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(multiple conversations before discussion begins; inaudible)

ALL SINGING: I’m going to lift my sister up. She is a not heavy. I’m going to lift sister up, she is not heavy. Oh, I’m going to lift my sister up, she is not heavy. If I’m going to lift her up, if I don’t lift her up, well, yeah, if I don’t lift her up, I will fall down. [00:02:00] Well, I’m going to lift my brother up, he is not heavy. I’m going to lift my brother up, he is not heavy. I’m going to lift my brother up, he is not heavy. If I don’t lift him up, if I don’t lift him up, if I don’t lift him up, I will fall down. I’m going to lift my children up, they are not heavy, I’m going to lift my children up, they are not heavy. I’m going to lift my children up, they are not heavy. If I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them up, I will fall down. I’m going to lift my roots up, they are not heavy. I’m going to lift my roots up, they are not heavy. I’m going to lift my roots up, they are not heavy. If I don’t lift them up, [00:04:00] if I don’t lift them up, if I don’t lift them, I will fall down. I’m going to lift my earth up, she is not heavy. I’m going to lift my earth up, she is not heavy. I’m going to lift my earth up, she is not heavy. Well, if I don’t lift her up, if I don’t lift her up, if I don’t lift her up, I will fall down.

M: Yeah.

(applause)

MOD: Thank you, everybody. (inaudible) singing together. My name is Bob Leonard, and I am really excited, a little bit shaking with the opportunity for this conversation this morning. Just a little bit of background, a small group of folks got together at Virginia Tech in December of 2013 to enter a conversation that’s happening around the country around the questions of documentation, archiving, and communication. And one of the outcomes of that weekend was the importance of continuing a conversation wherever we could in person. And Alternate ROOTS has given us that opportunity to continue this conversation. [00:06:00] So, thank you, thank you all for being here. And I anticipate that other folks may be coming, so be prepared to open up space, move chairs around as need be. And I wanted to thank [Ace?] and [Dubious?] for bringing in the video to make some record of this conversation, and likewise, Nick is doing a sound audio recording of this. And we will use this as it seems fit; following, it will be held with ROOTS. So, Nick, did you need to say anything more about that?

M: No.

MOD: OK. We have a plan; of course, we never know how plans will finalize.

F: (laughter) Gods laugh.

MOD: (laughter) The gods laugh, yes. We have a plan to have two parts to this conversation. The first part will be addressing the questions of aesthetics as they have come up here in the course of our week. And we’ll be looking to particular events that have happened, either here or in record that ROOTS has supported. And that will include and start off with Crystal, with the progress leader companies, [The Burning?], the conversation about aesthetics that came out of that. We’re also going to be hearing from Nick with Mondo Bizarro and ArtSpot, a (inaudible), which I want to say, was directed by Kathy Randalls, and she would be part of this conversation, I hope that she can come. But Nick was in Virginia Tech conversation; it seemed good to have that kind of continuity. [00:08:00] And Linda Paris-Bailey with Carpet Bag, her piece, or their piece, “Speed Killed My Cousin,” each of these are coming from very different aesthetics, very specific aesthetics, and with very particular purposes, in terms of how documentation is being made and used. So, that’s the context, if I’ve covered it more or less, am I OK?

M: Mm-hmm.

MOD: I’d like to just offer, by way of a frame, a working, temporary definition for aesthetics, which I think is sometimes a bit of a stumbling block. And this has been refined from the piece that we put together in the welcome packet. An inquiry into how artists, in their products and processes, utilized sensory and emotional stimulation and experience to find and express meaning and orientation in the world. And to deepen relationships amongst artists and their partners across differences. This came out of a recognition on my part that I didn’t really know what aesthetics, when it came down to it, meant. And I got turned on to a useful thought when I heard someone say anesthetics. Anesthetics, that’s to say not aesthetics, is something we take to deaden senses. So, aesthetics seem to me to be accessible for me to think about [00:10:00] in terms of enlivening the senses. What do we do to enliven the senses? How do we recognize and respond to emotional content? Feeling? So, the senses are both the five senses of their body and our emotional life. And it seemed to me useful to think in terms of these practical aspects of aesthetics. There’s thousands, millions, an infinite amount of possibilities of how we do that, but what we’re talking about is that stimulation and response. Yeah?

F: (inaudible) intellectual (inaudible)?

MOD: I love the question, I agree with you, and we’re simply putting this forward -- I think that it is something, for me, which ROOTS might do well to continue to examine and develop a clarity about the frame of aesthetics. ROOTS has a principle of aesthetics which, I will propose, needs to be tended to. And it’s been a long time in the parking lot, or in the bike rack. And I’m proposing, out of this conversation, to move ROOTS into a much more specific, intentional understanding, and proposition of aesthetics. So, use this as a starting place, and there are hundreds of other possibilities that we would add too. Is that satisfactory for the moment?

F: Anesthesia also deaden your brain.

MOD: Yes.

F: It deaden your body when you’re in operation, but it also deaden your brain, so in this -- yeah.

MOD: Right, thank you. [00:12:00] So, there was an amazing conversation that came out of the work of the burning, and the response was rich and vital, and it seemed important for us to pick up on that. So, we’ve asked, and Crystal has agreed, that she would take the first bit here, to open us to your thinking about aesthetics and how it plays in the work that you do.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, I think it’s a hard word, and it’s very difficult for me, as an artist, to articulate it in a way that I feel like captures everything that I think I do, or am trying to do, or am wanting to communicate. But I think, you know, in talking to Bob, and Jan, and Mark, one of the things -- and even in the conversation that we had after the (inaudible) performance that became important for me was less about what it looks like, and more about what it does. And I’m just thinking about what are the tools, and what are the forms, you know, how is it that I get to what I get to, you know? And I know we’re short on time, and so I just want to touch on some of the things that came up in the larger conversation about the how to of, right, and why those things are important and useful, even in terms of describing the work, right? So, I think sometimes, when people ask me what I do, and I said I do a cappella musicals, but then I pause, because I don’t know what that means. (laughter) Right, and I don’t know what comes to mind when someone hears the word musical, right? And I don’t know what comes to mind when they hear a cappella, right? And for me, it is the absence of the drum, because I’m thinking specifically about this African American historical trajectory of [00:14:00] a cappella being there because the drums were taken, right? And so, it was figuring out how to use the body and the voice to create the polyrhythmic experience of the drum, right? And all of those type of things. So, that’s what I’m talking about, right? (laughter) You know, does that word a cappella, you know, capture that, right? And that musical, right, for some people, there’s going to be something that comes to mind. But for me, it’s about the necessity of song and telling story that it is the natural step in the progression, you know, of urgency, or this concept that I use called an unending climax, right? That again, I would say, for me, comes out of African American performance traditions of the necessity of it in terms of survival and endurance, right? Which leads to these other forms of repetition that I spoke about after the performance that sometime -- and I had interesting conversations with some people just this weekend -- repetition in a European context can seem -- it’s read as redundant, right? That it’s redundant, you already said that, you already did that, you already sang it that way, right? But in African American performance tradition, it’s about endurance, it’s about emphasis, and it’s about the remix, right? And it’s about how many different ways can you say something, right, to really get to the heart of it because it’s so hard to express, you know? So, in thinking about, you know, I’m trying not to go on a tangent on one part of it. So, this term about a cappella, and repetition and remix, right? Remix is a very contemporary, I would say, hip hop generation, you know, term. This idea that you are, if we’re thinking academically, right, academics would say that you -- it’s a citation, right? That you have to use your works cited page when you’re referencing something, right? But in hip hop, it’s a sample, right, or it’s a remix, which is that you are using something that came before you, right, [00:16:00] and for someone who’s listening, you understand the work on a deeper level if you know the sample, right? So, if someone is listening to, you know -- right now, the only thing that comes to mind is a song by The Notorious B.I.G. But the point is -- and so, he’s sampling this old Isley Brothers melody, right, but if someone’s listening to that song, and they don’t know the Isley Brothers song, then you have a total -- you’re missing a whole other level of the communication. So, what seems like repetition is actually remix, which is actually a shout-out to the community who’s in the know about what came before. And so, then that leads me to this other part of the process, which is this idea of call and response, which is very deep, because it operates on multiple levels. For me, one of the ways that it shows up in the work, in my work, is through time travel, right? So, that it’s always -- it’s a call and response between what came before and what’s present now, right? That there is no separation between what happened, and what we are going through, and what we plan to push forward, or give forward, right? That we’re -- it’s this cycle that’s continually going, right? So, even in the remix, there is that -- and the repetition, it is that reaching back to hold that past, right, and bring it forward so that it’s always a part of the conversation in that way. So, when, you know, I’m talking about and thinking about something as big as aesthetics, right, how do I find the words, right? And I’m saying I’m going to start with the words, but how do I find the words, number one, and number two, how do I get to a process that documents all of those layers of things that are communicated and shared in human space that are much more difficult on the page, or much more difficult for me, in a video document that can seem flat. So, I think that’s what I’ll say about the aesthetics part of it for now. And then moving into documentation, and why this conversation was exciting for me, I would say in [00:18:00] a certain sense, you know, I feel like I’m at the very beginning of a conversation about documentation, right? Because it’s about how can I effectively capture all of these things that, for me, depend on the liveness of space, and the exchange of human beings in the environment. So, if I go back to call and response, one of the first ways for me that I feel like documentation has been successful has been in the teaching, right? And the questions that Mark and Jan brought up in one of the sessions, was it only yesterday? You know, ROOTS days can just...

M: Yes. (laughter)

CRYSTAL: Right? But (laughter) where it was, and thinking about documentation, it opened up my mind for me, right? Who is it for? Who is it for? Because for me, as an artist, sometimes the question of documentation doesn’t come up until it’s for this very business-centered purpose, that someone who doesn’t know your work needs to be introduced -- they just need to see it, right? And always feeling uncomfortable with that, because the work is meant to be live, you know? And it’s something that if it’s recorded, then you’re not really having the experience. So, anyway, who is it for? But then also, what do you want the documentation to do? So, for myself as a professor, you know, one of the assignments that I gave students, which ended up being a huge benefit to me, is that if I’m in acting class, and I’m teaching methodology and process, you know, my method that I call soul work, I have students write -- you know, they do journals after every class. And it’s for them to document what they’re learning, and how they learn it, and how they understand it, and those type of things. I’m thinking it’s for them, and then of course, they turn in their journals, and I’m reading it, and I’m like, oh, I do that, right? You know, that it introduced this documentation of hearing it in their words kind of introduced my work to myself and helped me to clarify, you know, what I was doing, how I was saying it. And also, I think, coming from [00:20:00] this idea of an oral tradition of teaching methods that are from body to body, mouth to mouth... (laughter)

M: (inaudible)

CRYSTAL: (laughter) That it is -- sometimes, I feel a resistance to doing it any other way. So, I think that there’s -- you know, so part of my block is kind of this liveness and living in the moment, that the work itself is this living piece of art that is in direct response to the audience and the community in that shared space, and how to capture that, you know, in a way that will be lost, because I feels flat. And how to capture all of the dimensions of the work, and of these words that don’t seem to hold enough space for everything that, you know, I dreamed that the work does. And then, the other part for me is that it’s really trying to find that collaborative space, or collaborative partner, right? I think it was Mark who said it before, I’ve heard it before, that it’s not -- a lot of times, artists, we think about documentation at the end, and how do you envision documentation as a part of the process from the beginning. But for me, as a generative artist, it’s also about having someone in space who understands what I’m doing, you know? And what I’m trying to do, and can help me think creatively about how to capture that, and how to translate it. So, I think, Jim, I’m probably at the end of my 10 minutes.

MOD: You’re doing great.

CRYSTAL: Am I OK?

MOD: You’ve got about a minute.

CRYSTAL: A minute? OK. So, I’ll segue. I wanted to, but I’m so verbose, you know, just open it up, even to my company members, just in terms of how you all experience the aesthetic, and how to talk about it, you know, or how to document it, or the -- you know, all of those type of things, but maybe that can come up later in a larger discussion if we don’t have time. But I wanted to, because I know Nick is going next with Mondo Bizarro, and I think one of the things for me, as an artistic colleague, has really been, you know, this space of admiration and sort of [00:22:00] the thoughtful creativity that I feel like I’ve witnessed, and how you all document, not only the work, but the intention behind the work, so that the documentation has a soul, you know? And so, that is the conversation, you know, the part of the conversation where I’m at. So, that’ll be my passing the...

MOD: Perfect. Thank you. I am assigned to keep time, so I’ll keep you about halfway through, and just give you a note.

NICK: Great. Thank you, Crystal. Good morning, everyone. My name is Nick Sly, I’m from New Orleans, Louisiana, I work with a company called Mondo Bizarro. And in collaboration with another company called ArtSpot Productions, we’ve been working on a project called Cry You One, which I’m going to use as a framework to talk about this notion. But just to back up to tell a story that Bob and Jan have been really inviting us to think about this documentation question. And three years ago, I started learning how to play the fiddle as a means of trying to learn French, because my grandparents only spoke French until after the war. And I started to realize, in my research of Louisiana, that since my great-grandmother spoke French, and my ancestors spoke French, that there was a certain amount of cultural memory that I don’t have access to, because I don’t speak the language of the people where I’m from. So, I didn’t just want to go take a French class, and I also discovered that my grandfather played Cajun music, so I’ve been trying to laboriously, and very painfully, learn how to play music and speak a language. And it started to make sense to me as a form of documentation in this conversation, because it makes so much sense to me, because there’s such a necessity in my body for it, because I’m like, I have to do this. And because I know I have to do it, it’s a big teacher. And it starts to invite me in how to think about, well, what is the use of this documentation? And it was the first thing before we started Cry You One that really invited me into seeing my own cultural traditions again in a new way, because I often say we’re not making anything up [00:24:00] in New Orleans, we’re not innovative, we’re not contemporary. We’re simply, a lot of times, leaning into this very rich cultural palate that we have in front of us. And so, that invited me into thinking about social function of documentation, and how the people in New Orleans used their creativity, and their singing, and their dancing, and the way we cook as, like, a really clear social function, which is, like, we want to get people together, we want them to dance, right, we want them to honor, sometimes, folks who have passed, or honor a moment, and then we want to make some community, right? And so, I think that that question that we’ve been raising, what is the purpose of the things we are documenting, and has been useful and helpful to us, and how we think about what we document. And the other thing is to say that Mr. Joe Lambert, from the Center For Digital Storytelling, really influences our work around documentation, because he consistently reminds us that you can go and document the hell out of something, Nick, but if you don’t get people that are involved in your work involved in the documentation of the work, it’s not going to be as meaningful for them. So, I think about those two frameworks. And for us, at Mondo Bizarro, I like to think, a lot of times, that what we’re trying to do when we document is to create a bandwidth, like, the widest bandwidth for our project, or for the work we’re doing. And that includes, sometimes, podcasts, radio, sticky notes, fiddle tunes, songs, digital videos, anything that can create an entry point for the work that always has to go physical to digital to physical. And so, we feel like a strategy stops for us if it lands on the digital. If we’re just talking about something digital, just like if we’re just talking about money, we’re always suspect of ourselves, because if we’re just talking about the digital world, and it doesn’t have a gathering point, then it’s going to fall flat [00:26:00] for us, because what we feel like we want to do is gather people. And so, the digital world is a way to encourage us to put people in the room together, and then maybe show a document, or have a listening party. When we were doing Race Peace, and still are doing Race Peace, we were using these listening parties that we recorded around -- from voices around the country, but we didn’t want to just say, hey, go download this podcast, the requirement is that we have to get in the room and listen to them together, because, like Mama Nia reminded us, centering happens when we’re together, right? And there’s something very disassociative for me of just going to the internet to try to learn about somebody, or learn about something. And so, like I was -- I listed a few of the forms I think we use, which are, like, video sound recordings, photos, musical concerts, poems, letters, old programs, handwritten notes, thank you cards, emails, and then interviews. And I’ll just make a distinction, Cry You One is a very large project that investigates what happens to cultural traditions when the land that sustains them disappears. In the context of Louisiana’s rapidly disappearing coast, and also looks at that with an environmental racism framework around it. And there’s two types of documentation that I can point to in Cry You One. One of which is, we made a learning community of 16 people that were like, you guys are influencing this work so much, teaching us, we were just sitting with people, and our partners, and different people, and learning from them. And we sat and we interviewed those people. And when we sat and interviewed those people, we knew that it would be -- their stories would be featured on the web. And so, one big tenant for us was about aesthetics was this notion of how can we honor these people’s stories with the same amount of rigor and beauty that we want people to see in our work. And so, we really tried to plan and document those things so that when you see them, you get a sense of them as a person, and a sense of [00:28:00] the breadth of the moment that we were in. Also, because we know that a lot of the people we want to involve in the policy questions of our work are going to go to a website and almost immediately go, oh, this is legit, or this is not legit. You know, and so, how do we put an image out to the outside world where people can be like, I’m going to take the time to sit and listen to this person’s story. And part of that had to do with honoring who that person is, and asking them where’s your favorite place, or where would you like to be videoed in, or what makes you feel comfortable or good. Trying to, like, sort of amplify that. And in the case of Cry You One, a lot of times, it was let’s go outside to talk to you, and so we can hear the landscape around us.

MOD: Three or four minutes.

NICK: Cool. The other thing is, though, this big question that -- I mean, who has ever gotten to the point where it’s the last weekend of your show, and it’s like, who’s going to do the documentation, right? All of us. I mean, every time. And so, we do it -- we fall into that pitfall a lot, but I think one thing that we’ve learned is, so the soul of the work, the way the songs feel, the way the movement feels, the way the costumes feel, when we ask somebody to help us document, we’re not trying to get them to ever document the show so that one person in history will come look at it on the archives at Mondo Bizarro in the computer. Similar to Crystal, we’re trying to, in the documentation, get a sense of the essence of five or six minutes of the work, right? That’s why I think the photo goes so much farther than the video, so that we can -- because the documentation has to be used for so many ways, one way being grant panels, right? Or teaching someone about your work. The others being giving people the same sort of feeling that they had coming to the work by watching a little bit of the work, and then saying guess what, you can’t see the whole thing, this is not what this is intended to do. But hopefully, this gives you an impression enough of the breadth of the work [00:30:00] that you might want to come to be with us when we do our work again. But I’m a firm believer that I don’t think -- I think, like, for those people who need to see everything all the time, I think with regards to this, you just have to suffer a little. Like, you know, it’s not meant to do that. And so, yeah, the last thing I would say is just that Bob has really inspired me to think that aesthetics is a verb, it’s a feeling, it’s an action. So, it’s that I saw this, it made me feel, right, from what I saw. And then the big question is, well, what are we going to do about it? I was completely overwhelmed by Progress Theater yesterday, and I mistakenly tried to answer a conversation when I hadn’t dealt with what I was feeling already, right? And it just reminded me that, like, we have a responsibility, we have a duty when we feel and we see things to then figure out, OK, now how are we organizing about it, or how are we acting about it?

MOD: Thank you, Nick.

NICK: You’re welcome.

MOD: Linda (inaudible) with what (inaudible) how to capture the aesthetic in ways that are effective, and where do we use that, how do we use that (inaudible) we’re attending to. I feel like you have a really clear understanding of -- or clear articulation of aesthetic (inaudible) and also, you’re putting to use the documentation (inaudible).

LINDA: I’m going to talk slower than my peers. And the reason is, you know, you can always start with what you think you’re going to say, and then you’re impacted by what [00:32:00] goes on in the circle. And so, I’m going to kind of reflect on what I’ve heard, and talk about how that impacts me, because I should also start by saying that I just came from a meeting of black theater artists who have been exploring some of these same notions, and it was hosted at the National Black Theater in Harlem, and I go back to Barbara Ann Teer, and her work, and how Crystal’s work connects with that, and how all of these points of contact, and the fact that we are here at ROOTS. So, there’s something common in our aesthetics, but I think it is based in value, so that when we talk about aesthetics, which we received as -- and I’ll just put it this way, the hammer of European culture, beefing back the work of other cultures, and so, you know, there was -- there are two parts to my discussion about aesthetics. One is responsive, and the other is proactive, so that those two things came together in statements, you know, and we had to kind of self-define, and I think that is so much a part of the discussion about aesthetics, is that you have to understand the community and its aesthetic, and what you’re working for, who you’re working for, the voices that you’re trying to bring to the table and utilize. So, having said all of that, I’m with the Carpetbag Theater, and one of the things that’s inherent in the name itself is challenge. [00:34:00] It’s a challenging thing, and the work that we are doing now, Speed Killed My Cousin, is as complex as our name. And I was listening to Bob yesterday to talk about -- when he was talking about speed, because it’s a piece about an African American woman who is dealing with what we have come to understand as moral injury, in addition to her post-traumatic stress disorder. So, we are talking about war, and its impact on the African American community. And we are finding our self in the midst of peculiar partners. You know, I, as a college student, was very active in the peace movement, and I wrote this story from a personal experience to try to bring some healing and sense to veterans who were committing suicide. And when we looked at the statistics, and the rates of suicide from today’s wars in Iraq, and Afghanistan, and eastern Europe, the issue before us was how do we provide healing for warriors who didn’t choose the war, because a lot of the young people in the military were escaping from battered situations at home, economic situations at home, so how do we have a discussion about healing with them [00:36:00] in an environment where there’s not a discussion about war in general. I mean, people are talking about it. It’s kind of like under here. And then how do we have this discussion in a way where we can engage veterans who are still dealing with the war? And the background of all of this is very simple; my experience as a family member of a veteran who killed himself is that we have to have this discussion without blaming the veteran, and we have to have this discussion because it impacts our entire community. So, that’s background. And I...

MOD: (inaudible)

LINDA: I’m sorry?

MOD: We’re about halfway through.

LINDA: I’m about halfway through. So, let’s get back to aesthetics. That’s background. So, we described our aesthetic in a statement, and I’ll just read the statement, that way we’ll be back on track, it’ll be easier. And we talked about what we believe. So, I’ll just read it, and then I’ll connect. So, Carpetbag Theater, the ensemble, the company, believe in the power of story to frame experiences, and provide healing. And in that act of telling, we release the demons that hold us hostage over time. We believe that our values are revealed through our stories, and that those values revealed express or form our aesthetic. We believe that all aesthetic decisions and values are based in our cultural values, and the experience of the world, and that our experiences, though unique, conform to a set of norms that form the basis of a common community. Out of that community comes a particular set of standards for beauty. [00:38:00] We believe in the collective experience that creates the aesthetic of a particular community, and that our work is in service to that community and accountable to it and its aesthetic. We believe in the power of art as the experience of cultural interaction, and that its value is based on the values of those experiencing the art. We believe that good and valuable art changes our way of seeing. We believe that when we practice these values and aesthetics, we create community and form ensemble. Ensemble is a foundation of our collective work. We believe that practicing ensemble enables us to enter any community with a set of core values that enables us to learn the aesthetic values of the community and respond accordingly in the creative process. So, that’s our statement. I find so many things are common to our experience in the African American community and to what we describe as plays with music. And two, African American traditions and their action in the community, and how they have evolved, how they have become -- I don’t know if I want to use this expression, but -- I won’t. (laughter) And how -- and the value of ritual, which is that repetition, which is that, you know, thing. And how we share that. so, I will get to using all of that, knowing what we believe, and what our aesthetic is, how do we look at documentation. And how we look at documentation goes back to our core mission, which is to reveal hidden voices. And the way we look at documentation is how close, what kinds of tools can you put [00:40:00] in the hands of the people with the story so that they can tell their own story. We can stimulate a conversation with our performance, but what we want to do to follow that up is to put in the hands of the people who actually have the story, some kinds of tools for communication. So, what we have done with Speed is we have a connected piece that we call CAR, so we call it Speed To CAR, Creative Arts Reintegration, because we are dealing with reintegration into the community, and how trauma impacts that. So, what we do there is we do digital storytelling with a community of veterans that self-identify as people that want to be engaged. We have done audio stories, and we have done digital stories. And those are the stories that it’s important to share and communicate with, you know? I’m a playwright, so plays are, like, real important to me, but you know, the play is not the thing. (laughter) What is the thing is to stimulate this engagement in discussion and self-description, self-healing, tell your story. So, how do we do that? That’s one technique that we are using currently, have found that is useful. And, you know, you mention Joe Lambert. You know, we -- our team was trained by Joe, we’ve been working in digital storytelling for about nine years, and I think that has been the most powerful tool for our mission, our purpose, and our aesthetic.

MOD: About a minute.

LINDA: About a minute? What happened (inaudible).

(laughter)

LINDA: But I kind of wanted to respond to something about why we are engaged with Speed Killed My Cousin, and what the importance of that is. You know, as Bob made a statement yesterday, and I was like [00:42:00] that’s really an important statement. And he said, “Who would’ve thought that a ROOTS company would have been working with, you know, the military?” And first of all, I don’t see us actually working with the military, but you know, we are. Because the issue is so complex, and there are so many people that have to be engaged in order to get to the core, get to that moral injury, and why the military doesn’t want to deal with moral injury, they’re OK with PTSD, but when you get to moral injury, there’s kind of this thing. And then you run into, particularly from veterans from the Vietnam War who continue to be damaged, and homeless, and what not, but they are, like, the hardcore anti-war activists, you know? And I just went to the Veterans For Peace national conference, and you know, that’s some inspirational stuff. The Veterans For Peace are, like, all my age, right? They’re running around. And then there are Iraq Veterans against the war, and they’re all, like, 20s and 30s. And the fact that there is this anti-war movement there, and that we can tap into it and maybe aid that. Somebody made the statement is, you know, we are probably not going to end all wars for maybe 100 years, but I’m willing to be in. You know what I’m saying? I know I’m not going to be here, but that doesn’t mean that it’s not an important thing to work for. Anyway, I tapped into emotional places. [00:44:00] I’ll stop.

MOD: Thank you, Linda. Yes, if you’d like to come into the circle, please, (inaudible) chair, we can open the circle up.

(inaudible background discussion)

MOD: One of the questions that has written in this conversation about aesthetics and about documentation is the place of the audience. Linda was really quite articulate about how important, in her sense, the values of the community are the source of the aesthetic. If I’m saying it correctly. And how that plays out in the life of a company that’s based in the particular community is mirrored in the moment of performance, in my mind. And Mark has been really -- Mark Kidd, has been really quite articulate and passionate about the place of the audience in the aesthetic experience. We don’t necessarily fully comprehend the aesthetic experience, as I’m learning from Mark, until we begin to hear the audience, and what the audience is doing in the moment, and what the audience is thinking and feeling after the moment. So, Mark has been working at some length with social media and various aspects of documentary paraphernalia, and [00:46:00] I’d love to hear from Mark.

MARK: Thanks. And I’d like to say that this discussion of aesthetics is brand new to me, and I credit the group that met in Blacksburg recently with, kind of, sparking something that has become a livewire for me. So, participating in this learning exchange for me, over the last month of preparation or so, has been because I believe that having some command over this term, or understanding of its power for my own work is going to be a priority. And so, in that way, I’m approaching this discussion as a -- it’s reframing some of the practice that I’ve already been involved in, and it’s clarifying. So, this is an exciting moment for me, because I feel like I’ve made a long journey. Four years ago, people were telling me you’re a community organizer, and you’re doing it here, and it’s been successful. And so, all right, this is community organizing. I started working with the Thousand Kites project around that era, based in Appalshop and roadside theater, which was trying to work at a convergence of two interrelated practices of creating new work in central Appalachia. But they were distinct. One was a devising process, a play creation process, that has created many plays out of the experiences of community members, not just in our area, but around the country. And the other practice is a media practice that goes back to the founding of our organization, Appalshop, in 1969. That whole organization exists because a media technology came to the mountains which allowed the creation of documentary film and other film and video work in a place where it was entirely impractical to create [00:48:00] that kind of art before. And in doing so, allowed the people in this place that had not been able to represent themselves, it allowed them to do so in a way that was national, international, and also very local, and had a local significance, a local aesthetic, that connected with other local places. So, when I came to work with this particular play about four years ago, there was a conscious attempt underway already to say what, as an organization that’s founded on this principle of accessible media of putting media tools in the hands of people that haven’t had a chance to express themselves in that venue, and how to take that and put it together with this devising process. So, we had a play created with the experiences of people in the criminal justice system, not just the prisoners and their families, but also the guards, the judges, the police officers. And this play was an attempt to create change in the ways that the audiences, each place it was performed, were directing. So, the final act of the play, this was our experiment a few years ago, was to, through Story Circle, and then by providing access and training to low-cost media. I saw low cost in the sense of accessible. How can the final act of our play and this media training which provides people connection after they’re gone, kind of distill a moment -- create a moment in a community where people could take action on a particular issue. So, you know, this was a successful experiment, kind of. What we really wanted to do was make sure that whatever media responses to this play were being created, whatever activism that was coming out of it was being generated by audience members with cameras. And at that time, it took a -- [00:50:00] there was a training program, a considerable amount of effort until people reach a comfort with the tools, and a comfort with the storytelling. But there was a real emphasis on equity, in terms of controlling the stories. This is my introduction, before I get to my response, I think I’m following Linda’s pattern, which is a good one. And there’s no coincidence, I think the work we’re doing is pretty related. We experienced, you know, in the mid-2000s and late 2000s, something that happened when the documentation -- and this is really documentation that is entirely audience-driven, once we’re out of the room, I guess, it wasn’t completely integrated into the process, and the vision for the archival future of the work. And the tragic outcome of this was technological in nature. We had many opportunities to help communities tell important stories, and to do so, create their own websites, control the stories they’re telling, and two and three years after creating a community website like that, it was controlled by the people in a place, they almost all were crashed, and the stories were gone, that doesn’t mean the action was gone, or that the significance of the work was gone, but that’s sort of where we were three or four years ago. And since then, my work has been to increasingly incorporate the audience-created media into the devising process for work. So, in other words, we’re already using a story gathering process, a story circle based process to create plays in eastern Kentucky and southwest Virginia, and other places. How can we, from the beginning of a process, incorporate media so that we have a record of the aesthetic of a place through the eyes -- I’m working more and more in photography instead of video, actually. That’s been a convergence for some of this, too. [00:52:00] How can we, from the beginning of a work, if possible, have a visual record that’s not -- that complements whatever professional documentation has done? And then -- and I think this is where I’m so appreciative of a chance to talk about this word aesthetics, how can we use these resources, these tools, to understand how an audience responds to a performance, or a performative experience, or even a community meal. What are we like on time?

MOD: You’ve got about two or three minutes.

MARK: Great. So, we’re in good shape. I think there is an impulse to document that’s shared between the artist and the audience. One thing that I think is true in both groups is also that without some deliberation and thought, and sometimes prompting, both of those impulses can be expressed, kind of at the last moment as the response is happening, without an intention. But I really want to hold up my respect for the way that audience members, just as they might applaud spontaneously, or sigh, or shout something out, or snap our fingers, there’s a feeling that happens, a response to this stimulation, an emotional, a sensual, an intellectual response to work that causes people to pull out their camera, their phone. And that’s a moment with significance to understanding the way work is received. And certainly, we try, when possible, to put a professional camera on the audience, so we can see those moments of excitement, or we could maybe see when people are leaning in or making a noise. But whether that’s possible or not, I think the opportunity that the media provides, you know, with some pitfalls, is to ask audiences to be [00:54:00] collaborators in the documentation of our work. And that might include people that have been involved in the devising process, but that might also include people who have had a much narrower participation, a narrower experience of the work that’s being performed. And in doing that, there’s kind of two components. One is a technology component, which has many pitfalls, and I think is the responsibility of people that are in the practice as artists to help their audiences not deal with to the greatest extent possible. And the other part is prompting. So, thinking about these moments when people pull out their phones, or moments when people gasp, trying to understand within the context of specific work, what prompts might be successful in soliciting on social media, or whatever the simplest venue is, the contribution of photographs, video, and sound. And so, there are some very general ones that I go to, and they’re quite universal, just to give you a sense. So, after a short introduction to this idea of we’re welcoming you within all or a certain portion of this experience, this performance, to help us document, we might say something like think of your home community or your family, when you have your camera out, try to take a photo of something that represents a feeling, or emotion, or a moment that you like to convey to your home community, or to your family. That’s one kind of prompt we might do. We might say look for something that seemed deeply familiar, or something that just seemed very foreign. So, these are the kinds of prompts that are not -- it’s not usually -- it’s very highly specific, and it’s a way of welcoming that form of call and response, and also channeling it into somewhere where we can have access to it afterward, as artists, to be able to have to have that reflection of the experience, and reflection of the aesthetics, even of different [00:56:00] places as a piece is toured, or as it’s performed in a residence. So, that’s kind of the practice. And so, again, having the word aesthetics, for me, and being able to think in terms of what is the aesthetics of a home community, and also thinking about what is the aesthetics of a form that the artists have been using, perhaps in consultation creatively with a community, I think, is providing me a real focusing lens for how to prompt these sort of collaborative documentation processes, and also for kind of thinking about how to express what I feel are the significances to the places where people are taking the photographs. So, in other words, it’s helping me have a better kind of appreciation of how -- and I’m thinking of work that’s performed in several different locations, how each performance can, with the media, as well as the talkbacks or story circles, how the media can build one on another. How, through the use of -- especially Facebook in my area, people from the past performance, and their photographs are there, and those are part of the prompting from a different community, can be part of the prompting experience for the next performance. So, that’s kind of where -- this is sort of the state of thinking about this collaborative audience documentation.

MOD: Great, Mark. Thank you. Thank you so much. You just prompted a brand new thought from me in terms of aesthetic. It has to do with the aesthetic of the event of performance, and we’re saddled, oftentimes, with an audience expectation that they’re supposed to sit down and shut up while we do our thing. And how can we embrace an aesthetic that will provide the audience an alternative to that. So that as you are trying to -- you’re opening my mind to the idea of the audience responding with camera, or this or that. Also, grunts and groans are really [00:58:00] appreciated, and stand-ups, and movement, and talk can be an aesthetic of performance, which our culture tends to want to set aside. With that, I had said earlier that we’re trying to break this up into two parts, and we’re on the cusp of moving into the second part, which is a closer examination of documentation, and a way into it is to ask the question, what does aesthetics and documentation have to do with critical thinking? And Jan Cohen-Cruz has helped me understand something about critical thinking as a form and an inherent aspect of documentation, that it isn’t simply a neutral act to document something, but you’re making choices all the way along that are predicated on critical thinking. So, I want to tell a story about Jan, as we move into this part of the conversation. Jan is an expert in the use of Theatre of the Oppressed, Augusto Boal work. And she was leading a workshop that I was part of that was using image theater, and she asked the question of an image that was in front of us of two people kissing. And she said, “What do you see?” And I blurted out, “Two people in love.” And she said, “No, that’s an interpretation. What do you see?” And I had to struggle to get past my interpretation to see two people touching each other with their lips. And the angle in the bodies, and the particulars [01:00:00] of their shape between each other. That’s what I saw, what I interpreted was my choice. There could be another choice, many other choices, and I just wanted to check in with Nick who said, when you do this, you made me feel this. And I learned from an extraordinary person, who ranks high in the history of my growth, Steve Kent, who is a -- I call him an itinerant director. And he brought to me, and to alternate ROOTS, a particular formulation. When you do X, I feel Y. And I thought that this came out of a theatrical environment. It turns out that this is a formulation often used in therapy work, growth work, to own my feeling is important. My feeling is my response to something I experience. So, when I -- when you do this, I feel this, is an important formulation. When you do this, I think this, that’s an important formulation. And I feel like Jan has a real handle on that, and I’m going to turn over the facilitation, but not the timekeeping, to Jan as we move forward into this second part.

JAN: Thanks. (inaudible)

M: Everyone is invited into the circle, so if you want space, just come forward, [01:02:00] and we’ll make space for you. (inaudible) Good stretch (inaudible).

JAN: OK. So, moving into the relationship between documentation and communication, the ground has already been set in this conversation and this week, certainly a number of you all who spoke so beautifully have talked about documentation as part of the whole process, not something you do at the end. And so, part of it being part of the whole process is who is it for? And where do we imagine posting it, because another one of the things that seems so tricky about the digital, not only that it can crash, as Mark points out, but we can be so overwhelmed by how much is on the internet. We can think because it’s on the internet, that means we’ve communicated it to everybody. But in fact, it’s not always so easy to find what we’re looking for on the internet. So, how do we really try to be as deliberate in that next step of the work, especially since ROOTS is a place, as I’ve seen from more of a distance, but always with great respect, where, as Linda just said, the play is not the thing? There’s a larger -- there’s something larger that the play is part of, and that, of course, goes on afterwards, and so the communication strategy beyond the communication of the artwork is really crucial. A lot has been said about the community of origin, and the importance [01:04:00] that the community of origin is part of the whole documentation and communication strategy. I also want to bring in -- it somehow ends up being my role in circles like this, when I’m in higher ed, I’m always bringing in what about the community of origin? When I’m in a group like alternate ROOTS, I’m always bringing in scholars do know something. (laughter) You know? I mean, like, I think of Karen [Atlas?] in that fabulous book that (inaudible) Democracy did, *Critical Perspectives*, where there were those three artistic projects, and then there were responses by three different people. So, the theater piece that Delarte made about the casino in their neighborhood that Native Americans had created. Well, so there was a theater critic who responded, they’re a theater company, they wanted a review. There was a Native American putting into context what does it mean that these Native American places, casinos are being built, what’s that doing to our community? And there was someone who works in community development. And each of those were equally important. And so, they made a book, and that’s the whole tone of the book, and I certainly hope it’s circulated the place as one would want it to circulate. But extending from that, what other voices, what other perspectives do we bring into work that depending on what you’re doing, and who your partners are that are not the artist’s partners, you need their perspective as part of the documentation and you’d actually like the work to be communicated in their circles where they live. You know, how do we get into those journals? How are we part of those conferences? So, similarly to, again, something I’ve heard this morning, and really resonate with, about there’s the digital [01:06:00] and there’s the live space. And the live space is true for documentation as well. It’s one thing to read it, and I love reading, and I feel, you know, that -- but unless we’re having the dialogue about it, and conversing, that’s where it gets developed so much further. So, one thought I had listening to Partners In Action, and then listening to Race Forward, and the degree to which certain other people have been brought in to some of the partnerships that ROOTS supports, and partners with, and furthers, I was thinking about all of the colleges and universities across the country that are in places where you all are doing your work, and who often -- there are people at those colleges and universities who are community people, they live there, they’re not going anywhere, if they’re lucky enough to have a stable job, which, of course, is fewer and fewer of us, but nevertheless, it still exists. And there are sometimes partners to be had, people who can be part of a conversation, who can help with some of the scholarly parts of the history, some of which you might know, and some of which you might not know. So, one thing is I would really encourage looking to those institutions as one source of another piece of this large ecosystem that we’re all making. And honestly, I would be so happy to talk to any of you about who in your region might be able to help you, because like Jamie [Hamm?], we both work within organization Imagining America Artists & Scholars in Public Life, and Dudley Cocke, who is on the board, and Dionisio Cruz, my husband, he’s had to live through the whole thing. So, we could suggest actual people who might be able to partner with you in a fruitful way and would love it. So, I just want to add that to who we’re thinking of, as we develop this kind of iterative, this kind of documentation that starts early, [01:08:00] that’s back and forth. And as we’re moving toward communication, because sometimes those are people -- because publish or perish, you know, if you’re in scholarship, Crystal knows, Dr. Prescott knows, that you have to get the work out. And in fact, that’s really great. I mean, I had to write about community arts, I didn’t know if it was going to keep my job, but that’s all I had to write about. So, when it came time for tenure, that’s what I wrote about, and I did keep my job. But because you have to publish, and you have to talk to people who might not get it, that’s actually really good. I think it’s very parallel to some of the conversations I imagine you’re now part of, Linda, because of the military, even though I understand that your approach is the healing piece. So, the question is, so, in addition to looking at what might be a whole range of various places to bring to work, and other kinds of partners, then, I’ve heard in the conversations here in my really just limited experience in hearing the conversations here, there is the question of do we want a network, do we want a hub? Is there a place where, to some degree, the community arts networks serve that function, and to some degree, they were -- Linda and Steve -- Linda and Steve were moving towards how to expand the multiple voices that had to be part of the vision of what art does in public life. Is there a desire for a place where, perhaps, pieces, articles, essay, images, video clips, that are created out of different organizations, out of alternate ROOTS, out of Imagining America, out of First Nations, out of Americans For The Arts, out of NALEC, where there might be a group of people whose tasks would be [01:10:00] to look at work that was created and say what ought we all be reading, what ought we all be looking at, and then where do we come together where we could be having these conversations together, and not only the arts-based organizations, arts and social justice base, which is already a lot, (inaudible) as we say, that would’ve been enough, it’s not enough, of course. How do we also include who are the important partners, given the particular project, whether it’s cultural development, or healing from the military, or the disappearing weapons, etc., etc. So, this is a conversation which we are going to open into a little bit later this morning, not too much later, but I just wanted to introduce that as part of what we mean in thinking about communication, would that be useful? And how would it have to be framed? If someone was reading, I hear this was this Andrea Assaf was talking about this lovely essay that was written about moral injury and Speed Killed My Cousin. And so, maybe people would need to -- if you get that article as part of the alternate ROOTS newsletter, you fill in all kinds of context. If this other group of people that doesn’t know alternate ROOTS gets that article, what kind of frame would it need? Now, that’s a great opportunity to actually have to put into words part of what’s important about it. Just like I so identified with Crystal talking about how much she learned about from her students. You know, that opened my experience, too, in the classroom. I hear it back and I say, oh, that was at the heart of what I was saying. I’m so glad to know that because -- you know, it’s sort of like that beautiful book by Liz Lerman, *Hiking The Horizontal*, you know, it can all seem equally as important. But so, hearing how it’s received by the people you really care about communicating with is just crucial. So, I know I just got off the subject, but the point was, in this vision that I’m -- it’s a proposal, I really very much want to hear from people, [01:12:00] does that seem useful that there would be one place? It doesn’t mean all of those other places wouldn’t still exist, and you would each have your favorite, and go to the ones you go to.

F: Link together.

JAN: Yeah, it could link, and there would be some -- there’d be an editorial board that would be composed of people from different organizations that say this is important, but here’s how it has to be reframed. Or it needs an interview with it, or it needs that video footage I never got at the moment. It would be an opportunity to deepen the thinking in response to this particular larger audience. So, that’s something I’d like us to talk about. I also just want to mention something about archiving. It’s not at the heart of the discussion, but it’s hard to talk about documentation without at least tipping my hat to archiving. I know some people don’t like that word, archiving. And to me, archiving, that’s our collective wisdom, you know? I mean, it’s little -- I mean, as much on the edge of ROOTS as I am, even in just the couple days we’ve been here, I’ve heard certain conversations and certain questions, and I went I know they discussed that at ROOTS already, you know, I wish there were a site where there were really clear good keywords, and there were these great little three-sentence summations where you could say, oh, is that what you’re interested in? Well, here’s how you find it, it’s super easy, and that we can do that function, and try to gather and build that. Diana Taylor wrote a book, and just the name itself, the title of the book I think is great, which is *The Archive and the Repertoire*. So, you know, there’s this kind of ongoing conversation. Archive in a kind of academic sense is often the written word, and in the academic universe, we know the written word is often prioritized over the body. But of course, we carry archives; we might not use archive that way. But she writing from an academic standpoint, contrasted the wisdom that comes down to us, the knowledge we [01:14:00] retain, both through the written word, the archive, and the reparatory, which lives through our body, we pass on through our body. So, when Nick says, “Oh, it was the environmental justice project that June Bug did some years back that we build on,” and when Mark references Thousand Kites and Appalshop, that’s both an archive and a repertoire that we’re referencing. And so, I just don’t want us to see them in opposition. They’re both ways we pass things on, and they both jog our memory in different ways, I just wanted to mention that. So, that’s really the introduction to the conversation that we are going to invite momentarily. Before we do, however, we’ve asked Carlton if he would, at this moment, talk to us all about a meeting he was at, I know Dudley was there, that was with a group of networks at what might be necessary and important for the networks to be doing together, and we would like, then, to bring it to is there a documentation and communication piece to that, but first, we all need to know what that meeting was.

CARLTON: Right. So, thank you and good morning, everyone. I’ll start by just kind of pulling on a couple of piece that I heard from some of the first presenters. So, framing it first as aesthetics, and understanding aesthetics, and this conversation that we’re having, the frame of this annual meeting, ROOTS week, and what Crystal was talking about in terms of repetition from a [Europe-centric?] perspective being seen as redundancy, and what has happened in terms of philanthropy is that this has surfaced towards a push towards innovation as the push for a more philanthropic world. This constant need to create something new. And so, I challenged that both at this meeting, and consistently over the last couple of years, and thinking about, and [01:16:00] framing innovation as remembrance. And I see myself as a living document and imprint of the founding members of alternate ROOTS, and I see myself as a remix of what I think would happen in 1976, when these people came together, because I’m not creating anything new in ROOTS -- I’m only taking the wisdom and the things that I’ve learned sitting at the feet and being mentored by amazing people like Linda, and John O’Neil, and Dudley, and Bob, and Kathy, and all of the amazing -- all of these folks that I’ve had access to, that have really guided my work and my understanding of how to use art and community. And so, what I’ve developed is both a privilege and a responsibility. And so, I see myself as that living archive to -- and the responsibility is to continue to see that work through to the next iteration of itself. So, this conversation was around how our artist-centered organizations, building innovative networks that -- there’s that word again, innovative networks, and this is not my language, this is the language of the framing of the conversation, innovative networks that identify, support, connect, and elevate discrete efforts across the country, and how are these networks connecting with transformative social movements. And to explore how network organizations are successfully creating the cultural conditions that propel social change, grounded in cultural communities and artistic creativity. And the organizations that were part of this conversation are all organizations that have been supported through the Ford Foundation. And those are the Allied Media project in Detroit, alternate ROOTS, Artspace, Culture Strike, First People’s Fund, the Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics at NYU, the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture, the National Performance Network, and Youth Speaks. And just thinking about this quote from Jeff Chang, where he says, “Cultural change [01:18:00] is often the dress rehearsal for political change.” Or put it another way, political change is the final manifestation of cultural shifts that have already occurred. So, what we tried to bring to this conversation was both an understanding of how our networks are doing work that is essential to the transformation of this country and society as a whole, and also asking the question, where’s the support for that work? And so, this question about, so what happened in terms of aesthetics in this conversation is that this aesthetic question has often been used to divide and to isolate artists of color from a conversation, using the words artistic excellence or exceptional practice. And so, we begin framing this conversation in terms of what is exceptional practice for artists that are working in community, and who defines it? And so, it goes back to what, you know, Linda was sharing, you know, our audiences, the defining moment is artists, presenters, curators, is it the market, is it all of the above, and if so, what values are they using to measure that? And how are we -- you know, and if the marketplace is the main point of validation of exceptionalism, then that mechanism, it leaves a very narrow space for diversity. And so, understanding all of those pieces. So, some of the questions that we lead with were how are we also embodying excellence, or aesthetics, what I was, like, replacing that word with in my mind, in our own work as networks. And what is our practice as organizations, and how do we talk about the aesthetics of our own organization’s work in terms of this national conversation, and how are we modeling the practices that we want to live in from an organizational standpoint. How do we lead? And what does race, class, and geography, how does that play in how the work that is happening in the field, [01:20:00] how the diversity of aesthetics is being critiqued, and how that work is supported. And then, you know, just really asking the questions of what type of resources are there to support this work ongoing. And so, I kind of think of this common response that some of the people in the group that I was working with to hold this conversation as being kind of our response to the question about aesthetics and exceptional practice was it’s the values to create a space for people to be themselves and stand in their cultural traditions without shame, and to be supported in their practices. There’s an idea that the solution to diversity in the arts field is to support the diversification of institutions that have traditionally served the western European audience. And what we’re saying is that diversification in the arts field is about really recognizing all of the voices that already exist that aren’t being recognized. And so, in terms of how this works, going back to what Jan was asking in terms of documentation and archiving, we see the work of these networks to not just be about our individual practice, but that understanding the strength that we have as a network of networks. So, what ROOTS brings to the table is different from what NALAC brings to the table, which is different from what First People’s Fund brings to the table, which is different from Artspace brings to the table, but how are we working together to collaborate and create a much stronger organizational picture, in terms of changing and pushing the front of social transformation in this country. And so, one of the things that is coming out of -- not coming out of this, but that helped us to help guide ROOTS into this conversation is ongoing work that we’re doing in collaboration with the National Association of Latino Arts and Culture and First People’s Fund specifically, recognizing as we gather -- and as we have gathered for 38 years here with this organization, the [01:22:00] continued lack of indigenous voices in this space, the lack of representation from the Latino community that we know exists in this region, that has not showed up yet in this space at the level in which it should. And so, working together with those two organizations to develop an intercultural institute that will look at cross-pollinating the sector in our own organizations, bringing the strengths of the indigenous community leadership, bringing the strengths of Latino community leadership, bringing the strengths of what alternate ROOTS does to create a much more vibrant and body steeped in solidarity, and recognizing that our struggles are interconnected, and that it’s going to take all of us collectively to figure them out.

JAN: Thank you. Great. So, we’re going to now open up to conversation. Obviously, feel free to say whatever you like, but just repeat some of the questions that we said earlier we were wanting to put to you. There’s just three we’ve summed up. Well, really, two. What benefits are there to a common place where documentation, dialogue, communication can happen? And what would be liabilities to avoid or be mindful about in trying to create such a space? And then secondly, how might we pursue improving building developing ROOTS principle of aesthetics, articulating it, but then, obviously, anything else that came up. We’ve got a good 20 minutes, I think.

MOD: Yes.

JAN: A little exchange, please.

MOD: Actually, 25.

JAN: I think, Bob, you’re going to...

BOB: Great. So, if you want to speak, speak. And we’ll -- yes, Dudley?

DUDLEY: Yeah, I really appreciate this framing that occurred, really, from the jump, Crystal, with yours. I mean, one of the challenges, as I [01:24:00] came into this conversation was trying to connect documentation and aesthetics, and see that relationship. And I think by framing the -- both the documentation and the aesthetic in a call and response between the past and the present, helped join that. And that conversation between the past and present reminded me of a story of a southerner, Faulkner, who was lecturing somewhere out of the South. And at the end of his lecture, someone in the audience said, “Mr. Faulkner, why are you and the southern people so obsessed with the dead past?” And Faulkner responded, “Madam, or sir, not only is the past not dead, it is not even past.” (laughter) So, this is something about the South, and we can include Texas and a lot of other places. So, that’s really -- that really struck me. And this idea of centering this -- or framing this, is how do the people document? I mean, I like -- Nick, you were moving on this, too. How do the people enact documentation? And so, we quickly -- you all quickly hit on this importance of morality, and the embodiment of how the people do it. I mean, the people -- let’s look at how the people do it, and what we know, one of the things that has happened in this [01:26:00] kind of western European hegemonic situation is that documentation has become the providence of specialists, not the people. That it’s all leveraged on specialists. And so, of course, the specialists privilege what they do best, which is often writing, right? So, they make all of these choices, it’s sort of like what do you see versus, you know, how do you interpret it? And they conflate the two, so that it seems -- and on this western European theme, what -- you know, I really think there is a western European hegemonic paradigm operating that shoves others aside. But what is -- I would also claim is that a lot of western Europeans are also shoved aside by that hegemonic that has developed. So, I guess the point I would make is that race and class condition everything. That race and class condition everything. So, it’s not -- if you just think of race as the only condition and forget the class, then you’re missing, I would claim, some of the dynamic of what incurs. And in that hegemonic creation, western European hegemonic creation, the class element has been shoved way aside. What I mean is, there are whole people [01:28:00] in western European countries who feel as marginalized, as disconnected from that hegemonic western European aesthetic, as people in other parts of the world who’ve had it shoved down their throat. So, that’s just a point I would make. And finally, I just thought it was really interesting, this question of -- that Carlton brought up, using Jeff Chang’s quote. And so, you know, we had a session at the ROOTS Baltimore that was titled -- between Luis Valdez and John O’Neil, and the session was titled *When Theater Was Dangerous*. Right? And Luis told the story about -- he was with his company out in the fields, and a young owner came up with a .45, shoved the .45 up under his chin, and said, “Now act.” *When Theater Was Dangerous*. So, I just think a theme of what we’re saying is, you know -- or a theme to investigate is why is culture so dangerous?

F: Just to piggyback on that, I really agree on the race and class, but I really believe it should be race, class, and sex.

F: Hear, hear.

M: Hear, hear.

F: So, race, class, and sex is what I was saying. So, I wanted to respond to, I (inaudible) the computer, but she mentioned how would this benefit. I believe for the resources that you’re talking about, this networking, Jan, so for me, it’s a thing of urgency, right? And so, for me, the urgency is the aesthetic that I’m seeing because of after Trayvon Martin, Jordan Davis, and [Marisa?], which you hear me say a lot here, as an artist, the social movement that I’m involved in has changed into a [01:30:00] movement [artistry?]. Meaning, our call has been something we call perceptional schema. Perceptional schema is basically what you said, as a filmmaker, the African American Master Residency Program in Boston said that perceptional schema deals with the psychology so that people would be moved to action. And so, our action is movement in the theater, or in the film, or what have you, during the times of Trayvon Martin, or even standing our ground for those that have came, so that they will become a part of the movement. And so, my whole thing of urgency is, I’m working in this framework, really loving not only the dialogue that we haven’t had in Jacksonville because of the Ku Klux Klan that’s confederate, conservative, that’s mastering all of this that you see on TV. But where we come in as movement workers to get them to a place of feeling, as in the emotions that we’re talking about to act. And so, in four months, one of our plans is -- and this is how I see it as an artist, is coming here to hear some of the benefits that we can use in a short term urgency rapid response to get people, if it is a theater piece that we’re going to do, of course, we use movement songs, people have seen that when we did that walk for dignity for six days, walking right after Trayvon Martin from Jacksonville to Sanford. But in that place, right before this trial, which is a place of here and now, when we’re talking about these communities in which we’re affected, this is a movement that is right now, where we cannot allow Florida to not only kill anymore youth, criminalization of youth, but also to really incarcerate this woman with 60 years. So, I’m going to use this tool where I’m hoping that this film piece that we’re going to put together, this play or whoever is going to come through will, in four months, be able to get the city to get up with us and actually walk into this courthouse. [01:32:00] And so for me, it’s more not a long-term effect, but an urgent rapid response. Wanting to hear how you all saw that, really agreeing that the benefits for that piece that you’re putting would help us.

BOB: Could we see the hands if you were able -- that were up? We had Sage, there was one over here. OK.

F: Karen.

BOB: Let’s go this way, we’ll take you four. Sage?

SAGE: I just want to respond to the question around what is the value of some sort of place to collect all of this. And what I’m seeing over these last few years is there’s the academy in the scholarly work, and there’s kind of community work, and we talk about these as places on the spectrum, but there’s no room, or it’s hard to find room for the public scholar, someone who is not attached to the academy, who doesn’t work in a university, who may not be an actual maker, but is engaged in the work, is in the field, and is writing and thinking critically, and there’s nowhere to put your work besides creating a blog, right? And so, there are all of these, like, really great blogs out, but if you don’t know even where they are, how do you find them to read them? And so, I think the value of it is an opportunity for us to have a space to collect that voice, to support that voice, and give the field, like, a larger view from all of these different spaces and places.

BOB: Let’s go Karen, then Jeff, then here.

KAREN: So, where my mind keeps going in this conversation is connecting this to the Partners In Action work (inaudible), and the idea of reciprocal partnerships that support the challenge, and make change through supporting the challenge. [01:34:00] And so, when the critical perspectives has been referred to, which was this collection of essays from different points of view, I think even more important, when we created that, it was about how you create, sort of, a role -- like a dramaturge would be, but that that might be an activist, or it might be -- the idea that change happens through dialogue and not monologue. And so, how, throughout our processes, can we have these dialogues which often are challenging -- lovingly challenging us. And then that can shape documentation that’s activist-oriented. So, it may be in the midst of creating something that’s movement-building, having people within that movement challenging us in the way we create that, or raising questions. In one of the critical perspectives cases, it was a piece that was based on demographics, and there was a demographer who challenged them on the demographics, and then he ended up saying, “That doesn’t matter, what I care about is why you even saw it that way.” So, the demographer changed his practice because meaning became more important than numbers, and the people who did that artwork were really interested in the demographics. So, just getting -- I guess you get the point. I think if we can build the notion of dialogue leading to action, and part of that being that we challenge our perspectives in a way that really compliments each other, I think I’d like to see that part of the model.

BOB: That’s nice. We had Jeff, and then we’re going to go here, and we’ll come back to you and (inaudible). And who’s over here?

MOD: We have 10 minutes.

BOB: We have 10 minutes.

JEFF: Is it to me?

BOB: Yes, please.

JEFF: So, I’m Jeff Mather. I’ve got a kind of boots on the ground question for our facilitators in the circle, if [01:36:00] you forgive the military imagery. A month, seven weeks ago, I got to be in Knoxville for my first time, and I saw Linda and a bunch of Carpetbag folks doing an evening performance as part of the conference. And incorporating digital storytelling interspersed with song suites and stage performance. So, just to use digital storytelling as kind of a -- since it has come up -- and Joe Lambert’s name came up a couple of times. Nine years ago here, Joe Lambert and a team from Berkeley trained 12 of us at ROOTS. So, my question is kind of like how ROOTS as an organization changes the way we work, people that come to ROOTS, and keep coming back to ROOTS, it impacts us. We don’t work the same. And so, you know, for 22 years, this has kind of been my graduate program, right? And as ROOTers, I don’t know if you ever -- any of you used the term coach, you go into a community as a visiting artist, but you are coaching others. I sometimes reach for that term, because it seems to make more sense. So, coaching aesthetics, and just use digital storytelling as an example, when I saw the pieces that you showed interspersed, Linda, that evening in Knoxville, very powerful work, but also suffering from some of the same problems that I see have been -- digital story -- once I got trained here at ROOTS, it has become a bigger and bigger part of my work, and I’ve now been a digital storytelling coach at the School of Law and Social Justice in Atlanta for eight years. And the problems that I see in the students’ work there, in terms of what I think of as, you know, lazy aesthetics, you know, and I’m real sensitive because of being 22 years with ROOTS to, you know, hold back that hammer, dude, you know? As you referred to aesthetics as a subject that we avoid, because it’s that looming hammer of European culture. So, what I’m -- just to get real specific, just kind of like use this as an example, because of the internet glut [01:38:00] of what’s available, and you’ve got people doing digital storytelling, where the primacy of the voice, and the story, and the facilitation of, you know, telling us a story that only you can tell. But now layering it up with images and doing what’s expedient, and maybe a little lazy, and gathering images to layer on your story that aren’t yours, right? And I’ve saw in some of the stories in Knoxville, and some of my people’s work in Atlanta, where they still got the freaking watermark on a graphic that they swiped off of Google. You know? And it’s like, wow, you couldn’t even, like, blur out the watermark? You know, it’s about ownership, right? And if this really is a facilitation of community stories, then there’s a sensitive -- there’s a role that we need to really keep training each other on where I’m not stepping on your aesthetics, I’m honoring your aesthetics, but I’m also going to call you on some laziness. If you’re just throwing in a bunch of [winners?] -- I mean, seriously, there are people who will, like, go -- well, this story -- telling this story, I’m thinking about how angry I was, and so they Google angry, and next thing you know, they’ve got a little frowny face emoticon in their digital story, like, really? That’s lame.

M: But Jeff, if the overall strategy is articulated, then I think we can avoid the use of the word lazy in some instances, because if my students get invited to make their first digital story, it’s that they don’t know how to get the watermark off yet, because they’re just learning how to even think about a digital story, right? And so, in the overall trajectory of their life’s work, they might get real good at taking their own photographs, but in that moment, it’s like, what is the strategy that’s being used in this particular class, or workshop, or in your teaching, because it’s not inherently lazy, it’s just that sometimes, people need to be brought into the information about where to get images from, how to take pictures, how to use Google Image Search, and stuff like that. So, I would think that I would have to understand what is the purpose of Linda’s evening to understand if that is “lazy” or if there’s a better way [01:40:00] to do it, does that make sense?

LINDA: Yes.

JEFF: OK, take back the word lazy.

M: No, no, I’m just -- you’re throwing that out to the circle, so it’s just a thing of, like...

F: Education.

JEFF: Well, it’s -- yeah, it’s like, how much as coach do you coach someone’s aesthetic, and how much do you step back and say, this is meaningful to you --

M: That’s a question.

JEFF: -- you thought that that was an interesting sequence of images, if it was really cliché, but you know, as a coach, (multiple conversations; inaudible)...

F: Well, that’s (inaudible).

JEFF: Well, and it’s, to me, because of 22 years of coming to ROOTS meetings and knowing when something is rehash.

M: But that’s not necessarily accurate. Like, what I’m learning, especially in dealing with young people more and more is that things that are, maybe, a little weird for me to understand, actually have some form of cultural relevance because of the way that they communicate. Like, I think that it’s really weird that people misspell words, but that is a part of the culture that they inhabit now. Like, people say things that I wouldn’t say in a text message that way. (laughter) So, it would be weird to judge them based off of my experience of having a card catalog. And I think as an older person, to be very critical of young people’s work makes me feel away, right? Like, I feel away hearing people that don’t come from my experience being critical of my work. Now, I think you could find -- you, second person plural, could find other words to try to challenge and try to [adjust?], and maybe even in teaching, teach some of those things that you identify as lazy, right? But I think it says a lot to judge a person’s work with adjectives that don’t necessarily honor their experience, because their experiences are speaking through their work in a lot of instances.

(multiple conversations; inaudible)

F: I have, [01:42:00] like, a really burning comment.

M: And we broached that here.

F: If that’s OK.

M: We good?

F: Because I was -- I was having some reactions, what Jeff was saying made me feel certain ways, and then I was trying to really hear deeply what I -- what I think you may be saying. And then your comments just sort of help connect that for me. There’s a particular culture that can be interpreted differently. What I think I hear you saying, Jeff, and help me with this, is that what you want to be able to -- what you want is for the person creating this story to dig deeply into their feeling self, and because we are in this 30-second sound bite moment and culture in history, that’s not what’s happened. And how did we help people, not necessarily just young people, because people who don’t have access to media, when you first get that access, you start grabbing and grappling with what you think makes sense. I watched a video right before I came here, a Slingshot video about hip hop in Palestine, where the gentleman, first, when they were introduced to hip hop, they were emulating what they saw, before they actually realized that the value in their experiences, and in their words, was what was going to move hip hop forward in their country. And that then, they were able to raise their voices. But the first thing that happens is trying to fit into the dominant culture, trying to fit into what someone else says is correct. And what I think I hear you saying is that how do we get those folks [01:44:00] that we are coaching to tap into a space that maybe they have not had permission to do before, and it may not look like what they think it should look like. Is that...

BOB: Can we pause for just a second, I want to honor the people who are in the stack, and then see where we are at time, we have three minutes, so we had -- we’ll start here and come back down the line to [Guelin?] and Stephanie, if we have time, we’ll grab you, and Mark, we’ll grab you.

F: This conversation that we just had is so important that it feels like -- but I want to go back to staff, but I just really -- I feel like this should be a whole, you know, lifetime endeavor. My personal story with documentation began when we were doing foreign theater on the history of race relations in Charlottesville, Virginia. And a professor came from Richmond named Chuck Mike, who I don’t know if any of you know, a black professor, who I just remember two words he said, and they were “Document everything.” And for some reason, I totally took that to heart, and I just began doing that, mostly through video, and kind of painfully self-taught myself to edit video, and my work since 2007, a lot of it has been in East Africa, and have had the pleasure of being able to share the editing of stuff we’ve done there, and the filming, with other groups over there. And I just want to say, one of our projects that started with foreign theater, and what grew out of that, is a reproductive health center in a village in Uganda. And it was documented -- we got a TV camera, we got a camera that I brought, and I just didn’t trust any of that, and so I had my two little tiny digital cameras, and through that, was able -- both of the other ones failed. I had the footage, though, and I was able to make a short piece about it that has received, like, 40,000 hits from every country except for China, and it’s on infant and maternal mortality, working with foreign theater. And, you know, most of the other ones get, like, 100 hits or [01:46:00] something, but for some reason, that one -- and so, what’s happening now is through this process of being able to document the work, especially through video, in my case, has been really, really helpful in obtaining grants, and to continue finally getting some funding for this work, this participatory theater work in East Africa. And I’m also in the middle, right now, which I really want to talk to Jan about especially, of writing an article for an academic journal. And I have no experience in this, so I’m really, like, pulling in all resources to help with that.

MOD: Great, thank you, we’ve got to cut so that others can get in.

F: Yeah, I’m finished.

MOD: Great, thank you very much.

BOB: If you can essentialize what you’re going to say to its strongest chicken stock right now, we’d really appreciate it. (laughter) Yeah?

F: I was just really thinking about youth, and what is the middle space of an art space? So, like, even this space in the performances we have, where can we have a sense of play in response? And especially with young people, because I spent a lot of time this week in the youth village, and I work with young people, and yeah, young people are awesome. And sometimes, the aesthetic of access for young people, and how we can connect them to the work, because it’s not the same experience for them.

BOB: Thank you. Guelin?

GUELIN: I appreciated what you said earlier, (inaudible) the history of the people who challenged it. And in my generation, and the people before me, there is a whole lot of people who (inaudible) kind of thing, and actually taking the voice to give our own documentation was one of them, and what made available because the beginning of the videos. However, it’s not digitalized, so it’s not part of the documentation now, it’s not accessible. And [01:48:00] one -- for me, as a (inaudible), think this is a responsibility. And I was really happy when we started to work together that Sheila, who is not from my generation, not from my ways, not from France, started to talk about 1968. When (inaudible) about who is taking the world, why the artists are not writing about it, and the critics are writing things that actually have nothing to do with what we are doing, she started by 1968. And for me, 1968 was students, workers united, universities, [factories linked?]. Whether it’s something that is never achieved and that’s part of our world. And when you talked about (inaudible), you know, the people first using -- they were first using -- we have been in different circumstances (inaudible). It doesn’t mean that everything that has been (inaudible) is good, always interesting for them, but the process of taking our own voice within our history has been existing, and it’s not really documented that -- and we should use it.

MOD: Great, thank you.

BOB: If Stephanie and our friend who is doing the video documentation, is there a way for you to frame this in a question so we can leave with it? Just because we’re out of time, and just honoring the progress talk back and other things?

STEPHANIE: Just trying to figure it out.

BOB: Go ahead, partner.

STEPHANIE: OK, how this lived experience that you talked about as being a form of documentation? How is there a way inside that process that is just as vigorous as it is inside the writing process, where things are cited to tell the lineage of it? How can we do that?

BOB: Amen. And you have the final word, our friend.

M: I wanted to kind of touch back on -- I’m sorry, I’m bad with names, Jeff?

JEFF: Jeff.

M: What he said -- what he said. He said something [01:50:00] similar to my mentor, Philip Shabazz, who Mama Nia knows very well, he was my artistic mentor. And one thing he always told me was, “You know, Kelsey, always avoid cliché.” And there is a such thing as cliché. There is a such thing as, you know, idioms that are overused in our society. And what he wanted me to do was not be a lazy artist, and I feel like a lot of people, you know, they get this idea that, oh, just because I created something, that that means I have no responsibility to the craft, or even the history of the craft, which takes time and effort. And so, when he was saying, you know, people are being lazy, you know, my mentor never tried to change my approach, or my mindset, but what he wanted me to do was to dig deeper. And I think, you know, and I see the deterioration of culture, like, in my city in Atlanta, where people aren’t digging deep. They are trying to go for popcorn solutions rather than going for something that that is in-depth. And my thing is, is how do we challenge each other, this is my question, how do we challenge each other to further the culture, make it deeper, make it richer, add upon it, without taking away the voice of the artist that we’re either coaching or mentoring.

M: Hear, hear.

M: And there is a such thing as being a lazy artist, and we see it all the time. So, let’s not try to say, oh, just because it’s artistic, and it came from somebody’s imagination, that they’re not being lazy, because my mentor always told me one thing that stuck with me was he said, “Art is in the refinement, not the raw thing that you put on a page that you’re super excited about, but the refinement of it.” [01:52:00] And so, I mean, everybody refines they’re things in different ways, but how do we go about refining ourselves?

M: Word.

MOD: Thank you, that’s terrific. I want to say just one thing. This conversation has already deepened the conversation in ROOTS about aesthetics. It has deepened the conversation about documentation and communication. And in finishing up here, I want to put the challenge to alternate ROOTS that we have a set of principles, four of which are quite functional. Quite functional, strong, and the fifth principle, which is currently articulated as the aesthetics of transparent processes doesn’t mean anything. That’s me saying it.

F: That’s me saying it.

M: That’s me thirding it.

MOD: It doesn’t mean -- OK. So, we need to do something about that, we need to do one of two things. Make that principle functional, and important, and as central as partnerships, and shared power, or get rid of it.

F: Hear, hear.

MOD: It is not useful if it’s a mess.

F: I just want to make this one comment (inaudible) but I want (inaudible) I, as an artist, selected those stories because they were relevant to themes that I wanted to talk about. That was my choice as an artist. What I don’t want to happen is for the people, the individuals who shared these stories, to be a part of this critique. They’re not describing themselves as artists, they are describing the stories that they wanted to tell. And if I chose as an artist to share them, that’s my fault, not theirs. And that their intent is the point of doing the digital story. [01:54:00] Yes, if we had more time, we would refine those stories. Yes, there is value to creating a story that doesn’t use -- I don’t remember how you referred to the images, but...

M: Web-based.

F: Web-based images. But let’s not confuse those storytellers, and the intention of their stories, with the refinement of artists, they’re two different things.

MOD: OK, so let’s...

F: Can we -- with offering an opportunity to the ROOTS leadership to schedule such a conversation on Wednesday and not on Saturday? And have a way for us to continue to talk about it for a couple of days --

M: Hear, hear.

F: -- instead of jamming it in at the last minute?

F: Put that on your evaluation.

F: I will.

MOD: Thank you.

F: You know, I’m leaving because we invited people who saw the full run of the progress leader tour yesterday to meet us for a dialogue, a dialogue to action in the chapel, and I want to respect people who wanted to share with us.

M: Thank you.

M: Thank you.

F: So, that if any of you all, you know, after you finish this moment, because I think it’s important, and rich, and I loved it, you know, (inaudible) join us, please feel free to come, we’ll be there until lunchtime in the chapel. But thank you.

BOB: Hear, hear, thank you everyone.

MOD: Thank you, Crystal. I think we’re done, I want to thank everyone so much for this conversation, I look forward to it continuing.

[applause]

END OF AUDIO FILE