

**Reflection Circle at Appalshop with the Tisch Scholars**  
**March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006**

DUDLEY: This is the final circle we'll do. We'll move around the circle and people can make a comment or share an image about the experience. It's not really a thank you circle, so don't feel obliged that way. It's more about what is on your mind from being here, or what you're taking away, what thoughts you're taking away, that sort of thing. Or maybe just an image, or maybe many images, but you just want to name one. So here we are; anyone who wants to start the conversation, we'll move to that person's left and go around the circle.

JABARDI: My only other experience in a small town was in Iowa last summer at an arts workshop, so I was with a lot of other loud kids: performers, singers, dancers, actors. And they really hated us for destroying the sanctity of their town. I had a kind of bad experience there. So I had this big New York City bias where I thought there wasn't anything outside of the city and that people in small towns didn't really do much or accomplish much, because they didn't have the facilities and resources of a place like New York. Coming here really broke down that for me. There really is stuff going on around here, and it's really beautiful to know that people are doing so much with so little. And for me, who is going to be a broke starving artist some day, it inspires me to do as much as I can with as little as I know I will have. So yeah, inspirational, eye opening.

JON: Inspirational, yeah. Probably my favorite memory was whatever had just happened five minutes ago, all the time. So I guess that makes right now, the square dance last night. Going in, at first half the people there were from the town, and we were like, "Ah, we don't know what to do, should we interact with them? Are they going to resent that we're like, forcing ourselves upon them?" But then at the end of the night, at the end of the songs, we were ready to throw up and pass out. Running outside cause it's really cold, and just looking at the people from the town smoking a cigarette or whatever, playing basketball with their kids. And just looking at them and being like, "huuuuh." Sighing and nodding, at each other.

LUCIA: I think I remember the first night most when we watched Ron Short. I never really liked bluegrass at all; I hated it. I was just really glad to get to watch that performance, because it gave me a greater appreciation for it. I like it more than I have, so that's kind of cool to me.

DONNA: The image that comes to me is on the video we saw: the shot that started out at the sign for the Indian Bottom Old Regular Baptist Church, and then went in through the eye of the sign to the church, and then into the eye of the church. It's emotional to even talk about. We have our culture disrespected constantly. So to have someone come, particularly a young person from somewhere else, and portray this tradition respectfully and artfully, even though it is a tradition that might not mean that much to him, was very moving to me. I know the piece that was produced will be very important to James and his family. James is very ill, seriously ill. That shot typified the entire week for me.

JAMIE: I came with a little more experience as a junior and have enjoyed a couple of days of reflection brought on by meeting everyone here. Hearing where you all are at, that stage just entering Tisch, has made me think about what the experience has been like for me. It's been

such a wild rollercoaster to get from there to here, but it's been really great. And also, I think I will leave with a little more heart for my own religion.

ANI: I think one of the things that stuck the most was Herb talking about everything under the sun, at least in this state. It's amazing to hear him have so much information to give to us, and a real sense of what he comes out of. Everyone here is like that, having such a strong sense of where they've come from, to be able to move forward. We talked several times about everyone not knowing exactly what their tradition is or where they're from. I want to go back to New York and read and steep myself in what my parents have, watch lots of movies and see lots of theater. Just something to help me solidify a sense of some kind of tradition that will help me to move forward with whatever I'm planning to do. I remember recently, I don't know if anyone else is in my "Writing the Essay" lecture, people kept bringing up T.S. Elliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." That kept popping into mind here, the notion that you need to have something that you're rooted in to be able to grow. It's cliché, but after having witnessed it in so many individuals here, it makes me want to do that for myself.

NANDAN: I think the idea of Appalshop – I didn't understand it at all until I got down here. It embodies something that I didn't know was possible to exist in reality. It's almost an idealistic idea, an artist community in-house out in a very small town. Especially for myself, a filmmaker, I'm not much of a big city person, so it's always been a kind of conflict to balance what I want to do and where I am going to spend my life. To see this amazing community that is actually creating beautiful work, to see how it works, it is a possibility that I hadn't considered before, and I am grateful for the opportunity to understand it.

JESSE: I have always seen towns like this throughout areas of Georgia and Mississippi, and I've always been fascinated with southern culture. As much as we call Kentucky southern culture, it's really middle America. As we've learned over the course of the week, it has a lot of things attributed to it that hits middle America: like prisons, coal mining. That's what struck me the most, this is one region of the country that I've always wanted to be close to. It's been eye opening, because you always see reports on CNN or NPR, about the mines and coal miners. It's funny, but during the driving tour I had my iPod going and every song popping up talked about mining, like Johnny Cash or CCR (*laugh*). I really felt like – at first you think Kentucky and you almost can pass it off. But really, it represents the greatness of America, and also a lot of things that we can change about the place. I can go on for awhile like this, but it's been a remarkable experience. I'll be back.

SARITH: The first thing I wanted to say, but I wasn't planning for him to be here when I said it, was that Herb Smith is a god of a man. The Appalshop experience is nothing like I've ever experienced before. I've never been this far south, first of all. I had no idea where this place was. When I came down here and observed what you people do and the community around here, I see it's a really important place. It's really important that you keep doing what you're doing, and I think that other establishments like this need to be set up in other communities. In terms of what this place is doing with the tradition of the area, it got me thinking about my roots. I was born in Sri Lanka, and I'm pretty far removed from my roots. I think I should really go back and think about where I come from, my people. I really don't know much about it, and I've never cared to learn, until now.

SHAINA: First of all, I think that what Appalshop does is beautiful and important and weighty. That said, I think one thing that I'm taking away is that being a young artist in New York, in an environment such as we are at NYU, can become very...the social lifestyle can become very judgmental, petty, material, very quickly. That's something that permeates a lot in the city, and something I try to get away from. In that environment in New York a lot of the joy falls out of doing the work, and puts it all on the accomplishment. Appalshop really reminded me that the joy coming out of doing the work is why we do it in the first place. Here's a quote that Appalshop exemplifies: "Success is getting what you want, but happiness is wanting what you get." It was great to be here.

PAUL: That reminds me of how I approached this experience, until I was actually here. It's funny because in a place as busy as New York, you have to be just as busy as everyone around you. Recently, I've been living by a scheduled planner and coasting from appointment to appointment, meeting to meeting, class to class. For a long time having heard about this abstract thing called Appalshop, it was just one thing to do on my semester's plan. But it was a good revitalization for me to come here, because here, there is time to stop and look. I'll be spending the rest of the semester doing documentary work, and I know that if I go back with the attitude of, "I have to be here at this point and there at that point, etc." – to shove and cram a documentary out of that tight time schedule, it's not going to work. And that it doesn't have to be a huge subject either. I've had a hard time figuring out what big thing I needed to tackle, but this week has showed me, slow down. Take a look around you, and just find something that is important and speaks to me, or to a social issue. It's been important for me to realize a lot of the why, of why we're being artists, and why we need to look at social issues.

TIFFANY: For me, in New York it's so easy to be swept up by everything that you're doing and that is a part of our lives. I guess, what I found most interesting here is that normally, I'm sad in New York for some reason. But I found so much joy in being here. Just someone saying hi to me in the bathroom, and starting a conversation. I was surprised to be so happy. Every step of the experience, I was happy. Even being in the grocery store at 11:30 at night. I was so happy to talk to the cashier, because they were so happy to talk to me. I loved the acceptance here that I got, even though I'm not from here. It gave me a sense of what it means to be a part of a community and to be compassionate and to care about things around you. I'm going to take that away for my art, and, also, the way I approach life.

AUBURN RUTLEDGE: Not to focus on the negative here, but obviously, I've been sick. Nate's been sick, Erica's coughing over there. It's probably because of me, too, I'm really sorry about that. But at Appalshop, everyone cared. Twenty people a day came up to me to ask me how I was feeling. In New York everyone is busy, they're doing their own thing, I respect that. But everyone here, really cared about each other. It was nice to come here and feel like a big partying family. Thank you.

SHANA: I think for the students a lot of this week is about exploring identity, and I really enjoyed watching you all and listening to you all and just getting to know you a lot better. It's been really great. I think I stayed away from looking into my own identity until last night; I had the chance to do that, and it was really nice to reflect on that again. I know it's not supposed to

be a thank you circle, but I want to extend really warm regards to Dudley and Donna and Herbie and Elizabeth, everyone here, for the warm reception and the wonderful experience that you've crafted for us. I really appreciate it.

ANITA: I had shared with some of you in one of our story circles about how uncomfortable I felt when I first got here, thinking that my Indian-ness didn't belong in Whitesburg. I didn't know how the week was going to evolve for me. But each day, the entire experience and parts of me have opened up. I've had the opportunity to share so much with the people here, and have had so many people take an interest in who I am. That all culminated in last night's square dance at the community center. There were so many complete strangers who just came over and were talking to me and I felt like, wow, I guess in my own way I do belong here! It felt really nice to lead up to this place – I felt really centered and happy. It was a really beautiful surprise for me. I also just want to say that I've been so impressed and amazed by each of you students. I've had the chance to work with you in different subsets, story circles and projects, just being in the van together. It's been so incredible, I have so much respect and regard for all of you. I honor you. I'm going to take that back with me. I can't wait to see you again at our next meeting. Again, it's an amazing surprise. And I also just have to say I just fell in love with this man. One of the things I said to Shana was that I wish we could take Herbie back with us, but we'll get him to New York.

ELIZABETH: For me, it's about taking things for granted, on our part, even in our own community. The square dance last night – they happen monthly in a couple of places, great music, great people, great dancing. When you're hosting visitors, you see your community through their eyes, and, for me, that was part of what happened this week. Going to the square dance last night and watching you have so much fun was great. And also hooking up with Becky again; her freshman year of college, I worked closely with her for three months, and she's been here for six months, but I hadn't really seen her yet. She's been at AMI, and I've been doing my projects. So this project allowed us to get together and work with you all – it was great. Also, Herbie and I have been living in another county, Pike County, and we just moved back to Letcher County the week before you got here, so it was really nice for me to connect with Patty, who is an asset in this community. You take people and their work for granted, and this was another way to reconnect with her and think again about the work she's doing and who she is. It was fantastic, I'm looking forward to the new group. Each year it's been different, a different makeup of students. It's invigorating for us to talk about our work and see your reactions and hear your questions. Best of luck for the rest of your time at NYU.

HERBIE: I remember going to interview James and on the way there we were talking about what was going to happen. When you get into these interviews, you never really know where you're going. It's like getting in a cab and not knowing the route the cab is taking, but you just go along for the ride. And I was thinking that, here I am with a group of students who are young and full of energy from New York, it's going to be my job to keep things calm and everyone under control. But y'all were just fantastic. There was one point when James stopped talking, and one of the things I've learned is to give it space, because then the best thing comes next. But I worried, as soon as I do this, these poor students are gonna get really antsy. But you guys were just calm, easy, and that really made everything work. And Nandan, you're just amazing.

DUDLEY: There's a phrase down here in the mountains that goes something like, "Don't get above your raisin'." It's often meant as criticism. You can imagine that in putting on something like this, people, not necessarily from inside this building, have said, "Why are you messing around with an elite institution in New York City? You know that a large part of the problem in the US now is privilege, so why are you working with privilege?" In other words, why are you getting above your raisin' and not sticking to your people and their struggle? When people have said that to me, I've responded, "Yeah, NYU is an elite institution with privilege, but that doesn't mean that the people who come here have bought into that privilege and are exercising that privilege and that they, just because they are going there, are part of the problem." In fact, we've found that the people who visit us have this impulse to resist privilege, and to care about justice, and to find soul in their work. Not just to make good work, but to find soul in their work. One of the things I know that I will continue to think about with this class is both group one and group two's opening story circles. I just felt those story circles were unusually deep, and I have no idea of the reason. From year to year there's a rise and fall, where some activities catch a different intensity than others – each year it's different. Those two story circles I just felt particularly connected to on these questions of soul and justice. I think I was like some other people in those circles, ready to go around again, and plumb down to a whole other level. When you get to one place and it's authentic, then it allows for the possibility of going further. I really appreciated the fact that you all were able to put yourselves out in that way. I think anybody who was worried that we were copping to some sort of elitism would have understood that's not at all what this exchange is about. It's not what you've come here to do. So I thank you for that.

SEAN: I think what stuck out in my mind most probably was Robert and Herb's relationship. It's a weird thing being from New York and everyone thinks identity is an individual thing, and if you're not blazing your own path, tearing down traditions and creating something new, then it's not worthwhile. Even people who have influences always try to make it like, "My repertoire, I'm going to claim it as *my* own." It's this shameful thing to be a part of something. Especially at Tisch. If you're a part of something, you're not yourself and you are not being a true... whatever. It's nice to have somebody who is just naturally following in the tradition, or in someone's footsteps. It's really natural to just be yourself, and find something there. It seems like people here are looking for something, rather than trying always to create something new. That's what struck me most about being here.

MARY: I've spent a lot of time in this general area, personally – physically, back in high school and junior high. We did shows about this area – I talked to Herb about it – dealing with this area and its issues, involving research and being committed to the problem and addressing it and getting people to look at it and think about it – not just high school theater. This week, I kept tying it back to those experiences. I was in Trinidad last summer, and that couldn't be more different from here. But we keep talking about where we come from, and not blazing a new trail. Using a past and your foundation should be a tool. It should be something you embrace and build off of, and use. I find myself thinking a lot about Trinidad, about Wisconsin. At Playwrights, there is this pressure that you have to *say* something. They ask you, "What do you have to say that nobody else in the world has to say?" Which is stressful. But I think being here has given me a little more insight into what I can say that nobody else can. It's going to be interesting to take that back to New York.

ZAK: So we're at Food City yesterday buying our ingredients for our pot luck things, which when you step out of it, it's like, "Wow, there are a bunch of kids from NYU, and they're going to cook things for a pot luck?" I was walking down one of the aisles, and I made eye contact. I usually do a little smile. But this woman smiled back, and then introduced herself and said hi. At first, I didn't know how to handle what was happening. I saw that in everything I really liked about being here. The fact that we were a group of strangers, who seem to be from a completely different area, coming here. Not just you, but everyone here, everyone we met. Even the waitress at the Courthouse Café. And we were so loud and there were so many of us. You were so nice. And I didn't feel like you were faking nice. You were genuinely there! It made me feel really good that there are people who are genuinely interested in acknowledging and getting to know a stranger.

NATE: A lot of people have been saying that they liked the sense of community, and that's my favorite thing about Appalshop and Whitesburg. I went to a high school where we had a strong sense of community. One of the things I don't like about NYU is that we don't have a strong sense of community; we don't have a football team – we don't go to games. One of the things about here is that when you're out on the street people say hi to you. And this week, we became a community within ourselves. Not that we've been insular, but we've bonded with each other. At first, during the story circles, I was really self-conscious – what if I don't have a good story. But as it progressed, I realized that everyone's story was good.

TED: To continue with that idea of the community, for the first couple of days there was nobody in the streets. So it was like, "Are the only people in Whitesburg the people at Appalshop?" So yesterday – there are no Dairy Queens in New York – I decided to take advantage of the fact that there was one right there. I expected that it would be noticed that I wasn't from here. But when I walked in there and ordered and stood off to the side, everyone in there who came up and ordered after me – there were ten people – all came up to me and asked me if I had been helped. I was like, wow, I'm not even standing on line, and the people are just walking up to the counter and making sure that they are not cutting in front of me. As I was leaving, there was this little four-year-old girl standing at the door, and she opened it for me and held it as I walked through. I looked down and smiled. Yeah.

LIPICA: Despite the amazing four-hour workout that was the square dance, I'm still convinced that I've gained 90 pounds because of the outrageously good food that we've eaten here. And, I mean, I was full, but my body just wouldn't let me stop eating! Anyway, as you all know, I'm from a really small town in New Jersey, and the difference...I've never been to this area before, but I always respected southern culture. I'm a huge fan of southern generosity and how everyone is there for each other, even if you're a stranger. Being here this week really opened my eyes to the fact that I really wish we had that in my town. And the thing in New York where you're invisible walking down the street – it was so nice to have this sense of community with people I didn't even know. At the square dance, when we were all switching partners. I don't know how to dance, so I was kidding around with people I knew. But at one point, I was partnered with this ten-year-old kid. And he was like, "You're doing it wrong! Let me show you." I got taught how to square dance by this ten-year-old kid; that makes me feel good about myself. But it was like, the little kids have this sense of...I dunno...its genetic or something. It was nice to have that as a break from the busy-ness and constant fast-pace of New York.

ROCHELLE: For me there are so many beautiful moments. So many things when you can just stand back and think how amazing this experience was. Like when we were at the church or on the way there, looking at the mountains. Realizing how insignificant we were among the mountains, versus how insignificant we are among all the people in New York. A strange comparison. Capturing all of these beautiful moments – I always see these things but I don't know how to visually capture them – it was incredible working in my group and collaborating. The sense of community that everyone was talking about, so much fun. I met this girl, her name was Tequila. Talking with her, she wanted to teach me to play the fiddle, all the kids wanted to teach me how to dance. These little girls got so excited, and for the next half-hour taught me. They were so adorable interacting with everyone last night. Everyone had these ridiculous smiles on their faces and no one could explain why or what was going on, the room was steaming inside, everyone wanted to die, but we couldn't stop, it was amazing. Such different amazing experiences throughout the entire week. Thank you.

JOHN: My favorite part of Appalshop is Lee Sexton describing how he killed that raccoon. That was the most amazing story. It lasted twenty seconds. Then he played a song.

ALICIA: I'm really thankful for my experience here, especially because I feel like the past couple of days I slowed down to think about my life, ways that I seldom find the time to do in New York. I put this pressure on myself when I'm in New York at Tisch to reject my community and my home. When I have the chance to write about it, I think, oh it's not enough for this class. I really admire how everyone has embraced their community. It's made me do a lot of thinking about doing that back at home, tapping those resources.

ERICA: Thursday night we had been up really late working on our projects, and everyone decided that it was sleep night – we'd hang out tomorrow. Thursday we had this really long day, we had a few tense moments . . . but also amazing moments to counter that. That night we were so drained, and I went back to the room with Lipica and Rochelle, and being physically exhausted and determined to go to bed...but we started to talk about what this experience meant to us. And we sat there so fired up. It wasn't girl talk about boys or anything like that. We were talking about how this place inspired us and how we want to do something. I want to do something with this experience, bring it into my work. At NYU, I feel like my work is too optimistic or too simple, that art should be serious, art should be intense. Being here I realize that art should be what it means to you, where you come from. This experience taught me about what it means to have passion about your work. I feel like this also taught me a lot about what can come out of collaborations. I never thought I'd be at some tiny high school in a mining town in Kentucky working with kids to make their issues come out to their public, but it was a great experience. I hope I can find something in this to bring into my work and all that I do at home.

ANITA: I just wanted to take a moment for all of us to thank Dudley and Donna, Herb and Elizabeth, Robert and Rebecca, Bethany, Sean, Julie, Aida, Tom Hansel...these people are doing amazing work here every single day and have opened themselves and their hearts up for us, for this wonderful week. So let's all give them a round of applause. (*A huge round of applause, a standing ovation.*)

JON: Just one more thing. I don't know how long I've been here – I don't know which day is which, we're all tired and we want to sleep. But looking around, I know so much about everyone. Even the people I don't know as well, there is something that we know about each other that no one outside of here knows. It's sort of weird! I guess also, the one thing that I want to mention was Anita and Shana, being in the van, that was hilarious. Also, I forgot to mention, the collaboration on our project, how crazy it was: pulling our hair out, but it was also really exciting, not knowing what was going on at all. At the end of the day when we finally did it, there was a sense of being really happy that we pulled it together and it was done. But also a sense of, if we just had three more hours or one more day, we could have really landed that last thing, or how much we could have done. Dudley said when we were done, "Now you've seen one day at Appalshop. Now multiply it by 365." And I just thought, "Oh my god, what is wrong with you people!" I'm so jealous that what we did for that one day, you get to go at again and again.

DONNA: We really are only 29 years old – we just look old... *(laughter)*

JESSE: As a testament to this place, I was talking to this man named Don who lives in California – he played fiddle last night. And I was like, "Man, it must be pretty great to live in California. It's so beautiful there." And he was like, "Yeah, but I'd rather be living here."

JAMIE: I just feel really strongly that we need to take the thanks that we feel and the gratitude that we feel for this amazing experience and transform it into action. That's the way to really show respect to this incredible experience. I encourage us all to remember this week and this experience for the next three years for the freshman class and one year for me, to hold each other accountable for sustaining this work, because it won't happen without our intentional effort.

SHAINA: Be really cryptic to next year's freshman about the trip. Don't tell them what happened.

MARY: We should make up different stories about what really happens to throw them off track.

*(Talking and laughter)*

PAUL: Sorry, one last thing. I know that Anita has just made a formal thanks, but I want to make sure everyone is aware that the thanks goes beyond Tisch Scholars as a whole and reaches from everyone as an individual. It's been wonderful to be able to have a relationship with you all, a relationship we don't even have with our professors, and to see people working in their community. It has been fantastic. So, we have a little card for you. I know there are many of us that will come back here. I hope you know how much you've touched us. Thank you. *(Clapping)* Also to Anita, Shana, CCR. We can't take for granted our own people! So thank you. *(Clapping)*

DUDLEY: We here at Appalshop want to let each of you know that the door is always open for you to come back to visit. We mean that. It's not like we are inundated by visitors, because, as you know, you have to make a travel commitment to get here. So the people that come from

beautiful places in California come because they want to be here. We welcome each of you to come back whenever you can.

--Transcription by Jamie