do want to take a step and do want to, that's sort of the strength and that momentum picks up and it crashes and falls away and starts again at some point but I think the whole acknowledgment in this room of people coming to this event acknowledging what the forces are is saying maybe there is a movement, or maybe there is something that's bubbling at least through our presence here and our expression of a need that may lead to a demand and maybe someone does step to the front and step into the vanguard from this language and from this place.

I mean as she was saying, the integration in this room, the diversity in this room is something that's remarkable and unparalleled and for me becomes a new agenda, a new language that may not be so deeply versed in race issues of the past or particular differences but more about alliance and allegiance and cause and an expression through our artistry as an incredible force. so I'm, fed here and inspired in this moment, to acknowledge what you were saying about being a stunted adult; it's probably the most brilliant description of my particular apathy and despair at this moment (*much laughter*) as someone who probably yes, is far too knowledgeable with far too many ideas and not enough action.

Ted Joseph 100 years from today when we all have everything that we want and we're all fat cats, we'll

all be voting republican

Melanie Joseph Really, why? Defend that.

TJ I would think that to be on the left is part and parcel of the 'have nots' and I only hope that when and if we get what we want we'll still be true ...

MJ you said ... and I'm going to go after you on this ... this is my father everybody so ... (*much laughter*) You said you that when we're sated, then we'll give up on folks less fortunate. And I say you're full of shit. Because you wouldn't, and you haven't. You're sated, you're feeding yourself, you know there were times ... I think that's fear that talks...

TJ I said it in jest but nobody laughed so I quit (*much laughter*)

Peg Pettit I want to say something just briefly and we don't have to spend time on it unless it's relevant in any kind of way. Is it my imagination or ... I've been telling everyone that I see that I celebrated my 48th birthday and one of the things that's interesting to me is are we from the forever young generation? Do you know what I'm talking about.

(yes, yes)

PP See when my mother was 48, she already gave birth to 10 children. do you follow me. She had an agenda and my grandmother I think passed on certain things; they had a mission, things they had to take care of before they left this world; they weren't afraid to say that one day I'm going to die and I want you to have these skills ... do for yourself --that's an expression: Do for yourself so you don't have to scuffle like I do. Okay, now, what is it about this generation here in this middle somewhere that has a very difficult time to say I'm getting older, I'm going to die and I want to pass on something to somebody -- that there's a responsibility

Unidentified I think a lot of it is the infantilizing mechanisms of the structures of power around us so we're still sending our little proposals to underpaid dysfunctional institutions around us ...

(*much agreement*)

MJ: Absolutely. Let me tell you, that's so IT. I've got to tell you all about this meeting I once had with one of the more enlightened funders. I had this idea that maybe The Foundry could undertake a for-profit project that might feed back into the not-for-profit activities of the company. I was doing a lot of thinking at that time about how artists and artists' organizations could be less susceptible to the winds of non profit funding. But it couldn't happen all of a sudden so I had this idea that perhaps certain foundations could support artists and arts organizations in a different ways, those who were really serious about this, you know those who had a good business idea and maybe could join forces with someone in the business sector, with whom they could do a strong, for-real business plan, could go to a foundation and instead of asking for a grant, ask for a no interest loan to test the waters of this endeavor.

Unidentified: Or even a low interest loan

MJ: No, I was looking for a no interest loan (*laughter*) I admit it. No interest was what I had in mind. Anyway, I was invited to come to this foundation to meet with the honchos of the paunchas of the organization and propose the idea. So I'm waiting for him in this kick ass office -- I mean the man had some incredible art on the walls, in comes the honchos of the paunchas and we have this long conversation

and I propose the notion of more self-sufficiency for artists and artistic organization. Then I propose this idea of his foundations taking some of their money and providing no interest loans to artists and arts organizations with a good business plan, etc. His response was, well, you're fortunate that you have the ability to think this way, most artists don't know how to think this way -- which was said with great compassion for those poor foundering artists. And I thought *what?* So I said to him, I don't want to think this way, I mean I would much rather just think about my own work but there has to be a way we can be less dependent on ... Anyway he talked out of both sides of his mouth because first he said artists didn't know how to consider such enterprises and then when I presented the idea that maybe artists or artistic institutions could use a hand in the form of no interest loans to begin to engage in such an enterprise, he says that if we want loans we will have to be able to compete like any other business -- and then I suddenly realized this man doesn't want us to be self-sufficient, independent because then what would he do; I don't mean to say that all foundations are that way or that philanthropy for the arts isn't genuine or that we aren't grateful for it, etc. but this man has the perfect job, he does it out to us, almost at his total discretion and has this beautiful office and has a lot of power in the artistic community, who hangs out with all the hip and groovy, and who gets to see everything for free ... anyway I just got really angry finally. And I said 'this is the kind of attitude that continues to infantilize us, and we believe you. We believe that we don't really know how to take care of ourselves, that we just don't have the knack for financial self-sufficiency, that we don't have the time to try and all that ... Anyway, Peg, I think this is a major part of this eternal adolescence you're talking about.

Unidentified ...two things is that we're all very immature; we don't know where we get value from, we're not satisfied with the value we give ourselves. for the last two days there's been this huge uproar that they're wasting out time, they're hijacking the [process or worse, what people talking, what they're trying to do is to get everybody to recognize the value of their own work which leads me to believe that we don't know where the value for our own work is coming from. And so we're looking outside of ourselves and we're very divisive. I, from Kentucky so I can't talk about the New York community but I've heard a lot of the same things where I come from and we will be accepting of certain things but not others, and the one thing we are accepting of is this endless process where we just keep talking and keep trying to rationalize our value but we don't do anything and I find it really frustrating because we're so busy trying to credentialize each other or ourselves that we're worthwhile -- but we're all here, so nobody's going to get rich or powerful infiltrating the left at this point. So I think one the things I think we have to get over is this ultimate suspicion of ourselves, and of people around us -- who does good art, who does bad art -- who cares. I mean it seems to me we just need to do things together, we'll get someplace instead of wading around in this muck

Unidentified This goes back to Cornel's original question about leadership and whether we need a new paradigm of leadership or whether, because there's a sense that we're waiting for leadership, even in this room, people have started a lot of their comments with "oh, I just want to say" or "well maybe this is just my opinion" and there is enough leadership in this room ... for everybody here to take leadership, we have to start by taking the risk of owning what you say and believing in it, there's so much refracted truth, 'well, this might not be the truth, or well, this is my opinion' what about saying this is it, this is the truth, and this is what I believe and I'm really should just say I believe and say not only I believe it but you guys should all believe it too, and

Unidentified Wait a minute, I'm not willing to accept absolute truth of any kind, I don't care how much anyone...

CW No but there's a difference between I believe what I'm saying and what I'm saying is the absolute truth. Everybody knows the first one's not the absolute truth, but the person has to believe in what

they're saying

Unidentified Can I repeat what I was saying in a different way based on that and picking up on something else as well, I think schools in a democracy arguably should be leadership training institutes and they are currently perpetual infantilization factories. so we ought to attend to that.

CW: That's a very important point and it relates to what Sister Rachel's fundamental question about which values would come up with ...

Unidentified: The psychology of denial, this notion of cognitive dissonance, someone was saying we put a lot of energy in not hearing and I'm not a psychologist but there's an old social psychology idea that you resolve your dissonance, you don't want to erase contradictions because they're painful, when I hear you talk about painful soul searching and who wants that well you want it because it's real, it's the real reality. There's dissonance; there's our comfort and there's people starving -- boy that's an uncomfortable contemplation so you want to avoid it. And you can avoid it if you're lucky enough to have experience with what you actualize coming to reality, then you have to do something and you have hope because that's the thing you have naturally, that's an organic thing and you have a worthy challenge. The consumer fetishist society dulls you down and then you're in some confused grieving because you've been dehumanized and that's a bad place to get into and the arts can bring us out of that.

CW: I look at it another way too, in that it's not just a matter of want, one of the reasons I would never call myself an artist is one, I've never had the audacity and number two, I would never want to be an artist. that's the last thing I would want because when I think of artists like Coltrane, that's too painful, I'm not into pain, you see what I mean. I do believe that it's inescapable and that's the same reason I'm not a preacher, as a Christian I believe that certain folks have certain calling, and it's the most awesome responsibility to be called to minister to a people, especially to a bleeding people, so I don't have that responsibility. I'm glad, it's a sign of divine wisdom, that I don't have that responsibility in a church context, now I'm a lay person which means I do still have a certain kind of calling but that's different. so the question then becomes if it's inescapable, how do you get people to have to deal with it? Because most people would rather live lives of denial, it makes sense to me. When Coltrane was a heroin addict, he was trying to get away from the pain because it was too much and he was so sensitive, it makes sense for him to be an addict in that context, even though I'm not viewing it as a morally desirable thing, but I can understand that he just needed some courage to say look, I can confront it without the heroin but I know how much it hurts. As an artist, I see they're doing the same thing, I'm going to dig deep into the abyss of my soul, it's going to be painful, I hope a few of you'll be going to come down with me. but most people are not going to want to go, they want to watch soap operas. why not. What is it. Well it's because it's a hard thing to be human and to wrestle with what it means to be human.

Unidentified: I'll tell you one more time, I have this obsession, but schools are places where we learn that the rich supportive -- which he heard about earlier today -- connection making of being with other humans, and that non-market economy sharing is such a great ritual, and then you juxtapose that against the reality of school experience, which we consign our children to ... and well, we get what we get.

CW: No, I mean, I'm not disagreeing with you.

Unidentified: Exactly. If people get... if young people get to connect with each other, they're less likely to go through that door and become addicted to whatever.

MJ: That's why I'm so addicted to Global Kids too, because their shared leadership... that's all what it's about... is leadership training all over the world -- for young people, it's huge for starting the program; it's

incredible.

CW: Back to the response by Rachel -

Rachel : I wonder if it's fundamental to what we try instill in our kids is the fact that - going back to what you were saying, you know, what is a leader and what is leadership and what is it we're trying to communicate with young people. And one thing they believe is that each and every one of them has leadership skills and granted you may not be someone who's you know, incredibly visible and you're getting exposure and you're doing this and that but you have a very important role to play in the world and so that.. I think that's a complete positive for anyone who wants to make any kind of change... I don't know... sit around wondering who we're going to call... I don't know. If someone asked us this morning... what are you going to tell... if someone asked the panel... what's your plan what we should do.. we want to hear from you I don't know... that would take forever. Change happens gradually, it happens from the bottom. I believe, at least for the young people try to emulate _it's empowering.

Peg Petit: I did want to talk a little bit about despair because I do feel that the tools I thought I had for dealing with this kind of political struggle are ineffective and that I'm facing something that was different than what I knew the issues of civil rights and what not to be. For me that creates a despair and I can't deny that. That I - I feel the tools I know to march, to do these things - that those are not effective means for combating what we are facing now. And I thought maybe, that's because it's - the laws are intertwined and hidden in a way... you know, you put a black face on that. But you can't really call that a law that, you know... It's a much different thing that we're struggling with. Media representation... corporate, you know kind of controlling of our society. I wonder if there are new tools that we haven't discovered yet or dealing with these things.

Unidentified: It must be that the whole decentralized answer; you know art wise, people wise is part of this new answer. It must be another way of looking at the whole problem. You can't... the organizing and the marching... it's not happening. The response to that doesn't pay. You know, we're standing downstairs and - I- I don't have children, I haven't grown up... figured how to talk to teenagers and what not. At one point there were five boys - 17 years old - and we were talking and it was simple, it was easy and I just was overcome by how simple it was. It was simple because they were all here. I didn't have to figure out the argumentation to switch to - But just the decentralized impact they had on me and not just me going out to them. But they were able to give me by being articulate 17 years and a half old.

Unidentified : I want to postulate - I think one of the reasons that we have so much trouble on the left is that the fact it conjures itself. A company can go __without the fear of being nationalized... which of course, disempowers the leverage... or in any third world places because it won't be nationalized... because you don't have the Russians sending arms into the rebel movements. And the power structure is no longer the fray - that people will become disaffected and go left. And there's no resource - And now, I don't know how we deal it. And the second question - what really discourages me is I'm wondering where are the Rennie Davises and the Abby Hoffmans and all those people... there should be people today 20 years old that did the same thing today that they did 20 years ago.

MJ: You didn't hear anything this young man said and you're saying that. This young man said - that's what you say but he makes his revolution not the way you make yours or the people that were around you made theirs but in another language and in another rhythm and on a different frequency. So maybe you need to figure out how to hone in on other things that are going on.

Unidentified : There's a media question around what you're saying. And also you're

saying... it doesn't matter if we march... people still march or they report... a hundred thousand people show up and they say 4000 people came. That's partly how we're treated by the media. So many people at different places making different attempts and they're not being covered so we don't hear about them. So we're partly in a grip of a corporate media structure that gives us certain information and feeds us certain information and not other parts of information. And that's how I see us put in a ____

CW: And if you ask the younger generation, they talk about Tupac and Chuck D and others who have some serious critiques as it were, different form because of different movement but still some spirit of resistance, given whatever flaws and blinds they might have.

Unidentified: There's a lot... power... seems like a lot of the talk about power and change is based on grappling with what we don't like. And a lot of abolitionary ideas... not inspired by what you're dissatisfied with...but dreaming of another place, to dance and letting it be vibrant and inviting by its presence... you know, dancers, other people to come to it... a new idea. I was in a demonstration, like it was ten years ago, it was at the __ Test site. Martin Sheen and so many other people were there. I hadn't been to a demonstration. You know there were people – we need to defend the country and our jobs – and others - Fuck you, fuck you – my god, kill each other and die. And it felt like children were pleading to these other children who were acting like children – like - please, daddy, tell us it's okay. Why should these people on the sidelines be the one you're looking to, to tell you it's okay for your idea of peace? But what Martin Sheen did - he just sat in his made a place of peace. And it was so beautiful because it invited the person protesting –uh, to keep the bonds and all of us... it made a place of peace that the person might not have known... if we were blocking the other side into the... the gate. It's like make a place sometimes, just another place that allows the other person to decide for themselves.

CW: That's a nice way. I know we're going to bring this to a close. I just want to say a few words of response to this question of both leadership strategy and how to relate to this very rich discussion that we've had. And I do think – my good brother Ron Daniels always says we are the leaders that we've been looking for. I think there is something to that. That is to say that to the degree to which we're able to not just become active but we become active in such a way that we begin to spin out our own visions, our own strategies, our own tactics, bouncing up against one another to see what they are. Now in my own particular case, which is just a humble opinion, and I think it really does reflect sister Melanie's father's words here. Because I think one of the reasons he's a progressive is because of conviction and courage. No matter where he is, he has certain conviction and he has certain courage. And the question becomes, who in our society, has enough conviction against the system and enough courage to act on it; outside of this room for example. Because I think the major issues are corporate power; patriarchy; white supremacy; homophobia. When we let outside of this room, who among our fellow citizens and fellow human beings manifests that kind of tilt. That's an interesting question. That's a very interesting question. But that's what we're dealing with. We're living in a conservative society. You see, conservative society. You can look at the profile of a WASP, you can look at the profile of Jews, You can look at the profile of Catholics, You can look at the profile of blacks, and so forth, in terms of where they tilt, and I'm not talking about some little empirical pole but in terms behavior over time and you see deeply conservative strands among every one of those groups; Every one of those groups. I'm convinced that if we don't make corporate power, especially multinational corporate power, major issue, we're in deep trouble. So we have to talk about wealth and equality class. But how do we do it? Well, I think one way of doing it is you either convince the American public that corporate power is attacking a sacred cow, in their experience. If we show corporate power was smashing family, motherhood, the things that Americans - smashing the flag - then you got a chance. Because then they're already invested in. I'm talking visionary at this point. I know you want the how do question but I'm getting to that. But what I'm saying is we go to spin out some ways of doing it- How do you link these kinds of public issues like corporate power and democratic accountability to people's every day personal troubles which are undeniable? The right wing always links their public issues of personal

troubles. They just end up blaming government, blaming black folk, blaming women, blaming gay brothers, lesbians. But they link it in private troubles. And do they have sustained grassroots organizers. I'm convinced that when we actually look at the American populations who have a fundamental tilt of courage and conviction against a system, we have to begin to black folk. Even given a conservative homophobia and patriarchy, when it comes to behavior, who supports youth messengers, who has the highest level of universal socialists, of universal health care support, who has the highest level of critiques of corporate power – it's everyday black folk. But conservative on other issues – who do you link some anti-racist struggle to corporate power that is also conjoined to some sacred cow that other Americans can get in on. That's the question. And again, this is just my humble opinion. I think I'm right. And which means any time we talk about the left and we're not talking about white supremacy and its legacy, it's not going to resonate among too many folk outside the room that we're in; because the folk that come to these kinds of conferences are already convinced that racism is a vicious thing. That's still not the case among large number of Americans, of white Americans. It's just not the case. That's why Republicans can win. They can push the race clan. We're not saying they're the Ku Klux Klan. We're saying the sensibility is still there. And we got the rest of the white folk that can cut against the grain; they are the John Browns, they're the minority. That's not the true for the rest of the cousins and the aunts and uncles and so forth. And if that's true, and we're talking concretely and realistically, then what are the ways in which we can create some multiracial context like this, that acts as not just race but also the corporate power but also patriarchy and homophobia but also in the end has the cash in on – some sacred cow that can be shown to be crushed by corporate power.

Unidentified: Democracy.

CW: But even that, Americans have not shown a deep commitment to protection of rights; from the anti-war movement to black folk to women and so forth. But we got to hope, we got to hope, because we still got –

Unidentified : That is the original sacred cow. If that's gone – I think we have to....

MJ: It's not gone.

CW: It's not gone. For me, it wouldn't cut deep, it's not gone... it's just that democracy and selection of rights is a very selective thing. There's never been a mass rising when Dubois's handcuffed in 1951 to have his rights violated for being an agent of Soviet government. Black pull it back. See what I mean. Black folk pull back and you see what the masses of white brothers and sisters did. It was just the white communist and the black communists and some socialists and a few prophetic preachers who supported Dubois. And there are other examples in this regard. But I do think there are some things. There are things like children, there are things like parenting, there are certain things that float across race, region and class that the masses of American fellow citizens are deeply concerned about. And if you can show that corporate power is a culprit then you got a different discourse. Because no corporation can get up and say... yes, we believe in disassembling the souls of young folk to make them hedonistic auto-monsters to make our business. They say that behind closed doors. They can't say that publicly. You see what I mean. The same is true about we believe in crushing the family. They won't say that. That's what capitalism does. There are certain things that are still at work - but it's still a good one - the left is a feeble hope - which is always the case for the left in America. It is a feeble hope. We have to acknowledge that feebleness. But it can come back strong under certain circumstances.

Unidentified: Aren't you just recycling that Michael Lerner stuff about pro family left? Don't women and gay people always lose when there's a pro family discourse at the centre of left politics?

CW: Not if the family is defined in terms of caring networks that include human beings of a variety of different things.

Unidentified : That's not what you said - you said children and parenting. Why is that excluding -

CW: Why is parenting necessarily -

Unidentified: It's not excluding - but okay, there's a lot of women here my age having children - and there's this big push of having children -

The terms for example, for gay people, the terms of acceptance right now are assimilation into a reproductive family model - that's what everyone is being told - gay marriage, gay parenting and then you can have your rights. But if you want to have a community based culture like we had before, forget it, because the only way they're going to let you in is reproduction like us . When you put in a pro family line as a centre for the left, I think that's really a problem.

CW: It certainly should be a problem if the family is conceived solely in terms of straight and patriarchal- A lot of us, we're impaired by our biological parents. It had to with significant others and a whole host of others but there's still parenting activity going on. We're talking about caring and nurturing; as activities.

Unidentified : But if you were to frame the discussion as a gay family, a multi-racial family, or a non-ordinary family, we wouldn't get the attention of a majority of Americans.

MJ: But that's not what you're saying. You're saying, what if you don't have children at all – do you think it means you don't have a family -

Unidentified : There's a big fight about Michael Lerner doing this at the end of the seventies. I mean, I think ultimately we're going to have a discourse that's very narrow and people on the outside are going to stay on the outside and that's going to be the terms of the discussion.

CW: It depends on how it's framed.

Unidentified : You think you're going to frame it to corporations in a way that's going to unite a public opinion. And people are going to be able to articulate all these complex shapes.

CW: We're not talking about shapes to corporations. We're trying to shape it over and against their corporate power.

Unidentified : I think it's very possible for queer people and the black community to be really great allies in terms of redefining a family - in terms of - well, there are separate identities such - there are gay and black people and I'm not saying that there aren't - but I'm saying within the context of what is queer liberation and within the context of the civil rights movement or even just who are African American people in the United States, there are very clear lines of allegiance that we can make and redefine what a family is and we're both working with a more complex sense of what a family is -

CW: And always have. Absolutely right.

Unidentified And always have. I think basically once we start connecting a lot of any ethnic lines or historic lines the idea of family is much more complex and expanse. The problem now is the word family - as a gay person in the room I'm already responsible for the broken family, right, so for me, it's like if I'm

just in a room and people say our children or the children that are coming to be, I used to feel excluded by that but now I just feel like wait that was me that was me internalizing some weird idea of family that is actually not mine - that's actually not how I grew up or the family I came in to which is a more communal, anarchistic queer community - it's not our idea of family either. The children are my children are our children. Nonetheless, depending on who is saying it they don't ever mean those kids are mine. So I agree that - I think it's problematic to have a central piece - parenting or the family - without really a lot of - a lot of the cross-cultural work about what is the families and how do we see family because right now the word family is already the flag and democracy and several other words so in a sense, we've already lost it. So to have a semblance of a dialogue, we first had to reclaim the concepts of the word.

CW: That's why I use the language of parenting rather than family at all. Because parenting talks about networks of caring and nurturing.

MJ: And downstairs right now, there's a roundtable going on in bioethics which concerns how we actually make people. Don't say oh please. I mean, policy is being set right now in the market for us in terms of - in terms of information, in terms of test-tube children, in terms of cloning, etc. And it's completely left open to market forces right now. And this stuff is happening faster than you can dream. What does it mean to be able to make humans now - what do WE mean? We have to take that seriously because it's for real, and it will affect what we mean by family and parenting... so to leave it up to market forces ...

Unidentified : Cornel, can you be more specific? I get it. I'm totally with you about the sake of power and blah, blah blah.... about corporations and etc. I don't see how gay people can be in on that, can tag team with that. Specifically because what has been brought up as gay people seen as the enemy of children, as the enemy of parenting, the enemy of family and so.... but do you have any other thoughts on that?

CW: One, we just have to expose these claims as vicious lies and just show the ways in which gays and lesbians are always already constitutive of networks of caring and nurturing.

Unidentified : But if we don't want gay people to teach our children in schools, how can we expect... how can we expose them? We're having trouble exposing gay people should be allowed to teach children.

CW: But that reveals the depths of the homophobia. That doesn't mean that you don't still talk about ways of caring and nurturing that still includes people across sexual orientations.

Unidentified : But also, the family is the site of both homophobia and sexism. It's the primary place where people learn those things and experience them. In a way, those things are familial problems more than societal problems. So when gay people are inside families or women are inside patriarchal families, they need a social authority that's larger than their families to advocate for them. But unfortunately right now the family is the highest social organization so if you're trapped in there and you're in alien territory, you have no one to advocate for you.

Unidentified : It's about the next generation of the species. It's about children. You got to think like the right think. You got an issue - it's about getting together behind it, not thinking defensively about my god, a gay person, how can I possibly you know, lend my weight to this anti-corporate thinking because maybe it won't fit me or something. If course it will fit, it will fit everybody because children are our next generation.

PP: A lot has happened over the last ten years in the sense that I think it has to do just expecting where we are right now. If we really - if we could talk back and forth to each other, we could find many of

us are right now are engaged in families that are gay, teachers teaching that are gay, it's already happening. But to put that out there and to accept that this is happening across the country. Families are inter-racial, they are multi-gender, they're all over the place. And we've been told that they're not. We've been fed - we've been told and re-told that this is not happening. But we can go into our families - we can go to our own families and say - look, this is all right - my cousin in gay - this one has - inter-racial marriage - it's all right. For years and years. So something is wrong about what we've been told and what we believe. Because I bet you if we open up the forum right here in this room, we'll be shocked that there's not even six degrees of separation in here.

MJ: You know, we have to wrap up.

Unidentified : We must really re-teach and re-idolize and re-inform the notion of family before we place it back at the centre of this discourse.

CW: And it's really - it's still not at the centre - it's corporate power.

MJ: I hate to do this, but we need to get downstairs.

CW: If we keep the corporate power at the centre -

Unidentified : It's a question of the sacred cow. I don't know if we can find one we can all agree on.

CW: Exactly. Rich dialogue, I'm telling you.

END