

## Thinking about Composition, October 25, 2019

- Rebecca Egger: Welcome to the Townsend Center for the Humanities. I'm Rebecca Egger, the associate director. It's a pleasure to welcome all of you and our guests for Thinking About Composition: Creative Work, Scholarship and the Art of Putting Things Together. This is the second in a series of conversations that looks critically and deeply at what it means to compose. It's an opportunity to bring together practitioners who work in various media to reflect on what they're doing when they're creating.
- Rebecca Egger: Before we get started, I just like to mention that next week the artist Paul Chan will be here for two events. He'll deliver our annual Una's lecture on Tuesday and then on Wednesday, he'll be in conversation with several Berkeley faculty members. In our lobby, there's a postcard with details about these events.
- Rebecca Egger: It's my pleasure to introduce Myra Melford who's going to kick off the conversation. Myra is professor of music at UC Berkeley where she teaches composition and improvisational studies. She's an internationally prominent jazz pianist and keyboardist. She also happens to have recently completed a year as a senior Townsend fellow here at the center. I'm pleased to turn things over to Myra, who's going to introduce our other speakers. Thanks Myra.
- Myra Melford: Good afternoon. I'm happy to welcome you here too for the second in our Thinking About Composition events here. When I was a senior fellow here at the Townsend Center, we got into some very interesting discussions, cross-disciplinary discussions about how we compose, how we write, how we make creative and scholarly work, and how are we working along similar paths and where do our paths diverge. And so, we thought it would be exciting as Rebecca said to have some cross-disciplinary conversations about how we do what we do here.
- Myra Melford: Before I introduce our esteemed guests, I'd like to tell you about the format for this event, which has been jointly sponsored by the Townsend Center, the Department of Music and Cal Performances. Each of the panelists has been invited to present their work and thoughts about composition. Then we'll open up for discussion amongst the panelists and then a Q&A with the audience.
- Myra Melford: I'd also like to add that Nicole Mitchell and Josh Kun are here this weekend to perform their collaborative piece, Spider Web, which has been presented by Cal Performances this Sunday at 7:00 p.m. They'll be in a double bill with the David Virelles Trio.
- Myra Melford: On Sunday, I'll be participating in a preconcert talk with Chuy Varela at 6:00 p.m. and in a participatory improvisation workshop which is open to the public with bassist and composer Lisa Mezzacappa at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday. Of course, all of this is up to the impending power outage, but we're keeping our fingers crossed.

Myra Melford: Now, I'd like to introduce our esteemed guests. Thank you all so much for coming and agreeing to participate. Nicole Mitchell is an award-winning flautist, composer, conceptualist, band leader, and educator. Having emerged from Chicago's innovative music scene in the 1990s, her artistic work celebrates contemporary African American culture and is centered in the belief that art has the power to be transformative. A Doris Duke Artist and recipient of the Herb Alpert Award, Mitchell is renowned as the founder of the Chicago-based Black Earth Ensemble, which celebrated its 20th Anniversary last year and was the former first president of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians or AACM.

Myra Melford: As a composer, she has been commissioned by the French Ministry of Culture, French American Jazz Exchange, Chicago Museum of Contemporary Art, Newport Jazz Festival, Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago Jazz Festival, International Contemporary Ensemble, the Chicago Sinfonietta and by Chamber Music America. She has been repeatedly named Top Flautist of the Year by the Down Beat Magazine Critics Poll and the Jazz Journalists Association. Her project *Mandorla Awakening* on FPE Records was cited the Top Jazz Album of 2017 in the New York Times. Mitchell is the Willian S. Dietrich II chair of jazz studies and a professor of music at the University of Pittsburgh.

Myra Melford: Josh Kun is director of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, where he is a professor of Communication and American Studies and Ethnicity and the holder of the chair in cross-cultural communication. A cultural historian, critic, journalist and MacArthur fellow, he writes and researches about music and the politics of cultural connection. He is an author and an editor of several books including *Audiotopia: Music, Race, and America* (2005), *Songs in the Key of Los Angeles* (2013), *The Tide was Always High: The Music of Latin America in Los Angeles* (2017), *Double Vision: The Photography of George Rodriguez* (2018) and most recently *The Autograph Book of LA* (2019).

Myra Melford: As a curator of music and public humanities projects, he has worked with SFMOMA, the California African American Museum, the Grammy Museum, The Getty Foundation and others. He is the winner of an American Book Award in 2005 and a Berlin Prize in 2018.

Myra Melford: Chiyuma Elliott is assistant professor of African American Studies at the University of California Berkeley, a former Stegner Fellow. Chiyuma's poems have appeared in the African American Review, Callaloo, the Notre Dame Review, the PN Review, and other journals. She has received fellowships from the American Philosophical Society, Cave Canem and the Vermont Studio Center. She is the author of two books of poetry, *California Winter League*, 2015 and *Vigil*, 2017. She is currently at work on a monograph about rural life in The Harlem Renaissance.

Myra Melford: Please join me in welcoming them.

Chiyuma Elliott: I'm on sabbatical right now this semester, and I'm working full-time to finish the scholarly book about African American Art in the 20s. One of the big challenges for the past year has been turning my poetry brain off so I can channel all that time and attention into writing prose. In order to shut the poems down, I've been very intentional about what I read and when. Really truly even on a normal year, I don't read poems after 9:00 p.m. because if they're good basically, it sounds like bells ringing inside my brain. I just want to write poems, and I just won't be able to sleep, so no poems after 9:00 p.m. This year, I had to be even more careful about it.

Chiyuma Elliott: Instead of writing poems, I've been writing poem prompts and emailing them to myself. That's actually been really fun. I've also cut way back on painting and on sewing because both of those kinetic things tend to generate these aha moments for me where I just sort of will be doing something and then will randomly solve an old problem from a poem draft that I've set aside often for a whole bunch of years. Sewing also helps me solve other kinds of conceptual problems, particularly the scholarly arguments though so I try to keep a delicate balance there.

Chiyuma Elliott: My poetry moratorium mostly worked until about a month ago when I got a series of emails from people I hadn't seen or talked to for decades. For one thing, it made me wonder if there was some crazy moon phase that was making everybody nostalgic. Then that seemed interesting to me and I wanted to write poems about that because it was such an improbable hypothesis. Also, how do you summarize 20 years or 40 years to someone who's now basically a stranger? It's not even a good idea. It was an emotional problem for me as well as a compositional challenge. All of a sudden, these poems just swooped in.

Chiyuma Elliott: Here is one of them, sort of a catalyst poem, it's called "Before the Small Machines:"

"Before there were such small machines, there were augers plying their trade in every paper. Dear Scorpio, they'd write, the stars are aligned for you this week, but be suspicious of promises of sudden wealth. I spent my dimes and quarters on candy and was susceptible to flattery. I learned to swim. I wondered where you were. Before we wore or carried the small machines that track where we go, how fast our hearts are beating, before the machines got bored and started recording our sounds and playing them back for engineers in bland rooms with good acoustics, two pines were our doorway. We walked through them and disappeared. The planet I went to was wet and evergreen and suddenly, I had an accent. And now, we cannot sit at this small table and simply feed in coordinates and say it with certainty if or where or when our paths crossed. You have to tell me about the interim and I have to tell you."

Chiyuma Elliott: I'm not one of those people who waits for inspiration. I go out looking for it and I structure my life so I can respond to it. There's an elementary school in my neighborhood that posts a new inspirational quote on its signboard every week. One of the recent quotes was from John Muir. He said, "Every two pines are a doorway." That thought worked its way into the poem. It also became part of the new books, a bigger story about how these two people got separated in the first place.

Chiyuma Elliott: Thinking about composition, another thing that's helped me be a writer is having artists in my life when I was growing up. I had a bunch of models, both positive and negative to learn from and that mattered. Many of our family friends were professional avant-garde jazz musicians so I got to see them on stage making music look easy, but I also knew that these same guys would play scales for hours on many if not most days of the week back in their studios. I knew that they were so careful about their instruments and that they practice improvising a lot both by themselves and with other musicians sometimes in our living room when I was trying to sleep and I would like pat out there like little footy pajamas and tell these amazing people that they really had to shut the heck up because I was in 3rd grade.

Chiyuma Elliott: Another thing is that I knew that they listened really carefully to different kinds of music and were friends with a bunch of artists from different fields. Their ability to make things look spontaneous on stage was built on a lot of hard,

disciplined work. It was fostered by being around other makers who inspired and encourage them and brought a lot of beauty into their lives and all of these helped them get unstuck when music got difficult. They expected to get stuck and then to get unstuck. I think because of that, I really like it when students come to me with writer's block because I know it's potentially an opportunity for something really different to happen in their work.

Chiyuma Elliott: There are so many great fixes, so many things to try. It's stressful, but it's also this beautiful, beautiful gift. Also, I think that the fact that not writing bothers them is a sign that they may already be writers in that deeper sense, that it's a vocation if they choose to follow it.

Chiyuma Elliott: When I was preparing my notes for this event, I got a little stressed out because I felt like I was giving a lot of implicit advice so here is an overtly bossy new poem that seemed like the right thing to do to just declare. It's called, "Fox and Rose and Watering Can and Cloche and Stirrups:"

Chiyuma Elliott: "Please don't talk to me about surface tension. The day I learned to drive unicorns was the day it all went south. On the playground sirens, on the page of pink beast with carrots in its mouth. Please don't talk to me about weather. The wind stopped because I trapped it in my hair. I lured it in with promises of honeycomb. Don't talk to me about the floorboards, their provenance bores me to tears. The last time I cried, the bamboo vowed to curse this village and all its artisanal cheese and its deep pockets. Don't talk to me about the slope, the sweat dried on us there. I well remember all those awkward footholds. Talk to me about the fox. Tell me about the one red rose that grew and spoke with such abandon that you've washed and covered it. Tell me about the cloche. Tell me about the freckles on your hands as you slit it in place, star maps and where you ride when half the world is sleeping and the other half is dazed by sun."

Chiyuma Elliott: I keep wanting to write a poem about prince that hasn't happened. This is a Little Prince poem, I'm like, okay, maybe, getting close, getting close. More things about composition. I quickly jot down poem ideas all the time. I really hate losing a poem idea so those tiny notes are really crux for me, but I generally need lots of unstructured time to actually finish poems. Making time for writing has looked different for me at different points in my career. For the decade when I was working 8:00 to 5:00 jobs, I tended to read during my commute and I did something called hermitting. That basically meant that I block out every other weekend. I wouldn't schedule anything with anyone. I just sort of follow the energy of the days and see where it took me.

Chiyuma Elliott: Often, that would mean I just go out and do errands or going on some adventure, but just as often I spend the time puttering around my apartment or taking walks. It was really freeing and that allowed a lot of poems to happen. I think that you build trust with your artform. When you make time for it and show up, that's a win even if you don't make anything or if you make a poem that's not very good. It's more than establishing a writing habit. That's I think something a little different. I can tell the poems to chill out for a year right now because I've banked many years of study practice and also reciprocity, maybe also respect.

Chiyuma Elliott: I want to show some things about failure in composition too because I think it's important and I don't think we talk about failure enough. When I was a kid, I sang in a couple of choirs including a jazz ensemble. To encourage me, family friends kept saying that I should write lyrics for these jazz songs that I liked that didn't have any words yet. I loved the lyrics to "Red Top." I loved the lyrics to "Don't Get Around Much Anymore." I wanted to make something cool like that

so I tried and I just failed over and over again. I failed. I've never written decent song lyrics. I've helped other people do it, but I just can't do it myself.

Chiyuma Elliott: I think part of what makes me a poet is that I'm so willing to try things like that and fail. I love the form and I'd much rather fail at a poem than succeed at most other things. It's humbling, but it gives me a lot of energy.

Chiyuma Elliott: Another thing I wanted to share because it usually takes me a long time between two to five years to finish projects and also to feel comfortable putting them out in the world, I'm always working on multiple things at the same time. From the outside, it looks like I write really fast, I don't. I just have a lot of things in the pipeline.

Chiyuma Elliott: Here's another new poem. I stole this title from my husband at breakfast the other week. He was describing what our dogs had been up to before I woke up. They're tiny, but they're hooligans. I was like, that would be an amazing title. I didn't know if it was for a short story or a poem so I just wrote it down at the top of a blank page and waited for an idea to match. Then all those weird emails. This crazy catalyst in my life.

Chiyuma Elliott: "How the trouble started. He was supposed to say, I saw your name on that petition about the school. He was supposed to fess up so the land would curve a way like a sickle and she would wander the aisles of the import store allowance in hand. More? He was supposed to say, I know you snuck away from that wedding reception to cry in the padding shed, that her mauve polyester hems drag through spilt pit moss. He was supposed to say, the day you left, I wandered the marsh. Your parents are still children and mine are still mountains and in July, I want to dance around the patio with lit sparklers again and yell at the sky until it's dark enough to see the sparks. He was supposed to say, we can wind it back like kite string and learn again to fish and put all our treasure in a carved wood box."

Chiyuma Elliott: I write a lot and I revise a lot and I draw and throw out a ton of work. When I start writing a book, I'm usually wrong about it, like completely wrong at least twice. There's always a question at the center and that stays the same, but what changes is how I try to answer it. I've got these two books of poems in progress that I'm mostly trying to ignore right now. One book is about collaboration. It's called *Blue in Green* after the Miles Davis song and also kind of back for Maggie Nelson's book *Bluets*. Its question is, what do we owe one another?

Chiyuma Elliott: *Hemland* is the totally new book that just started happening this last month. Its title means "homeland" in Swedish. It's about counterfactuals. Its central question is, what if we didn't come back? It was really humbling to have all these new poems show and poems ideas show up because they made me realize that my original idea for *Hemland*, all of my ideas actually were just wrong, flat out wrong.

Chiyuma Elliott: I was born in Sweden, and I thought the book was going to be about what it meant for my family to come back to the US. I had this whole plan worked out. I had the table of contents. I had all these notes. I was so excited. I'm like, someday off in the future when I'm done with this scholarly book, I'm going to start writing this thing.

Chiyuma Elliott: Yeah, I thought the book was about light and seasonal changes and jazz songs and I was so excited. I was going to write all these jazz ekphrastic poems. Then the new poems made me realize that the emotional heart of the book is actually

about leaving Marin County, just north of here where I also lived as a child. It's about the long river of a much smaller geographical changes so yeah, not what I've had planned, not at all what I planned.

Chiyuma Elliott: Here's a new poem about homesickness. It's called "Wherein I Asked the Experts:"

"And the musicologist tells me about the 17th Century Spain. To Thessaly, I would go and suffer there, he says, so as to erase the visions of that beast. Wherein the survivalist is at a rest stop 500 miles from rabbit stick. Writing quickly, he says, sending many hugs. He dreamed about corruption and woke up in Winnemucca. When he considers the past, he's still in uniform standing by a T37 and the edges of the photo are crisp in his pocket. Wherein the past rocks underfoot like a loose paver and fall clenches its fist. The musicologist and I text about betrayal which he calls fashy and I drink too much coffee. Wherein the survivalist says, grief is like crossing an ice-cold river in a row boat. Wherein the musicologist reminds me that it's traditional not to write longingly about other places, but only about homesickness for Israel."

Chiyuma Elliott: Some of the lines quoted at the beginning of the poem are from an inquisition era Spanish poem by Antonio Enriquez Gómez called "When I Consider that Glorious Past of Mine." One of my MFA past professors told us students to read like thieves and I think it's really good advice. I'm always looking for techniques and patterns to remix in my own way. I put detailed notes in books about things that somebody else did that I want to try. I also reverse engineer poems all the time both for fun and to make writing prompts for when I get stuck or just don't have any compelling ideas. I might do something like count up the syllables in each line and write a poem that matches that syllable count or I might try to parallel someone's syntax or use the same density of rhyme or assonance or figurative language, the similes and metaphors or I might nest poem elements in a particular way.

Chiyuma Elliott: Here is a reverse engineered prompt. Based on the epigraph to *Hemland* which crazily, that stayed the same. I knew what the book's epigraph was and also the cover art I wanted before I knew much else about the project that turns out. Prompt goes like this.

Chiyuma Elliott: Compare something you learned to at least two inanimate objects. Repeat the same word or phrase at the beginning of at least two of your lines. Use at least one quotation and at least one exclamation point. Also, make a direct appeal to an abstraction.

Chiyuma Elliott: Here's the epigraph itself. It's from Laura Jensen's poem called "Happiness" which is brilliant and beautiful. The way the garden shines through fence slots as you pass. The way the big moon rises with an edge in shadow. You see that once there was happiness. This is the way to call it back. Come back, come back right away. I am giving up neatness for you.

Chiyuma Elliott: I also make a lot of found poems. I feel in love with Annie Dillard's beautiful of found poems called *Mornings Like This*. In part because she explains that kind of crazy, strict rules she gave herself when she was remixing other people's words. Found poems are really useful for me because they force me to get out of my usual vocabulary. When I use other people's words, my rhythms are different and that's important. I love repetition, but I don't want to spend my career basically writing the same poem or the same kind of poem over and over again.

Chiyuma Elliott: I want to finish my little moment here with a new tiny poem about childhood that's probably also about writing. It's called "Time and Materials."

"The planet I went to had three simultaneous Fridays. On one, I was dearly beloved. On another, I gathered signatures to save coral. On the third, I was a spider weaving webs, working on fractals. On Thursdays it rained. We used hammers to punctuate our discontent. Imagine the trees. Imagine the squat buildings in primary colors. In all the parks, there were upturned leaves and dark berries. On Tuesdays, I tied ribbons in my hair and waited." Thank you.

Josh Kun: Sorry. Hi. Hi everybody. That was amazing.

Nicole Mitchell: Yeah.

Josh Kun: Yeah. I'm really happy to be here. I was in graduate school here and I was a graduate student some fellow resident something at the Townsend Center many, many, many years ago, so it's really cool to be back and to see some familiar faces. I'm really honored to be up here with all three of you. To be here really because of the work of Nicole, so really happy.

Josh Kun: It's going to be a really short lite attempt at some rising and some things and then I'll go off on some other points. My work is first and foremost rooted in a practice that I've been engaged with since I've been very young, which is listening to music, which is to say listening to sounds that other people make and experiencing those sounds as they enter my own body and bones as vibrations and become understood as music in my brain, and then being made to feel things because of other people's music entering my body, my bones and my brain, and tissue and then being made to feel things and then becomes an extension of my life in a way to understand how I literally move through the world and then moved by the world. Someone else's voice becomes a voice that helps me understand myself or helps me understand the world that that voice belongs to or the world that voices imagines or dreams or suggests.

Josh Kun: I've come to understand that one of the primary reasons that I love music so much is because it is a platform of relationality, a connecting force between self and other, the individual and social. Between cultures, between cities and countries and languages when we listen, we engage with that which it's not us. And not us that becomes the who we are.

Josh Kun: Music is how we understand that the other is within us, that who we think we are shaped by the music of those who are not us. As a result, music has the potential to be a kind of social action, making it, listening to it, opens up new modes of being new potentials for knowing, for relating, for being together in difference.

Josh Kun: I started DJing at a young age, mostly playing junior high and high school dances. Because I loved being able to revel in that relationality through my own musical connections, mixing songs to help others feel and dance and move. Because I love what music can assemble and what assemblies music can make possible.

Josh Kun: I'm not a musician. This is important for this conversation. I don't play. I don't read. We can get into that, what that means. When I would DJ these dances, I would take my father's receiver, the stereo receiver and the two speakers that he had in the living room and the turntable and I would take that to the school dance every time. I would find ways with the RadioShack mixer to try to make

mixes on his turntable on a cassette deck to make people dance. That became what I did for most of my youth and to my young adulthood was DJing.

Josh Kun: In high school, that got me a reputation for being a musical person. Recently I went back to my high school, a high school that I share with the professor I saw here, and I went back as a scholar and resident for a week and taught at my old high school, which is pretty great. I highly recommend it. Exhausting by the way.

Josh Kun: The college counselor, who's still there, came up to me and gave me an envelope. In the envelope was a typewritten document that was the note that she sent out to colleges that I might applied to about who I was, like the summary, like kind of confidential document. I'm not going to read to you the whole thing, it's too painful, but I will read you one paragraph. Where she says, "Josh thinks of himself as a music person. Yet has not found in himself any talent for instrumental music nor singing. He loves all types of music and has a collection of some 800 record albums from classical to Irish to rock to heavy metal. Not only does he subscribe to the obvious Rolling Stone but to musician, stereo review, spin and record works. Thus, he consider himself to be on the cutting edge of music. He considers himself to be on the cutting edge of music." Unfortunately, that is so true. "Josh shares his expertise through album critics and concert reviews in the Harvard news on a newspaper and as a DJ at local parties."

Josh Kun: Some of that was accurate. Actually, most of it was accurate. And so I'd say most of my career and most of my life has been living within that of thinking myself as a music person, wanting badly to be on the cutting edge of things and collecting and living through the act of collecting and living through the acts of listening but also living through taking the things that I collect, records and cassettes that I would gather and find ways to put them in dialog with each other to entertain people, to make bodies move in the ways that they weren't moving before to bring different bodies together in a common space like this one and to see what new languages, new ideas, what new emotions, new histories could be created by bringing different things together.

Josh Kun: On this RadioShack mixer that I have — and if you remember these RadioShack mixers were the basic two-input mixers that would allow you to put one song playing on input one and one song playing on input two and you had this little horizontal thing that allowed you to go back and forth between input one and input two. That horizontal thing was the crossfader. The crossfader has become probably my primary methodology for how you think about what I do, whether or not it's composing or not is I think something that's good to talk about what these terms mean. I do think of it as a tool of composition.

Josh Kun: The crossfader, that horizontal toggle is the thing that allows you to go from whatever song is on input one to whatever song is on input two, to go back and forth between one and two, to mix them together without erasing one or the other. This is crucial.

Josh Kun: When it was invented in the 1970s, it was invented actually by two people at roughly the same time, Richard Wadman, who is an engineer for a British tech company. He invented the crossfader not for music but to control energy flow and to figure out how you could keep energy sustained between two separate inputs without the original inputs erasing or canceling each other out, basically how do you juggle and sustain energy; and a guy who eventually became known as Grandmaster Flash in South Bronx, who made his own crossfader, roughly at the same time that Richard Wadman actually took out a patent on the crossfader. The South Bronx was rewiring a traditional vertical two-channel mixer and just



kind of rigged up his own horizontal crossfader to allow him to juggle beats better, to allow him to isolate percussive sections of disco and funk tracks and to sustain rhythmic language by juggling between input one and input two without again ever erasing one or the other.

Josh Kun: Both of them were interested in the sustenance of the sound coming from different sources and also interested in connection and to the crossfader for me has always been this tool that changed the way I thought about music. It meant that if I was playing a song out, I was thinking about it as that song but I was really always thinking about, where is it going to lead now next? How am I going to connect it to whatever is queued up in my ear?

Josh Kun: Crossfading and DJing is always about past, present and the future. You're always queuing up a song. You already know what's coming next even though the people listening don't. You already know what's happened and you know what's happening in the present moment. You have to find a way to say, how am I going to go from this past moment, this present moment into this future moment? How am I going to connect these dots? Which means instead of listening for a song as a holistic piece, you're often listening for that moment, that one little second of a trumpets will that will allow a Frank Sinatra recording to go into a Drake recording.

Josh Kun: All you need is that one moment. That one moment of connection allows you to go from one to the other, again without erasing either of them. This became a really important part of the way that I think about the work that I do is focusing on points of connection, thinking about pieces of music on their own terms but also about what they contain that allows them to be in dialogue with another piece of music that could come from a totally different place, totally different style, totally different tempo, totally different language, et cetera.

Josh Kun: Also crossfading is about mixing without erasing, mixing without erasing. In that way, it becomes a way not of course just to talk about music but a way to think about questions of identity, questions of cultural difference. Where in the United States, our dominant metaphor in the 20th century at least for thinking about cultural diversity or multiculturalism would be the melting pot. America is a great melting pot. A melting pot is actually a musical metaphor. It actually comes from a fictitious symphony that is part of a play written by the British playwright Israel Zangwill about a Jewish American immigrant composer who's trying to compose the ultimate symphony of America that will be the great melting pot symphony.

Josh Kun: We get this idea from that play. It's actually a false idea that we've inherited. We think of the melting pot as synonymous with democracy or multiculturalism. It's not how we argued, but it's the opposite. It's actually the melting of difference into one, the many into one, the production of as that play put it, a singular American race.

Josh Kun: And so, the melt was the 20th century, dominant 20th century tool for thinking about identity and culture melting into Americanism, melting difference away into this simulacrum promise of American culture. Crossfading is not melting. It's mixing without erasing. It's bringing difference together in such a way that difference does not have to go away to produce anything singular.

Josh Kun: What makes a great DJ set a great DJ set is there is no singularity. That's the death of a great DJ set, that you cannot produce one singular set. You must always be beat juggling, juggling tempos and taking people's places they never

thought they'd go. This is the great joy is that people are dancing to a song that they know and love and they're comfortable with that fits their sense of who they are and their sense of self.

Josh Kun: Then by finding that point of connection, you can take that room into a place they never thought that they would go and they're listening and thinking about things that they never thought that they would listen to or think about but are doing so on the terms of familiarity because there was always that grounding that started with input one.

Josh Kun: So juggling difference. Martin Buber of course talks about these ideas for example, not as a DJ, though I love the idea of Martin Buber as a DJ, as the idea that all living is meeting. That's a hip-hop sensibility, all living is meeting. All living is meeting and what connection hunting can do.

Josh Kun: Edward Said, another record I would put on if we were playing records, who said we are so to speak of the connections. We are of the connections. That's just an idea. I don't know how to prove that, but it's something that I aspire to think through. We are of the connections.

Josh Kun: To crossfade thoroughly I would say requires at least four key prerequisites that I think about musically but also in terms of the work that I do as a writer, scholar, curator, et cetera. One is you have to be a historian or you at least have to think historically. In DJ parlance, this is you have to dig through the crates. You can't just put any random record on. You got to know the record really, really, really well before you even put it on in order to mix it with something else. It's not a natural thing. You must actually study it. You must know your sources. You have to have an archival relationship, a historiographic relationship with the body of sound and the body of music and the body of culture and the body of knowledge.

Josh Kun: Second thing is you have to develop listening as an art but also as a critical skill, a critical tool. I know this is not news to anybody in this room and kind of wonderfully in the last 15, 20 years, theories and studies of listening as a critical act, listening as a social act have blossomed, which really used to be in a way the domain of a musician I would say and also maybe acoustic scientist. Now listening has become much more accepted as a broader rubric of critical thought of how to engage with the world. Crossfading for me is a way that puts pressure on that, that you have to always be on your toes and always listening, and not listening passively if that's even possible but listening for something. Where am I going to go next? How am I going to connect these things? What could I connect?

Josh Kun: Third thing is that the goal is always about creating a dialogue. My work is really, really invested in finding points of connection between communities that might not be in dialogue, geographies that might not be in dialogue, genres, practices and finding a way to create that dialogue in a way that again respects where both of those original resources are coming from brings them together without erasing either one of them.

Josh Kun: The fourth thing is that your life with any dance floor that one might be DJing for, the goal is to create new kinds of assemblies, unexpected publics that could potentially lead to new kinds of collective actions, that utopia of the dance floor that every dance scholar has ever written, that a song can bring people together, who might not ever rub elbows or knees together before. The high bar of the crossfade is that you are always mixing and finding points of connection in order to create potential new assemblies and new publics.

Josh Kun: Composition, the title of the panel I think is thinking about composition, which is really interesting. I started in my head thinking like do I think about composition? I don't know. I mean I do, of course I do, we all do. I started thinking it's also important to talk about as thinking through composition. What is the act of composing, the idea of composing as its own method of thought, as its own philosophical practice, as its own way of knowing.

Josh Kun: For me as a nonmusician, I've learned a lot from musicians about how to do that. I admittedly probably overromanticized the work of musicians. I sit at their feet and study them. Nicole is laughing. I sit at their feet because I marvel at the level of thought and knowledge that can be made and produced through performance and through the act either of composition or improvisation as composition.

Josh Kun: And so, I try to think about thinking through composition in terms of cities. A lot of my work is based on cities, Los Angeles specifically where I work with ... I've done three big projects with the LA Public Library all based on these massive special collections of hundred thousand pieces of sheet music about Los Angeles or 30,000 restaurant menus in Los Angeles or this most recent project of over about 2000 autographs that were part of library's connection and then figure out how to compose stories and scholarship based on these pieces that are in the crates like with the records and then figure out how to crossfade them with other text to produce new stories and new ideas.

Josh Kun: I did a project a couple years ago that's at MoMA and the San Francisco Public Library, where I worked, where we were challenged. I was commissioned to think about musical history in San Francisco and any social or cultural crisis in San Francisco. I started to work on a really easy one to solve, which is gentrification and neighborhood displacement.

Josh Kun: I asked a group of musicians in San Francisco who I'd never met before, never played before, if they'd be willing to come together at branch libraries and show up to play for an audience of people. Actually, let me rephrase that, come together in front of audience of people and I would give them a piece of sheet music about San Francisco from the 1800s, from the archives of SFPL and the audience ... The performance was the audience would watch them figure out if they were going to play anything.

Josh Kun: Basically we would watch musicians like meet themselves for the first time, meet each other for the first time, "Where did you play?" "Didn't I see you at that gig?" "Oh, yeah, yeah. You played with so and so." And like, "How are we going to do this?" That was what we were watching. This is really like just selfish because I was like, this is my first favorite thing on earth to watch. I got to ask other people to do it and use the rehearsal, the musical rehearsal as a way of thinking about it is the musical rehearsal for nonmusicians, a way of thinking about other rehearsals. Is the musical rehearsal a gateway into new kinds of social rehearsals? If we could rehearse the city the way we rehearse a song, will that make new cities? And so, as we were sitting here, I try to dig out really quick this one little bit that I thought might be fun to the share. This is just some transcription of what the musicians were saying to each other during the rehearsals.

Josh Kun: Just so you know, they were Idris Ackamoor, Marcus Shelby, Minna Choi, Diana Gameros, really, really wonderful, and Akheel Mestayer from all different backgrounds, all different neighborhoods in San Francisco. All right, here are some of them. I think that's a chorus. Why don't we transform it? Let's just do it piece by piece, but who's going to lead? Who's going to lead? So we had tensions in this? I like it unfinished. Let's just do it unfinished. It shouldn't be finished. Do you like it? I do, but let's try it again. Let's cut that. That's a nice tag. Yeah, but cut

that. But what if the tensions in these songs is actually the tension in the city? Let's have more bass and the bass can build tension just like the sound of urban renewal. Let's like cross melodies and cross rhythms, do some sharp 5s. If I start with a conga and I cajon, then we're honoring the mission. How many different versions of this same text are we going to do?

Josh Kun: I mean each moment can have different shapes. I mean all these different two worlds are possible. I feel like you're doing a different rhythm than what we're doing. I'll follow you guys. I'm playing what's written. We got out the tub, now we got to get back in the tub. This is like the Golden Gate Bridge going Asia, going Africa. No, no, no, it's going Chinese. Instead of melody and time and playing it straight, but why don't we do it thinking about shapes? Can you play the chords first and then vamp? I need to play the chords. Can we just stick to the published notation? I mean are we supposed to respect these things or innovate on top of them? Do we respect what's there? Do we move in? Do we take it back? What I'm hearing from you though is that you want more freedom. Yeah, that's what you're hearing from me, more freedom.

Josh Kun: And so, in watching rehearsals like that, for me the process of making music becomes a way to think, and this is no news to anyone who makes music and then particularly their ensembles. I mean it's certainly no news to jazz musicians, but the making of music becomes a way of thinking about making other things, bigger things. That's what fuels a lot in my work. I got more to say, but I'll stop there and turn it over to the great Nicole Mitchell.

Nicole Mitchell: Both of you leave a lot for me to work with actually. I was really mesmerized by watching all of your eyes when I was hearing them read and I feel like, I don't think they look like that when we play music but just the kind of way of hearing that's different with words than it is with music. It was really fascinating for me to see that, to see your eyes.

Nicole Mitchell: There's been a lot of things that I'm ricocheting off of in my head right now. There was talk of sewing. There was talk of spirals and spiders and actually our work is titled *Spider Web*. I guess I can start there. I was always fascinated with spiders. I would always write and I don't know if you've noticed this, but when the sun is going down, the energy of the day changes, you know like the light gets very orange and like there's kind of a feeling of busyness right before it gets dark. That's the time when spiders make their webs. They make their webs as the sun is going down so that when it gets dark, that's when they're going to trap their food.

Nicole Mitchell: I used to always be out during the time watching spiders weave their webs, but I didn't necessarily like being called a spiderweb myself, which is what I was ... It was one of the things that I was called as a youth living in Anaheim. We moved from Syracuse, New York. I went from an all-black school to all white school. That was one of the results was that my hair was weird for a lot of other young people.

Nicole Mitchell: This thing that we're doing on Sunday is titled *Spider Web* because it explores some of that experience and Josh really does an amazing job of kind of like crossfading into the history of Orange County and how that relates with there's some kind of undercurrents of intense racial history there, but also this idea of music in my own musical lineage, whereas another thing that was brought up this idea off crossfades, which I've never thought about it that way but this is something I've been very interested as well is I reject the melting pot, but I'm very focused like as an artist on this question of can art be transformational and can music be transformational?

Nicole Mitchell: And so, one thing I'm fascinated with, with all of us talking about improvisation is can I create, as a composer, can I create a space where people can keep and maintain their authenticity and their own musical language and yet we can have a conversation without all of us trying to melt into this other language that we're supposed to be able to communicate on? This idea of coexistence, of contrasting entities, which I call colliding duality, which was the premise of one of the pieces that I wrote, the "Mandorla Awakening," which each musician kind of is bringing their own tradition.

Nicole Mitchell: There's two musicians bringing some differing traditional Japanese traditions like shakuhachi flute and shamisen, which are completely different, have their own original story in a way that places where they've been developed and things like that, but then putting that with I'm a vocalist who grew up on the west side of Chicago in Baptist church and maybe a few classical musicians, one that also plays the banjo and a guitarist that place the oud and like how can we bring this all together and make a conversation through music. That's something I'm really fascinated with.

Nicole Mitchell: Since I was a child, since that experience of feeling and as an outsider and an outcast like as a child, music became this place of safety and sanctuary where this idea that it was another realm, not a physical realm but a realm where I could be and I could create and I could be safe. No one could hurt me there and also nothing could be taken away from me, like I could be there and I could make whatever world I wanted to make.

Nicole Mitchell: Again, connecting with what you all were talking about, my way of phrasing that is the idea of bridging the familiar with the unknown. So like to have this idea of come where people are but then to take them on a journey like through the music. I've been very interested in that. Just as you all talk so much about music and inspiration of music, words have been very central to my own creating in creating music, so narrative, poetry, prose. Every song that I pretty much have has some kind of story behind it or some kind of narrative that really was there before I created the music.

Nicole Mitchell: Like the way you listed that rehearsal and how the musicians were thinking about creating this music, I definitely relate to that idea because sometimes I will start with a poem or I'll start with something and then I'll want to express it. Sometimes I'll work with others spoken word artists that I feel are probably more powerful than I am in getting my ideas across. A few times I recorded with my own voice with music. That's another aspect that I'm trying to develop is actually sharing the words more in their own written form, which is something that I'm still a little nervous about but trying to work on.

Nicole Mitchell: I guess I will start because I brought that up. I'll start with the piece that has a poem in it that I have. This is from the *Mandorla Awakening Project* that I just mentioned. This piece started with a poem and the ensemble is performing it. It's called "Staircase Struggle." Conceptually, I was looking at a lot of different ideas with that project. I was asking the question, what is progress and looking at how a lot of times we focus on progress as technological advancement. What about us treating each other better? Have we really made any progress with that? The title "Staircase Struggle" is this idea of looking at hierarchy and how I was struggling to get to the top. There's no words in the poem that talk about that at all, but hopefully you feel what I'm trying to say. Hopefully, this won't play too loud. I'm hoping I got a good volume to start it:

Speaker 6: "Over and over and over again. I thought if maybe we could slow down and really see it, we could understand ourselves a little better and even make a

change. Some had the fortune to stick our hands in the black soil. We instinctively learned that dark matters. That's where the mind is free. Birds sing interlocking songs of imagination. An image nation of endless possibility. There is a place. There is a place. There is a place of innovation, of improvisation, of impossible. That's where our survival is.

Speaker 6: Many have dipped to drink its power. Darkness is the beauty and will always be. New worlds. New worlds and words. New worlds and words can change this illusionary one. Enter y'all. Enter. There's a maze in the mind, a battle where many artists fight to save us from destruction. Lives are hammered in our brains, tortuous thorns of fluorescent light. If these thorns are not plucked with the sound of truth, they chisel to one generation and to the next of the same moon. It seems. It seems the one where we hold, our love was dangling over the cliff close to peril and poverty. The combining walls close in quickly. There is a timeless resistance from death of the soul."

Nicole Mitchell: I like exploring a lot of different... It's kind of like not quite like the DJ, but I am interested in a lot of different styles of music. A lot of times musicians I think more than other artists, if you think about like writers, visual artists, dance, a lot of times you expect experimentalism, you expect like this idea of something new. A lot of us I mean we listen to music. We listen to music when you're washing dishes, when you're in the car, when you're doing different things. And so, a lot of times there's an expectation that music should be kind of more ... It's more of a conservative expectation that people might have a lot of times with music and different musicians will also go through a thing where they'll decide, well, I'm going to go down this direction and I'm just going to keep going this way because I'm trying to make a statement and I'm trying to get deeper and deeper into this development of this idea. I've never been that kind of musician.

Nicole Mitchell: For me because it's not safe space and it's because it's like a space for freedom, I love exploring whatever it is that I'm attracted to and also mixing those things up in how ever way that I would like and just don't tell me I can't because that's just how I've developed my work.

Nicole Mitchell: And so, there will be a lot of different stylistic shifts that might happen within one piece or from one album to the next or one piece to the next. Whereas somebody else might have a specific sound and concept that they're developing. I just love this idea of endless possibility. That's really important to me. I think that's what's allowed me to live my life the way that I live it and also in order to overcome different obstacles and to know that music can be a path that you can actually grow as a person, that you're going to meet certain challenges that the music is going to force you to be a person in certain areas. I've definitely experienced that, which has been super rewarding.

Nicole Mitchell: I want to have time for all of us to talk. I don't want to take up too much time. One thing that's become really important to me more recently is this idea of collaboration. Then we have this project we're elaborating on for Sunday and we can talk more about that, but also I have a project coming up. I've done a lot of work inspired by the science fiction writer, Octavia Butler. If you haven't read her work, I would definitely check out *Parable of the Sower*, *Parable of the Talents* right now because it literally about California right now, but she wrote it in the '80s. I mean it literally is about right now. It'll be scary if you open it up and read it.

Nicole Mitchell: One of the things that happens in the book is there's a woman in the book that creates a new religion. This new religion is to help people to adjust to the situations that they're in where they have to really make a lot of transitions and

to really embrace change and that nothing that they were used to is going to really still be there.

Nicole Mitchell: Me and a friend of mine who's a great vocalist and performance artist and composer, we wrote this piece together called "Earthseed." "Earthseed" is the name of the spiritual text in the book. We wrote our own and then we made music for it. Like when people ask us, like well, who did what? Who wrote this? Who did that part? Who did this song? Whereas it's going to be like, no, we both did all of it and this idea of not taking this individual ownership of something.

Nicole Mitchell: Because I feel like that's the feature. I think we have to learn to not be so individually driven like that. We have to have this name and we have to have this identity that in and credit for each little thing we do. I think we're kind of raised to do that. For us to really create a new world, we're going to have to learn how to create collectively again in different ways.

Nicole Mitchell: This is like my first project really doing was really fun. This piece is called Whole Black Collision, W-H-O-L-E, Whole Black Collision. It's very visual, I think. I don't think I'm going to have time to play the whole thing, but I'll just play a little bit of it and then I hope we can all talk together. Okay, I'll stop it there. Okay.

Myra Melford: The mic, yeah. Thank you. Thank you so much to all of you. There's so much there to continue to talk about. I wonder if the three of you have some questions for each other or things you'd like to comment on and/or we can go ahead and open it up for the audience.

Josh Kun: I have a question.

Myra Melford: Go ahead. Go for it.

Josh Kun: I'm feeling that you said you're talking about music and endless possibility. I know about 10 years ago maybe, jazz cellist named Fred Katz, who I had been writing about and working with for a long time. When he passed in his late 90s was inviting people to come sit with him during his final days. When I went to sit with him, he had recording on of an album of a record he did in the '60s. As he's listening to it, eyes closed, his fingering is still going as he's listening. It's just like this emotional. I'm crying. This beautiful moment watching him, no words, heavy breathing. Peace tops and he turns and looks at me and I'm thinking this is the most beautiful thing I've ever heard. He says, "We could have gone deeper." I'm just wondering is that endless possibility? Does that ever become...?

Nicole Mitchell: A perfectionism thing.

Josh Kun: Or a constant. Or is the flip side of that constant dissatisfaction, that there's always more. Was that part of it too?

Nicole Mitchell: Yeah, because when I first started composing, I could write a whole night of music in 30 minutes, like for improvisers. You know what I mean? I have to write like six or seven tunes out, bam, bam, bam, bam or whatever. Then it's like the more you do it, then you're just like, why is this taking longer and longer and longer to do? You know what I mean? Then and the feeling like it can get intimidating when you have a new project and you're like, okay, you have all these ideas what you want to express and can I actually do it? I think that does happen. I think it's probably the same for writing, right?

Chiyuma Elliott: I don't know. I mean, I feel like one of the things that kept me sane in writing is actually musicians talking about exactly that. A friend of our family is this guy. He is now deceased but a saxophonist named Julius Hemphill.

Nicole Mitchell: Oh yeah.

Chiyuma Elliott: You know Julius? Yeah, right. One of the things that he would just say that was that he couldn't ever make music like the music that was in his head. He couldn't make that set of sounds that kept him motivated. It was weird because like the last concert that he did when you're telling that story was just flashing back. I mean I wasn't there. The last concert he played was like this insane transcendent sort of thing. I feel kind of like he was able to let go after that because it finally matched. It was this eerie thing like everybody who was there was just like, what the hell just happened? I've listened to recordings that's just totally quality recording of it, but like even on that you can hear it like he did ... He actually hit it. He finally got that. It's like this beautiful thing, right? We get this almost divine feeling restlessness. It wasn't good enough. It wasn't quite that, but how awesome is that. We're not done.

Nicole Mitchell: Yeah. Restless is definitely a good word. I know I'm totally restless. I have a lot of anxiety and that all comes out in the music.

Chiyuma Elliott: I had a question for Josh. When I was listening, I was listening and I was listening to Whole Black Collison, I was like, "What would you crossfade with it?"

Josh Kun: I'll probably start with whale songs.

Chiyuma Elliott: Right?

Josh Kun: There's something going on there.

Nicole Mitchell: Yeah.

Chiyuma Elliott: The pauses.

Nicole Mitchell: That can work.

Chiyuma Elliott: The pauses in it, yeah.

Josh Kun: I'll start there and see where that goes, underwater. Some kind of submarine about that piece.

Nicole Mitchell: I love the way you said maybe we should be rehearsing the creation of a city the way musicians rehearse a song. I thought that was amazing. I mean people, they'll come up with a draft, right? But how do you actually practice experiencing something before it's created. I think we do, do that in the arts but how can we do that with certain things that are so impactful that are going to have such a big impact.

Josh Kun: Yeah. I think a lot of times when people think about these seemingly impossible to solve social crises, we often go to a point of we don't have models for it. What do we do? There are models. I mean, music is one of those models as a guide of as you very beautifully put it of individuals coming together to make something collective together while remaining individuals and maintaining their voices as



part of it. I mean, this is a long history of talking about this in jazz in particular. We have those models. The challenge is how do we actually translate it.

Nicole Mitchell: Exactly.

Josh Kun: That's what I really struggle with where I feel like, okay, I got to figure this out better.

Nicole Mitchell: It's funny because I always real like with music, it's so ... You're not going to destroy anything. We build a building and you don't have a good foundation, it's kind of messed up.

Chiyuma Elliott: Yeah.

Josh Kun: Right.

Chiyuma Elliott: That reminds me of my husband made a quip the other day. He was talking with an old college classmate. They lost touch for a long time and got back in contact. Steve's response was, "Well you know, if I don't do my job well, somebody just goes away with the wrong idea about Chaucer. Whereas you, you're actually a nuclear engineer. The city is gone if you're wrong."

Nicole Mitchell: Yeah.

Chiyuma Elliott: I think that moment, that amazing moment and that workshop sort of creation session, that moved me too. Part of it is just because I love analogy, like so much of what I do is I love trying to translate things, trying to move things from one form into another. It's like the best thing and part of what's best about it I think like it's just like always so hard and seems worthwhile is that they don't fit exactly, like trying to make one thing out of another.

Chiyuma Elliott: I had a really bad repetitive stress injury. I mean, I have scoliosis so I'm prone to these kinds of things in my hands. And so, when I first went to graduate school, I had this awful flare-up of that. And so, for the first two years, I couldn't really use my hands. I couldn't lift more than five pounds. I had always this recognition that was back when it was really, really in its infancy. It meant that I mainly wasn't writing poems. I realized how kinetic that activity was for me and also just physically, I needed to save my voice to talking to my computer to write my papers. I needed every bit of capacity I had.

Chiyuma Elliott: And so, I would sit in different places in my apartment and I would think about this poem that Medbh McGuckian and it's like crazy beautiful Irish poet wrote called "The Sofa." I would try to reimagine the apartment as that poem. And so, it was like okay, so if this apartment was this poem, what needs to change? It was like moving things. That sofa isn't there. That wall isn't there. The finish on that is gone. That angle of light coming through that window, that's wrong. I'm going to move that around. The roof line needs to change, all this stuff.

Chiyuma Elliott: It was like a meditation. I got in two years of doing this, probably almost every day, I got to about the fourth line of the poem. I feel like it's really generative because it's so hard and that we can't translate it really easily, like the building blocks, the materials of cities are different. That's why it's worth trying.

Myra Melford: If it's okay, I'd like to see if we have any questions or comments from anyone here?

- Speaker 7: Thank you for your contributions, very, very interesting. I'd like to ask a question to Nicole. How important is history in your work? Do you base your work on some roots, like in music history or you are kind of not really related to that, this kind of question, especially if you do like classical music, like contemporary classical music, do you use any sense this kind of content?
- Nicole Mitchell: It almost felt like two questions because with classical music, I have a big history with it. I studied the classical flute. I played in orchestra for five years, professional orchestra. I played in a ballet orchestra. So that experience of absorbing that sound and then, my mother listened to a whole range of music, which was mostly jazz and soul and R&B, and then my dad only listened to classical music. Just having all that kind of just put inside of you definitely informs what you create, you know what I mean? All those different influences mix around.
- Nicole Mitchell: In terms of the question about history, I think when I was really first starting to make albums and I started my group, Black Earth Ensemble, as a flute player, I always felt like I had a strange relationship to jazz history. Of course, the flute is an old instrument and it has histories in all different cultures, you know what I mean? The flute itself has its own history where I've been influenced by different flute playing traditions around the world, but then in jazz specifically. There was a time where I felt a need to kind of show some connection to that, to the jazz history.
- Nicole Mitchell: I remember my first album was Vision Quest and I had strings and rhythm section and me. They were like, "Well, we don't know what kind of music this is." I wanted them to recognize it as jazz. I brought in a saxophone and a trumpet, you know what I mean? It was important for me to create music where I would like you talked about writing a poem in response to the poem. I was writing songs in response to Mingus and in response to Ellington, in response to these different musicians, to Sun Ra and people that really had impact on me.
- Nicole Mitchell: In that sense I think, the history has been important. With AACM in general, which I haven't brought up at all but I'm a member of the AACM but most musicians, especially the elders is important. You're supposed to know the tradition before you start breaking the boundaries and breaking all the rules and everything like that.
- Nicole Mitchell: I started out breaking all the rules in the first place, but it was also I was always listening and always studying that tradition specifically. It was important for me to make my own music because as who I was, improvisation represented something really important for me to be free and for me to have play tunes all the time was not going to be free. I was not going to be able to express what I wanted to express. That's really what drove me to compose. Sorry, the answer was so long.
- Chiyuma Elliott: That's awesome.
- Myra Melford: Anyone else?
- Speaker 8: Hi. It's like a quick anecdote and a question. The anecdote is that I don't know if anyone knows, this morning Francis Fukuyama, the political scientist gave a sort of workshop talk at the law school. I'm getting sort of like crossfaded mirror experience because it's pretty much the same problem that they were trying to talk about. There's debate in the Q&A. Basically that it seems like contemporary

American culture has become fragmented. He sort of identifies this as identity politics in that way.

Speaker 8: In the end for him also, most people seem to agree that there needs some kind of coming together and then it was how did they put it, like national civic identity or something. This is about institution building and things like that. It seemed like almost the polar opposite of what we're talking about here. There was a point too where he mentioned that filmmakers and artists can build stories and senses of identity, but really you need lawmakers to actually build and so it's very different sense of what it means to be on collectivity.

Speaker 8: It's kind of interesting as a grad student because I can move around this campus. In the morning down on that side, you get a room full of people who are training to work in government or to influence from that direction and then come and see this. It's a little bit long.

Speaker 8: My question to all of you is I wonder how you feel like over the course of your careers, the way that you sort of shift or employ your vital or creative energies has changed whether the sort of moments of epiphany where the way that you work changes a lot or people that you encounter who made you rethink that.

Nicole Mitchell: I can just jump in and say, I'm really interested in not just collaboration with musicians but collaboration like interdisciplinary. I'm really fascinated with interdisciplinary work. That's something that I was turned on to a long time ago. It seems more possible now for some reason. I mean, the thing about the Mandorla Awakening, I didn't say much about it, but my dream would be if people from all different types of fields like whether it was green architecture or ecosustainability or I don't know what you call like when people are not doing mono-agriculture, but they're doing organic human-centered agriculture, if all those people were coming together to be creative and so that we can actually see what an alternative life can be because this is ending. This whole western way of doing things, it's going down to dead end. We really do have to change quickly. We're still kind of asleep right now. I feel like our task has a role to hopefully get us to imagine something else. In that sense, I feel the more we collaborate, we can do that. That would be a change from maybe when I started.

Josh Kun: First let me quickly reference your first point, your anecdote, without going too much into it. I would disagree with a lot of that thinking. You can't bring people together into a civic national collective if you don't respect them or listen to what they say or acknowledge their histories of subjugation. If you write of their oppression and marginalization as crying victim, there's no way you're going to build a collective that's worth being a part of. For me what's changed my work a lot is kind of simple, which is instead of just spending most of my early career writing about music, I started being able to convince musicians to let me write and perform with them.

Josh Kun: That started with just the idea of what would happen if as an academic or scholar or a writer, I'm on stage reading and performing what I'm writing with the musicians that have inspired that writing and how does that change my accountability as a writer? How does that change the way that I deliver my work? That's when something after the last 10 years I've been doing almost constantly and it's just been game-changing for me. It's also meant that I started singing all the time out of nowhere. My wife's a singer and was always like the, "Don't do that." It's meant that I've had to think about my own craft and the musicality of what I'm writing with the people who are making that music and it's been a great challenge. Also to get musicians ... There's a lot of trust to get people to trust you. I mean in most of the cases, there are people I've gotten to

know over the years. But with Nicole, we never had met. The fact that she was willing, all right.

Nicole Mitchell: You know I had to look into it.

Josh Kun: You did research, I know. But still, we haven't even in person really, really met. That's a real gift to have people say, okay, I'm willing to try this out with you. There's a trust there that's really beautiful and important.

Chiyuma Elliott: I was really focused on craft issues and I thought about them very locally, I think. One of the things I was reflecting on getting ready for the panel was how I used to be completely superstitious about what I would write with I got ... A lot of people just have liked their specific pen that they always use. I hated the idea of even potentially getting trapped into that. I'm like, what if the pen isn't there. I made myself shift my tools and where I was writing and how I was writing and all that. I was really focused on very local kinds of things.

Chiyuma Elliott: What has changed for me over time is realizing that so what seems to be so much more important now decades in is we're entering a whole life around making. That's what matters. I often give my graduate students copies of Sonja Lyubomirsky's book, *The How of Happiness* because I think we can train ourselves and learn how to build happiness as well. Part of it is craft knowledge. It's technique. I love Kelly McGonigal's book, *The Willpower Instinct*. It's because that's also been really important, how to be a more resilient human, so I can be a better maker. That's one big energy shift that's happened.

Chiyuma Elliott: Great. Thank you. I think it's time to maybe carry on the conversation more informally at the reception. I hope you'll all join us and please join me in thanking our fabulous panelists.

Josh Kun: Thank you, everybody.