

Participants: **Lloyd Suh, Talvin Wilks, Tracy Scott Wilson, Elizabeth Streb**

Moderator: **Melanie Joseph**

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## **February 2007: Panel discussion on World Social Forum in Nairobi**

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Moderated by Melanie Joseph

MELANIE JOSEPH: I've been thinking about the opening remarks for the article: what people will read as a lead-in. Basically I'm just going to give some information about the WSF, who went, and I'm not going to say too much. Here are four people from it, you know? I'm not going to talk about opinions how it went or didn't go, because that will be in this. So let me go to the questions.

The first question would be: what were your expectations, if any, of attending it, and what changed them, did anything change them, or dislodge you in any way?

TALVIN WILKS: I'll dive in, I'll go first. The thing for me is that I expected to feel a greater part of- I'll use the dangerous word-an international movement. That's in a way what I was looking for, or at least looking for a way to plug in. I thought that there would be a lot of interesting connected trajectories along lines of social justice, political movements, you know, of course, anti-war movements, but I really expected that there would be a greater way to align myself with some type of continuity, so to speak. And in many ways I didn't find that, or that was very hard to create for myself. I felt it was a very connect-the-dots kind of experience that at times I got lost in. And at times I found my way into one event, or one particular idea. But I didn't find a way of having a full connected experience. And that was something I had expected or anticipated I would either be guided into that, or there would be a type of critical mass or groundswell that would ease my way into this. And that was just based on my own particular assumptions. So, that's my beginning.

TRACY SCOTT WILSON: I sort of agree with Talvin, and I had my own expectation that there would be sort of-even though in the literature you did say it was free-flowing and things like that-I did expect there would be more of an organizing body or something where, you know, I felt more guided about where I needed to go, where I wanted to go, I'd be able to find that out a little easier.

ELIZABETH STREB: I guess for me-I magically entered this with no expectations. And I think part of it came from, Melanie, you were prepping me this way. I took everything you said pretty literally. That it's a self-organizing idea. And the notion of the idea of being in the mass [mess?]-my deep experience for this, and why I didn't have those expectations in a certain way, was that I was in this whirl of humanity that was distinct from any other grouping I'd been in before. It didn't have to be with me. It wasn't [called] by me wanting to sit in a room and hear the idea of what might change the world. I just felt that it was a tone, a smell, rising and falling, my wandering around, it was all of a oneness, and I felt profoundly moved by that, and I'm still sorting out what that all means. My planned departure is to take cultures and find out if they have relevance on the ground, on the dirt, and one of my big experiences in Nairobi was how much dust there was, and how much dirt there was, and everyone from the knee down was sort of dusty when they went anywhere. It was just this beautiful journey of watching people zig-zag around that huge stadium. I'm forever changed, but I'm still sorting out in what way.

LLOYD SUH: Yeah, and I also was kind of prepared to not have too many expectations, to try to keep an open mind. I've certainly never been to Africa before, and I've never been to an event like that. So, yeah, I went in, tried to keep as open a mind as possible so that I could take things in. But one thing I certainly was very surprised about, just in terms of going to conferences, whenever I've gone to a conference there's always been a kind of theoretical talk. And there was certainly some of that going on at the forum, but I was really struck by how very real a lot of the conversations were, and how very present and immediate and raw they were, as opposed to being theoretical or abstract-the conversations themselves were about people dealing with very real problems and wanting to work them through in very immediate ways, and that was exciting and sometimes jarring. And certainly wasn't something I was prepared for.

JOSEPH: So that surprised you?

SUH: Yeah, it surprised me even though I didn't know that was an expectation that I had. For some reason I was struck by it at the forum itself.

JOSEPH: Can I just ask, for clarity's sake, for you to give me a specific example of that immediate, raw talk?

SUH: Sure, just like, going to a panel on water rights, for example. And I think, you know, going into a panel on water rights I would expect on some level for the conversation to be about theoretical approaches on how to deal with water issues throughout the world. But those events tended to be not like that. They were about people coming forward and saying, "We have no water. How do we get water?" It cuts to the chase, because you get a very human face

on a problem. And that was for me far more affecting than hearing statistics or thinking about those kinds of issues in a more abstract way.

JOSEPH: This is actually really interesting to me, because in a sense, one of the things if you read Alisa's article, one of the things that was different about this forum from other forums, was that there really was a presence - even if it wasn't as large as other forums have been - there really was a presence of poor people. Particularly once they smashed the gates. And that, for some of the elders on the IC, that was a revolutionary occurrence, because it's what they've been trying so hard in Brazil to make sure there are more and more people who are really the people being affected by these kind of things, ie., poor people, particularly. And this forum, for them, because of the way they smashed the gates, which I suppose I will talk about a little bit, maybe in the beginning of the article if necessary, that brought those people immediately in. "I have no water-what the hell are we going to do-what are we going to do?" And I guess I would ask this question, and then I'll move on to the next in the list. Were there people at that water panel that you went to that said, "This is what we are doing?"

SUH: Well, I guess I went to a couple of things on water rights. Hmm. This is what we are doing. I suppose, actually, not. As opposed to actual best practices sharing it seemed to be about "these are things that need to happen." And they had to do with, you know, some abstract issues. You know, in terms of international policy and also the way the United States handles those kinds of issues. But yeah, I think that in terms of people who had been without water sharing best practices about how to deal with that in their communities, that didn't really happen. From what I personally saw.

STREB: I went to a land rights meeting. Again, it was one of those situations in which I was looking for something else, and going through the plethora of white tents and going in and sitting down, and loving that I didn't exactly know what the topics of that meeting was. But this one particular tent was huge. There was an East Indian man speaking, I'm sorry I don't know his name. It was filled with Kenyans-entirely packed with Kenyans-there was just a few, certainly few white people there, and it didn't look like there were that many Americans there. There were several comments I remember from it that really pierced my consciousness just because of dealing with how we in the West think of land, and the whole socialist, communist idea of property being [inaudible]. And since you're the trustee-and he was comparing a lot of Indian activities, land-wise, to what's happening in Africa with the land-and since you're the trustee, whether it's a government or an individual or a community, you shall not displace. The whole notion of taking property away, or the whole concept of eminent domain, came up. And the Kenyan government-it was requested that they don't take away customary rights of the people without the full consent of the people. And the idea was, this deeper idea, was that the people

enjoy property rights from time immemorial, and that it's not about a monetary compensation. The tribal right to land law-I'm not sure if it's scripted in the constitution-the tribal right to land law is if you're in possession of the land for the last three generations, you're by proxy owners of that land. So it's sort of like, what is it, you know, possession is 90 percent of the law. But as they were saying in the forum, the abduction of their land by the government using the excuse of eminent domain by multinationals. And so he was talking about, he kept saying things, and everyone in the room would just scream, because he had his finger on the pulse there. That was one thing. One of the other notions that was brought up was the inheritance, because of the three-generation rule. Because people had, you know, for all those generations, worshipped on that land. And it was an effort toward an alternate jurisprudence on that level. I thought that was really-custom has a force of law. Anglo Saxons make property, but custom has a force of law. And you throw out the rights to acquire, or own, or dispossess, or take jobs away. I was very moved because it's really talking about this very powerful complex political and cultural issue.

JOSEPH: And did you perceive that to have begun from a different mindset, for lack of a better word? Did you perceive that conversation to start from a different place than it might have begun here?

STREB: Well, I think the notion that you could bring up issues of customary practice... I'm not sure I can think of an analogy where you'd be able to argue with the government or with-there's nothing more powerful than owning land in this country, it seems-except for the government does take property away for quote-unquote highways. That boundary gets fuzzy a little bit. But it didn't feel the same to me. I'm not a land expert, but...

JOSEPH: Tracy or Talvin, since we're talking about specific events and moments of interest, were there any for you?

WILKS: Well, I think one of the most impacting experiences I had was the venue called the Q-Spot, basically they had organized a number of panels, workshops, conferences, dealing with Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual/Transgendered folks. And pretty consistently this venue, which was sort of a drop-in place throughout the four days being out at the stadium, and you know for me, I could consistently since those were issues of concern for me I could consistently navigate my day, and if I felt I hadn't made a connection, I could go by the Q-Spot and see what was going on, even if I knew that something was there. I felt that was really one of the most inspiring and exciting ideas, because there was a critical mass of folks gathered, there was an exchange of information, and one particular panel I experienced, a gentleman [ck name: sounds like Julian Victor Acasa], who is a conscientious person, clearly, and just beginning to understand the

politics of that idea-he was from Uganda and pretty much had this journey and experience all his life, and basically related his story, I thought in an incredibly inspiring way, of traveling through the politics of family life, daily life, and just growing up and discovering a type of language and identity, many times in isolation, by himself. For me that was one incredibly liberating, exciting, connecting, reaching across that time/land period, just to hear and see how the issues were being dealt with in another country. And that spot was particularly dangerous and risky-there were a number of conversations about creating particular language about these issues. How did we lose identity when the missionaries came? And people going back and trying to rediscover-was there language for a woman who loved a woman, or a man who loved a man? Did we have these identities before they were erased through missionaries, through colonialism, and that there were a number people doing a type of anthropology, going back and historical research, to discover original language, as they were saying. Or the salvation of the younger generation-that we had language, we have language, about our own particular identities that we need to reclaim. And that was just so incredibly profound, and a phenomenal occurrence for me, one that I did not particularly anticipate or expect. For me personally, it was a liberating, breaking out of my own particular culture, colonized box.

WILSON: For me, I went to a workshop on nonviolence, and it started out like a lot of the forum, very theoretical. But there was a woman there from Uganda, and we began to do these exercises in nonviolence, and role-playing and things like that. She came in and she was very quiet, as the meeting went on. She began to share her very real experiences with the police and with the attempt to use nonviolence in a situation where-my study of nonviolence, it only works when there's publicity, so that other people from around the globe can see your cause. This woman was trying to use these nonviolent tactics in a vacuum. It went from the theoretical to something that was very real and very intimate. And it went from just talking about it and "is this nonviolent, is that nonviolent," to seeing this woman, hearing her stories. It's when the forum became very real. As you say, [inaudible], this was a very real situation, it affects real people. I found it very moving and it really hit me that this is not just a discussion, we're really trying to affect people's lives here. That was very moving to me.

JOSEPH: These personal conversations with people sometimes, at least for me, a lot of them in both of these two forums I've been to, sometimes I've had more meaningful conversations outside the events, just talking one on one with someone I've never met before. It's what's personalized it even more for me. Elizabeth was there when we met this woman from Somalia, and she had lived in the States for several years, and she moved back. And was dealing with, what she says is that the American disease of Al-Qaeda-is that what she said, Elizabeth?-the Al-Qaeda disease. Just talking directly about the planes and the bombings and they haven't had a government in Somalia in I don't know how many years. It brought it home. She felt like if she

could only have a radio, if she could just-there's a lot of local radio going on all around the world, in fact I went to a panel in '05 about it-there's this huge growing movement of local radio stations that have a broadcast distance of three or four villages. They really have taken off, much more so than the Internet. Because people can share something. They don't need electricity in every home-they can have a radio in a public space. And so she was just going on, if only I could have a radio station and contact other people. And we were with Laura [Flanders], who hooked her up with one of these associations, that is trying to help more and people-it's in Alisa's article, this is already being written about. It's so moving to actually hear directly from someone what they're fighting with. And I actually don't know another situation where I get to have that kind of interaction. Sometimes on panels at conferences, NGOs will bring people onto the stage to parade their-I don't want to say it so cynically-some people will bring people to a panel or such to talk about their experiences. But this is unmitigated, this is you meeting them.

WILKS: The one thing about it it's constant. You're constantly moving in between events. And that constant ability of having that contact with that kind of story is overwhelming, incredible. What is possible of the experience in between what is planned and what isn't.

STREB: A great example: I was following Laura Flanders around a certain amount, because I figured she would have her finger on the pulse. She was carrying this hundred-pound pack, and I could not keep up with her. There was this one moment that we went into one of those booths, and there was a Palestinian man talking about the issue of the wall in Palestine and the whole enormously complex issue there. And there was a Kenyan there. And Laura just started to ask the Kenyan about-maybe he was a South African-about apartheid and how it compares in his mind to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She had the mike between the two, and they were just having the most incredible conversation about that issue. And it was just pure happenstance, and I think when you're wandering around, you know, meeting Fatima, and sitting down and having coffee, supposedly taking a break, is when these glorious epiphanies explode in front of you. Do you guys remember the cross with the pregnant woman on it, do you remember that? All the conversations that started along that were just amazing. One man came up and said, "What is this, what is this, we're taught that you cannot, that you have to practice abstinence. But we're 17, we're 20, we can't do that!" And they were so hungry for any kind of conversation. They realize their church would disown them, or their families. They were just unbelievably exploding for the chance to have a conversation about that.

JOSEPH: Yeah, that leads me to the next question which we're already on to, I think. Which is how is the WSF a different kind of process? I know it's so hard to - it takes a long time - it took me over a year to understand what I had done the first time I went, but how are you beginning to perceive this as a different sort of process in its affect [?] in the world? Does that make sense to anybody as a question in this moment?

WILKS: I think in a way it does rely on a lot of what we just talked about. It creates this idea of a critical mass of information and exchange at each time slot, four times a day, you have this multiple opportunity to connect, to you know, potentially ever major issue that's happening across the [continent itself]. In many ways that's not the conclusion. You don't go to a panel and then that's concluded, that's done. In a way, the idea's the immersion, the kickoff place, the reconnecting, the convergence, the new idea, the inspiration, and the idea of the WSF is that it seems to me to be very open to the idea of "this is the place for the possibility." When it says, "another world is possible." We are merely feeding the possibility. We're not controlling it, we're not dictating it, we're not saying it must happen. We are just feeding the potential success rate for something to happen. And in my mind, that's what is very different than anything I've ever experienced before. Because it allows that to be a possibility. It's not a failure if something doesn't happen or if something that's identified or expected doesn't happen, you know-that language isn't even valid, those expectations aren't really valid. But the idea that things do come out of it, and you do have these ongoing conversation, and people do start using this as a way to track progress-I mean, I was at a particular event where a great part of the time, near the end, was really people reporting out on what had happened in the past two years. So that there was a sense of the new, there was a sense of the old, there was a sense of the success, there was a sense of the failure. New voices, old voices, and two years from now, we'll see each other again. So that's also possible. And I feel like I'd never understood the experience in that way, and of course you have to be there to have that idea. It's really hard to contemplate. So for me, moving forward, I'm still sitting on this desire of "I must do something, something must happen, something has already happened"-I'm not sure what that is, except for, I bring it up practically in every conversation that I have. And you know, people get very excited about that, and there were people who tried to find out information here in the States when they heard I was doing it, and of course the States do a very poor job covering it. Clearly it is in me-it's in my voice, it's in my language, I talk about the go-down experience, I talk about Kibera constantly, I talk about this with other people who are also going to places in Africa, and the possibility of another kind of connection is suddenly newly possible for me in a way it has never been before. Just because I feel I have a firsthand knowledge of an experience. Not anything that's necessarily factual or concrete, but a firsthand knowledge of an experience as

something that is possible has now affected my language and I carry that forward. So that's what's happened to me.

STREB: My question is, then, being able to be invited to participate in such a poignant gathering as the World Social Forum in response to the WTO, I guess originally, and the IMF, that another world is possible, that all those thousands and thousands and thousands of people from the whole world around gathered in Nairobi, and I guess you know the other social forums, but I wasn't there. Basically I think the pact, that we all believe that this is true, is such a major social movement. And just that alone is so edifying. I kept thinking about-and I think I also absorbed an energy, and a power, and the fact that the tow, this tow-line of this assembly of urgent people who are dealing with actual urgent issues, and when I come back I feel like I have a deep-because of my privilege-cultural, just human responsibility that the quote-unquote art world is completely oblivious to. So my thought was, it's a simple sentence: how can a move make a difference against the veil of this? How can a move-I mean, my business is action-how can a move make a difference against the veil of all this. You almost feel like you could just sit in one place and just ponder and just never move again. What would have any relevance after this? And I think that one of the other things, when we went to Kibera-I guess the other thing was, agree that "go down" and the Kibera, the poetry, it was so moving, that space. The go-downs. And Kibera-I guess the smells-I mean I can just cannot get the smells out of my [inaudible: nose/clothes?]. And I was thinking about when we were there, in [inaudible], starting this gathering hands, and putting all our bags on a big pile. I felt like this Western...well what do you mean, you want me to put my bag on this big pile in the middle and back up? I mean, everything we were told not to do, in a way! It's like, "Wait a minute, that's my bag!" And then we back up. And this is a crazy thing. Hundreds of little kids, right? All of them joined hands. And I was realizing, looking at the children's faces in Kibera, and how immediately joining hands and moving around this way and that, and jumping around and turning, brought these childlike smiles to their faces erupting, in a way, out of concerns no child should ever bear. And I couldn't believe that such a simple moment would make them smile. And that that's how critical culture really is-and how powerful it is. I was just like, they're smiling! And they stood there for an hour-and-a-half in the hot sun, in their blue sweaters, most of them-not moving, just watching. I was just like, whoa.

JOSEPH: With your bag on the pile. [laughter]

STREB: Well then I saw these little fingers grab my bag. [laughter] Thousands of people between me and that bag! And I thought uh-oh. And then I even thought this very Western thing: I better not dive over the heads of everybody and tackle that poor little kid. But I was just like oh well, that's the end of my bag-little kids' hands grabbed it. And then it was so funny,

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because somebody else grabbed it. I was just watching like, hmm, okay. No big deal, you know, I got my bag. But it was really this unbelievably amazing, amazing, amazing moment. And I was watching the play, when I was sitting on those telephone poles. And mostly watching the faces of the kids. I'm just forever changed by that. I just can't believe the idea that you can bring a smile through all of those concerns-can you do that, can that happen-and what could you make that you would do that, separate from an experience.

JOSEPH: Lloyd, I'm curious how you perceive the ongoing difference of this event, going forward. Or how everyone does. One of the things Talvin just said about-I mean, I had cut this questions, which was how are you telling people about it, and are you telling people about it? How is it entering the daily-ness of your lives? I guess I want to repeat that to Tracy and Lloyd.

SUH: Yeah, it is, for sure. As far as telling people about it, it kind of changes day by day. Not even so much depending on who I'm talking to, but depending on how I'm processing that particular day, because I think each day I think about it in different ways, I suppose. I did this thing when I got back. I wrote out on a sheet of paper what happened each day, without any kind of editorializing. Very factual, this is what I did. And then returning to that periodically, and looking at what I did, and having different feelings about it, just so I could see how it evolves, my particular feelings about the event evolve based on my re-acclimating to being in New York. Because it really did feel like we were gone a very long time. The re-acclimation process is still happening. And the question that Elizabeth brought up, about how to take that and if not crystallize it then at least figure out how to let it feed our work here, that to me seems like the biggest question and the one that I'm thinking about the most and probably unsure of the most. And I think, yeah, I'm a little envious of your comment Elizabeth, in terms of being able to find a moment to crystallize it so beautifully. This past Sunday, I went to the Astor Place event where Reverend Billy did his three Starbucks in the East Village, and he would preach there and talk about the attempt by Starbucks to trademark ancient Ethiopian coffee names, to the great dismay of Ethiopian coffee farmers. And it was incredibly exciting and a little bit, you know, it made me think a lot because here's a guy who's able to take what happened and do this immediate action. Whether it's because of the particular form he works in. But yeah, I find myself unable to find a way to do that. And the thing I've been thinking more recently is just that the experience happened and it's in me and therefore everything I do will probably be affected in a variety of ways, because it affected me in a variety of ways I wouldn't want to crystallize into one thing specifically. We were talking about Fatima. Tracy and I met her as well, on a panel that Global Exchange from the United States put together. And she was talking about American activism. And one thing she said was that we have far more power than we realize. It was just an incredibly pivotal moment for me in terms of the way I was navigating the

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forum. Because I sensed a certain amount of - I don't want to say necessarily anti-American, though there was a degree of that -

but a sense that, what is the role of an American, not even to say the American artist, at the forum. And feeling unsure about how that fit in, or unsure how I could find my entry point into that. And just hearing her say that made me kind of realize that like Elizabeth was saying, because of where we are and the opportunities we have to communicate, we do have a tremendous responsibility. That was definitely a good entry point into the forum, just to say, I have a responsibility to communicate this profound humanity that was happening there. So on that level I think that absolutely it was a very different process, just by virtue of it being where it was with the variety of types of people who were there. That's something that I, yeah, never would have expected I would have the opportunity to experience.

WILSON: Well, it's funny. About a week ago I stopped talking about my experience in Kenya. When I got back, all my friends were calling me and saying, tell me what happened, show me your pictures. I was talking nonstop about it. And then I remember I was talking to another friend of mine on the phone about it and I had to stop, because I felt like I was losing the experience. Because I was just talking about it not from memory anymore from just, okay, we did this, and then we did that it was just becoming rote. I felt I needed to step back. I still haven't processed it. I need to step back and let it come at me again. Like Elizabeth said, the smells, especially in Kibera, and the sights, I've been dreaming about them every night. But I feel like I just need to stop thinking about it, and let it inhabit my body again. I don't want to lose the realness of it, I don't want to lose that. And I don't want it to just become the story I tell people about when I went to Kenya. Artistically it really affected me, it really reinforced my desire to-you know, I've always considered myself a political writer-writing about these experiences, and I so hate didactic plays about statistics and victims. One time I went to a play-a workshop of a play at the McCarter, I won't say what the play was-there was a character talking about a traumatic experience in the inner city, and there's a character named Jimmy who went through a whole lot of very bad things. And I was walking about and I was behind these two women who worked at the university. And they were talking about how Oprah was going to come there to interview Toni Morrison. The play had literally just let out, and they were talking about this. And in the middle of this conversation about Oprah coming, this woman stopped in the middle of her sentence, and she said, "poor Jimmy." And then she just started talking about Oprah again. And I just thought, wow. I don't want it to be that kind of-I don't want to write plays where it's just this fleeting thing, where it's like, "poor Jimmy" and then, they go have sushi or something like that. I want to create an art that affects me like Kibera did, where you can't get the smell or the sound out of your mouth. To really humanize these situations, instead of ticking off this list of woes or things like that. Because you know, it was amazing to watch the

faces and hear the people laughing at this play in the midst of their profound poverty. It just really made me think, I have to make my art true to that. Whether or not-it doesn't have to be about Africa, but I have to make it about more than just Poor Jimmy. Because these are very real people, very real situations, and I want to be able to touch people in the way that I was touched.

JOSEPH: I think one of the things that's really interesting to me about listening to you all is that in a certain way this event itself, and it goes to my last question, in its insistence, and its struggle to maintain its insistence and devotion to process, as opposed to direct action. And listening to you all navigate your way through understanding your time there, it seems to me in a certain way the WSF process mimics the development of new work in a certain way, and the necessity to sit inside something we don't know where it's going to be in the long run. Or where, if somebody who isn't accustomed to developing or making work comes in early in the stage of your making work, there's often questions about the results of that work that we're not necessary able to answer yet. I think that in some way mirrors-there's a big struggle, as you know, between people's desire to turn the forum into a more organized and stated political movement. Because as you can imagine, when activists and movement-builders go, they see this as an opportunity to take direct action and mobilize. And yet I think all of the kind of craziness of not being able to find something or the happenstance of meeting Fatima, or [Kennedy] or dropping in at the Q-Spot...all of those things it seems to me are quite intentional in providing on the part of the desire of the WSF to provide a space for the process. And so I can't help but think, also because I'm cogitating on this piece. Yesterday someone asked me a question about it and I felt so invaded by the question because I couldn't possibly answer that question yet, you know? I think it's potentially a really interesting metaphor to lend to the understanding of this really. Because there's a lot of [inaudible] the forum that it misses opportunities for organizing. That you can't find anything. And then also there's a lot of language that's attached to that about whether it was a success or failure. If indeed it is a process, which I believe for me it is, anyway, if indeed it is a process, you can't really adjudicate it on those terms of success and failure. Does that make sense to anybody?

STREB: For me it does, because I always think that if you're in a discipline where you're actually interested in inventing vocabulary rather than forwarding a tradition or interpreting a tradition, or dealing with the 36 stories that seem to exist in the world. And you want to figure out, well, there must be new stories to tell-I can't believe there's only 36. And I think that part of this issue has to do with the discovery and allowing yourself to be able to not know for a long long time, just not know. And as Tracy said, to feel the absorption of some of those, for me, horrible moments, as well. To gaze at a child that I felt was being caved in on by the entire universe because of just a simple thing, like-children are not supposed to be that filthy. I know I'm

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speaking as a very naïve person in a lot of ways, but wow, that's what happens when you wear a pair of pants for four years! And then these designers, the horror of designers selling dirty pants for \$500 or \$20,000. And I was thinking that I have to allow myself to not know for a quite a while after an experience like that. True discovery even in science is, if you're going to be fair and impartial to your data, you let it lie on its own and sometimes it takes much much longer than you'd like for that mold to propagate. You have to sit there and wait till it's going to tell you some kind of new message through all this mass of information. I think part of what, for me, it's going to be for a long long time is, well, I have to be patient. I have to use a patient lens through which to conjugate this, because it's not about answers, it's about this process. And that's what's correlative to this whole World Social Forum.

JOSEPH: It's curious also to hear to say, Lloyd-not curious, at all, I totally understand the flummoxing experience of Reverend Billy to be able to respond so immediately, because he has a form in terms of expression, he has an artistic form that allows him to respond immediately. But I want to offer this as an experience I've had so many times already that if you don't have a form that responds immediately, it's not less than. It's not at all less than. This is what I want to move on to next, the relationship of artists. Because you are that-we make things-and you went to this and now we're back. And so not all of us have forms that can respond so immediately. It took Billy a long time to find that character. And it's clearly not the way Tracy writes or the way Talvin makes work, or the way I make work for that matter. And so I think that in terms of the kind of process that the WSF once again asks us to, I would almost say, re-consider, particularly in the context of "Another world is possible." Because we're so used to that being immediate, action-oriented. Because there's immediate and dire consequences if there isn't action taken. But I think that the process of this forum, to invite greater and greater numbers of people into the possibility of experiencing process in a new way, and I think that also has a kind of corollary in other kinds of artistic work. And in the value of that work in a more contemplative culture. Which to me, I mean, at least I'll say to you guys that really my activism is really more about the forum than about any of the events within the forum. Because I personally so believe in bringing people into meaningful connection with a really radical idea of process. And I wonder if any of you have any response to that.

WILSON: Can you elaborate on that a little?

JOSEPH: Well, when I came back, I couldn't speak about this, and didn't for days. One of my colleagues in the office, I heard her say to someone on the phone-because everyone was calling and saying, "and, and, and?"-and Ann said, "Melanie went to secret camp, so they can't tell me what they did there." And it made me feel so bad, because I don't want to have this experience all to myself. That was the whole purpose of wanting to bring a great group of people to have

the experience! So I think about how to articulate as an artist my relationship to having had this amazing opportunity to be in the midst of all of this. I think about Billy-I also think a lot about Billy-and some of the hip-hop artists who can respond immediately politically and directly. And I can't do that. In fact it's not really what makes my blood beat to make work, to respond immediately. And so I think that this forum itself ratifies that hesitancy in a certain way.

WILKS: I think it's what you said earlier. It allows for both, or it allows for multiple ideas. There are people who want the immediate. Who need it, who need to galvanize. And then there are those who need it not to be that, that there's a possibility of shut-down, or as Tracy was saying, becoming rote, or being lost. I think the real trick of the formula is how do you keep nurturing, as you're saying, the possibility of all. It's a very interesting kind of process. And the question is-and how long can that continue? Will it ultimately implode or tear apart?

JOSEPH: Well, that's a very good question, Talvin. And Tracy, I'm hoping I'm elaborating what you wanted. The idea that if we feel we have to quickly ascribe results to this process of the World Social Forum in terms of how the world will change immediately, then we get into a language of success and failure immediately. And I think that what I find radical about this, and why I find a particular relationship between artists and this process-and let me qualify what I'm about to say by understanding the dire emergency of most things to be acted upon, I do-and I'm very privileged because I have all of those things, so it's very easy for me to say this, but I'm saying it nonetheless-I think that this process provides an opportunity, I've said it before, for the whole ecology of art-making. Because it itself provides an opportunity, it ratifies almost, the presence of contemplation, of taking time to process, to come up with new language, to only meet two people happenstantially at one of the events itself, to meander as Elizabeth would say, and to encourage meandering within it. And that's a good thing. That's what I find radical about this, is that within the charter of principles of this process is the protection of it being a process that invites greater and greater numbers into the process. Some of those people will be movement builders who are interested in using it as an opportunity to take direct action. And others - and it seems like most of us in this conversation actually - for others it provides an opening for radical possibility. And I really do see that in some small way as a metaphor for making work.

LLOYD: Yeah, I think that's absolutely right, and the plurality of the delegation of U.S. artists who went over there, I'm assuming it was deliberately chosen to have people who work in very different ways.

JOSEPH: Yes.

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LLOYD: So it's good to have people who can respond immediately and it's good to have people who respond over time, and it's good to have as many different types of voices as possible responding to, if not the same thing, just the same, you know to have some common ground in terms of [inaudible]. And that also reflects the plurality of the people who were at the forum in general. And so I think that yeah, the forum itself as an organism is probably-I mean the question of results and how it relates to an artist's process is one I haven't really thought about until now. But I think that it's certain goal-oriented. I don't know if that means that it's something where it's dwelling on results. But the goal to me seems in a way a series of different goals on different issues. And so while a conversation about sovereignty might have very specific goals, I think the idea of "another world is possible" might not have as specific a goal.

JOSEPH: Correct.

LLOYD: Because what that that other world is, is never defined in such a way that it has to look a certain way.

JOSEPH: Right!

LLOYD: It has to feel a certain way, it has to include people in a certain way, and it has to reflect a kind of humanism. But I think the designers of the forum themselves, in not clearly defining what "another world" is, understand that to try to define those parameters very specifically is probably pretty dangerous.

STREB: I guess I was maybe responding in terms of the dance I saw there, you know, James.... What they're willing to do physically. And the reason that they're doing it wasn't performative. There was sort of a different purpose in the culture. And you don't know what it was. We walked up and there was this old man, he was probably 40, but he looked...he's my age, if not older. And they were doing this stamping dance with poles. And the rhythm, turning sideways, turning sideways, and making this sound... And I was like, oh my God, you know? Wow. This is urgent quest for something. Maybe it's a land dance, maybe it's something else. Or the [inaudible] people in the Kibera. I saw the dirt on the ground and I was thinking, what are they going to do? They've got these beautiful costumes on, are they going to get so dirty? And by half a minute, they were on the ground, smearing themselves, getting up...and I was just like, something about that, the uninterrupted between the physical system, the body, and the bottom, the ground. And that there was no problem with intersecting that with the human. Whereas I think we try to stay as high above the ground, here...don't get dirty, wait, there's stuff...all of this weird concern for a certain kind of sanitization which we've become inured to here. There it was the holy ground idea. It was like, I am body, and ground, and there's no separation between us two. The impact of that for me was so severe because-do we spend so

much time being careful about ourselves here? And that care manifests itself into a lack of actual content in the end, in terms of physical theatre or physical things.

JOSEPH: Well, Elizabeth, that's so interesting to think about, it not being strictly performative, or performative in the way we understand it, like if you're wearing a beautiful costume, you don't get that beautiful costume dirty, unless it's narratively important.

STREB: Right, except, yeah, because it costs this much. And really what's important to us and exacerbates our values, ones we're not even aware of, unfortunately, what's really important is how much you spent for that costume. You know, that's what you're doing. All of a sudden our attention thinks it's on one spot in our system of making things, over here, and actually you know what, it's not. And that's why there's a certain hollowness in the theatre, I think. Even the way people smelled. The smelling of the people there-I was like, yeah, right, when you go to the theatre here-I've noticed this at S.L.A.M., when people who are actually homeless come in. The people who are not, don't want to sit next to them. Just because of the smell. What if just that alone we were able to-just that alone-you have to be willing to sit next to people who you think smell, but they don't, they are just not taking 20 baths a day. What does that mean? The physical messages, real truly physical messages I came away.

JOSEPH: Elizabeth, just as a sidebar, if we could figure out how to bring James here it would be an interesting osmosis of his relationship to that into your company.

STREB: Absolutely. James knew I was mulling over figuring out how to continue-I feel like we started our collaboration already over there with our hanging out together and me seeing a bit of his action on the sidewalk. I'm trying to think, would S.L.A.M., do we have, I'm pretty proud about S.L.A.M. but it would put it to the test to bring James in.

JOSEPH: Or to bring S.L.A.M. there!

STREB: Or to bring S.L.A.M. there, yeah yeah. That would be something.

JOSEPH: It would really be something, Elizabeth! Oh my god. Let's talk about that. Well, I want to bring the conversation back around to an artist's relationship to the process, particularly because the USSF is coming up. What I want to say is that although I'm not entirely in agreement with the language they're using to include culture among the main terrains of investigation at the USSF, they are actually making room for us, which they didn't do in Nairobi. And I'm saying this, and you probably know this but I'm saying this for the purpose of the article, that in fact there was a lot of sliding backwards in terms of the way artists around the world have been trying to activate a greater place for people who make things and cultural workers in the groups that represent the forum. There was a lot of backsliding in this one

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because we were not given the same place in this forum at all. Not at all! And so I'm very encouraged by the USSF organizers making a point to make room for us to be there and for us to have conversation about how we fit into this process, and how we fit into imagining another world. And so I guess I'm interested and I may not put this directly in the article, but I'm interesting in taking the imagination of the people who would read it, to go there. To have an experience of a forum that is going to be organized here. And so I guess with being as transparent as I can with what my motivation is to ask this question, how would you invite colleagues to show up at the USSF?

WILSON: I think it's what we were just talking about. It's to let go of this results-oriented idea, which I think we as artists sometimes can't help having. You write a play, for me it's like what theatres are going to be interested in it, how many people are going to be in it, is it going to be economically feasible? That's been one of my bigger struggles is letting go of that notion, I'm still letting it go, that frustration. My frustration with the World Social Forum-actually, I just realized this yesterday-sort of parallel to my frustration with black leadership in the United States, it being Black History Month and all, everyone's sort of going around with their state of the union speeches about what's wrong. For years just being very frustrated with the lack of organization there and lack of motivation in terms of that. Going there and having to let go of these notions of time-tables and things like that. So going there as an artist, letting go.... I just want to stop limiting my imagination by practicality. The practicality of, like you said, rolling around in the dirt or how much this cost or how many characters-just letting your art go again into places that you went when you were a kid and you just daydreamed a world. And didn't have to think about the regional theatre and how receptive they would be to something. In terms of art, I think that's a great thing for artist just to let that go and reconnect with the imagination again and let go of the limitations that have constantly, constantly been thrown in our faces. People always telling us what we can't do because of this or we can't do because of that, agents or whatever. So I think that's what the forum was, just to let your imagination go again and say there are no limitations here, just dream again.

WILKS: Riding on that, I do think that artists have to be encouraged to really crack open process and be willing to be more dynamic in the way they do engage here, to let possibility happen. Because I think artists come and they still remain in their isolation, they still remain closed in their particular process. I'm curious in finding ways to push people to crack a little, to just try that experiment in that moment, to push, do a collaboration immediately with James and Elizabeth [laughter], find a space and an idea and do it! I didn't feel that I saw much of that at the forum. Everything was very planned and set. There was some brilliant cinema and I thought all of the art things were quite dynamic, but I didn't find places where there was just a...we

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didn't create a moment of kind of an open mike, open idea, come, go, just rant, that kind of think. And maybe that was more in Brazil than here. I hope there's a way that happens at USSF.

JOSEPH: Well, the only way that happens is if a critical mass of artists get themselves there.

WILKS: Right. It's the encouragement of going in with that idea.

LLOYD: And I think that because the USSF is so new, there's a much larger degree to which any individual participant can influence the way it goes. Which is a pretty exciting notion. Yeah, I think that'll be pretty exciting.

WILKS: What you're saying is not to just come to observe, right?

JOSEPH: Well, I don't know. You know how I feel about that. I think just getting yourself there is, for some people, enough.

WILKS: But we're also always contemplating as if artists aren't invited or artists aren't involved. And I think it comes down to over-thinking what that means.

JOSEPH: I mean, in that case, I think that perhaps what I can do and maybe what you guys can do is to, you know, what do you guys want to talk about? What events can we think about organizing in the forum that we could talk to each other about, that we could talk to other activists about? I mean, what is the relationship, and this is my personal question. In another world what would the relationship be between artists and other sectors of people in that world? As well as the way artists like Reverend Billy further the movement directly. What are other ways that we can be integrated? I've written this before and I'm saying it again: This is going to be a huge opportunity for the grassroots to mobilize. I think it's the first ever event in the U.S. that will be like this, that isn't a one-issue focus. I know that the focus of this forum because I'm on one of the committees is movement-building. I am determined to bubble out sideways from movement-building and saying there's other aspects to movement-building. How do we talk about us being one of those aspects that's not direct action-based?

LLOYD: I have a specific impression about that. That has to do with sharing best-practices of the ways other artists have integrated. I'm thinking specifically about [inaudible] in Kibera and Kennedy [inaudible]. He's a 25-year-old kid who runs a community organization that combines quality-of-life issues, like water and health, sports organization, they have a soccer league and theatre. They have this very elaborate theatre that was invited to participate at the forum. It was moving to me just in terms of the incredible proactive nature of youth living in Kibera doing something specific and tangible to uplift their community and improve their own lives. I think

that itself is a kind of inspiration as a model for ways in which art can align with a particular purpose.

JOSEPH: There's a number of places and people doing that in this country that I think you will meet and hopefully be as inspired by them as you were by Kennedy at the forum.

LLOYD: And that I think is probably, in terms of how we can transpose that model to the U.S. Social Forum, just in sharing those best practices we can learn a lot from each other in terms of how to, if we're interested to place our work in the context of movement-building....

JOSEPH: Or "another U.S. is possible."

LLOYD: Right, "another U.S. is possible." Just being in the same room together, being able to talk to each other about what we do and being able to hear from people we might not otherwise hear from, not just in the theatre arts but in all aspects of the arts.

STREB: I have a context/content notion. Because I think we're saying movement-building is one thing, but the where of it all in terms of new rules of engagement. Because no matter how much we work on the thing we're making in terms of a subject, it's all about, from my experience, verbs and not nouns. How do you build a great good place, and what would be new manifestations of right-sized models of great good places in the world? Kind of like what Jane Jacobs calls where all the jumping joyous or the jumble occur. It's important to remember that. It's a lot about our places of culture in the United States that takes the bloodline out of the activities of what we're really thinking or making. I'm wondering if the U.S. Social Forum could be asking questions about the where of it all, rather than so much the what of it. And what our goals are, rather than we create something that is a healthy-what is Roberta Gratz talks about the definition of a public place, which is a physical manifestation of a democracy's need for people not of like mind or like look to come together for unplanned reasons. And what does that mean? That means true sovereignty for everybody. And could we call together-when I say right-sized, I mean...

JOSEPH: Do you mean correct-sized, or just-sized? What do you mean by right-sized?

STREB: I mean, kind of the un-Lincoln Center, the next century's idea of how people in society choose to gather. It seems that they are smaller, more activist/artist-driven venues, where audiences have different rules of engagement. I think the invention of everybody gathering together in one place-we're urban jungle animals, we've gathered a web that's sturdy and hard to rip out, but we're forced to encase ourselves in these presentation places, the galleries, and the theatres, and I think it's all wrong. I think we have to break it down and build it again. And

the structure of that, and the format of that, could radically alter what we do. We're a local economy and a walkable community.

JOSEPH: That's a great thing, Elizabeth. Maybe we could bring together some radical urban planners.

STREB: I think so. Even Roberta Gratz, who was certainly influenced by Jane Jacobs.

JOSEPH: Even Brad Lander.

STREB: Yeah! Oh my god, of course Brad Lander. I think that if we don't collaborate with urban planners and visionaries, we're crazy. Because we're just the content providers on some level, but we're also the canaries in the mines. We fly in to see if there's any oxygen left in that community and when it's gone, we fly to the next community. It's a signifier idea.

WILKS: I would also interject reminding ourselves of how we met Kennedy.

JOSEPH: Definitely, the happenstance of Katie.

WILKS: Coming to Kibera and how that suddenly became a whole new cause of integration. We came apart and were guided by that.

STREB: She met him in the march, right?

WILKS: That's just one of those stories. Happenstance leading to great discovery.

END OF TRANSCRIPT