

**Anne Bogart and Bill T. Jones**  
**Conversations with Anne**  
**TCG National Conference**  
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**MICHAEL ROSS:** You have made it to the final plenary session. You should be proud of yourselves. Final session: Conversations with Anne. I'm Michael Ross, the managing director of Westport Country Playhouse and a recovering Baltimorean. Hope you've had a great time in my city. Over the years I've had the great fortune of having many conversations with Anne. Our current conversation is actually about the transformation of her much-beloved SITI Company, which she founded with Suzuki in 1992. My first conversation with Anne—which might surprise some people—my first conversation with Anne was actually in a sleazy hotel room on a bed in New York City. Anne Bogart and I, conversing in a hotel bedroom in New York. Now I've had many conversations in hotel rooms over the years. Most I don't remember, and I don't remember names. But Anne Bogart's name and our conversation I will forever remember. I have been lucky enough—as I hope many of you have as well—to have conversations with her across the footlights, getting to witness her work, whether with SITI Company or with other companies, in Seattle, in Louisville, in New York, at the New York City opera, many, many locations where I've had that privilege. And I've had the conversation with Anne as Anne the author, as the author of the books *A Director Prepares*, *The Viewpoints Book*, *And Then You Act* and the soon-to-be-released—hence the title of this plenary—*Conversations with Anne*. It is my privilege and my honor to welcome my friend and my colleague, Anne Bogart to the stage.

**ANNE BOGART:** And it's my privilege and my honor to welcome Bill T. Jones. I feel love. Do you feel love? It's a beautiful thing. And it's a very happy thing to be sitting right here with you, with Bill, and having a conversation. And this series of Conversations with Anne started—it was after 9/11. I don't remember—it was a year, maybe a year and a half afterwards. But it came out of a remarkable feeling that happened in a room after 9/11 when people get together to talk about substantive ideas. And that seems to be necessary—it seemed, that kind of vitality and muscularity in the room. So I started this series of conversations, and Bill was one of them. And you know it, all of us in this business know when something feels right, which is why we kept going. And as a matter of fact, Conversations with Anne is not over. It will continue even though it is a soon-to-be released book under the same title, and it's selfish on my part because life is a learning process, as Mr. Obama said at the University of Arizona when he didn't get his degree. Remember that? So I'm delighted to share whatever happens today with you.

Roots, Renaissance, Revolution. It occurs to me that Bill is the embodiment of all three. And I'm going to use the title of the conference as a structure for our conversation. Roots—and I promised I would throw you something that you don't expect—Bill comes out of—as do I—out of the postmodernist impulse. We are deconstructionists. We come out of a particular history. And what I'm going to throw at you—although not immediately because I also want to talk about—this has to do with roots and renaissance and then revolution. But in the roots part, we as postmodernists have come to the point

that—I'm going to say it out loud because I think it's healthy. We have come to the end of postmodernism. Thank you very much. We don't have a name yet for the next part, but I believe in at least saying it. We've deconstructed to a point where we cannot deconstruct anymore because there's nothing left to deconstruct. I believe that it is the birth of a new kind of reified kind of meaning. And a new look at the notion of stories. And the questions are: What stories? Whose stories? Who are these stories for? And how do we tell them? This is the first part of the discussion I'd like to have with you, because I know Bill is working on a production about Abraham Lincoln, which is an extraordinary moment in your work that dates way back in the history of American storytelling, in a sense. *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, for one. So I want to start with roots, your own roots and how the hell you tell stories now. And I'm going to come back to that in just a moment.

Renaissance, when I think of you I think of the fact that you have a Tony, you just got a Lucille Lortel Award, you work with people of all different disciplines. You don't—you have a dance company that's 25 years old, but you don't actually limit yourself to the dance world. You're theatre, you're dance, you now have *Fela!*, which is about to go to Broadway, thank you very much, in the fall. Maybe you'll have another Tony, who knows. So you're very much a Renaissance man in every sense, and I want to cover what that means, and in particular that word I brought up at the first part, which is audience. Who are we making this for and how do we do that?

And lastly, which I don't think I have to say too much about as an introduction, which is revolution. In my mind you are revolutionary. You have fought, I think. I think you've been angry. I think the obstacles which have been presented to you you've turned into extraordinary work. You have faced some of the most vituperative criticism I have ever seen in my life. And you've in a very wonderful way have taken a "fuck you" and turned it into the most beautiful form of expression. Seriously. That is personal, that makes you cry, that is highly political, and that is—nobody ever knows what you're going to do next. And I know that we're going to get into that subject.

All of that to preface this discussion, and let's go back to the idea of roots and family. How do you think about family, in terms of your own family, in terms of the past, in terms of something I would call Abraham Lincoln family?

**BILL T. JONES:** Art world family.

**BOGART:** Art world family. And how do you in this context tell the story of that family? This is really a tough question.

**JONES:** You mean, is the work telling those stories?

**BOGART:** No, you. Bill.

**JONES:** Oh. Well, sometimes I've compartmentalized. Some stories I feel—one thing that happens in a day like this, talking to you, is that I can sometimes get what my mother calls—you get happy. You know, there are African Americans in the room, you know the term. You saw it in the old church when you would get out of self and get happy—and that's when people would start speaking in tongues. And then I'd feel like I'd usually

transgress because I bring highly personal things into a discourse that is now suddenly—and I feel later like a bit of a sham. And I'd betrayed confidences. Now everything used to be—now you're talking to a 57-year-old man who used to never think this way. Everything was fair. I used to do solos on stage. They were designed to go in there and dig so deep in the psyche—talking solo, which is a real dangerous thing, moving in a certain way, and then the job was to get your mind to report, unedited, everything you were thinking. That's what I was doing. Literally I called it setting myself on fire every night, and I considered it a good performance when I would blaze and I couldn't remember.

**BOGART:** Why did you do this?

**JONES:** Maybe it's what you call this deconstruction. It was the performer is not—this is not a thing you're seeing in front of you that is complete, that I've honed. You're actually witnessing a process in front of you. That's what I thought. And what you hear and what you see is greater than the sum of the parts. The arm is moving over here and you're talking about Afghanistan, you know? And you're talking about oil. And you're talking about the bird you saw this morning flying out of the house, and now you're thinking about the donuts you and I discussed earlier. But then there's a hole in the donut and it's sexual and it's black and there's a dick and there's a woman, and there's a room full of white people. And you could keep going, just as I'm doing right now. And I think we all do it. And that's what the art was, picking up on this notion, just as Duchamp said, that art is primarily an intellectual activity. That the artist puts brackets around experience, and then it becomes something. Well, that's what I thought I was doing as well.

So. Family. Estella Jones is much with you. As I say, I've told you, the first theatre performances I ever saw was Christmas morning, all 220 pounds of her, would make us get down—

**BOGART:** You and nine brothers and sisters, right?

**JONES:** Well, there were 12 all total, but by the time I came along there were only about 10 still at home. But she, we'd all get down, you couldn't open the gifts or anything, and she'd begin this prayer. And the prayer was a chant. And I've read places, certain lines, "Please Lord, Savior," and then you would repeat that. "I want you to come into this house this morning, Lord. And I want you to touch my husband because he needs your help, Lord. And this is my daughter-in-law. She's got a young one in her belly. And my son who is across the waters. And I want you to go into the White House, Lord, and touch the man in the White House." And this is, you know, by the end of it, when she says, "Until my face becomes like a looking glass," that line. "And my house, my bedroom is like a public road, and everyone turns from me, oh Lord, oh where can I go?" And then you repeat all that again, everything that's bothering her. Everything that she has doubts about, all in that moment, until she is doused with sweat. Now imagine being five years old and watching your mother come apart like that on Christmas. Right? She comes apart and then she's literally exhausted and she says, "Now, y'all. Open the gifts." Like that. And I said that was the first theatre I ever saw. Now, what did Stravinsky say?

All ritual is theatre, but it only becomes art when it stops being ritual. You know? So that, so maybe there was some confusion, but I was very moved by it because it's purpose was public, personal, spiritual. And that was the first example. And then I read about the Greeks and their notion of ecstasis and catharsis and what the theatre was as religion. All those things came later, but I had seen it up front. So as I said last week to a very high, fancy bio-engineer, I said, "I have the genetic programming of a Southern Baptist. But I have the doubts of a mid-20th-century intellectual." And those two things, trying to get them to come together.

Roots. Roots. Then there's the art-world roots.

**BOGART:** How did that happen between being part of a family upstate I believe, and then the liaison to the downtown art world. How did that happen?

**JONES:** I was fortunate to be born in 1952. I think. Because you know *Brown v. the Board of Education* was '54. Woodstock was '69. Stonewall was '69, I think. Around the same time, I think. Might have been a year earlier. And then the March on Washington in '64. I mention these things because the culture was going through paroxysm of change. It was coming—I mean literally, I remember the moment of drying the pot in the kitchen and seeing Oswald shoot—no, get shot by Jack Ruby. The whole family was watching it. There were these moments happening all the time. So when I went off to the university, the idea was that I was going to Broadway. Did I know anything else? No, I didn't. Going off to Broadway, which had to be what theatre was, but along the way I got ambushed by modern dance. And modern dance at that time was saying no to everything.

**BOGART:** Was that by taking classes or seeing things?

**JONES:** I think it was taking classes. And it was always this cultural moment. I must have told you this story. I was a runner, right? I was at the university on a sports scholarship and because I had distinguished myself as an actor.

**BOGART:** Was that Binghamton?

**JONES:** University of New York at Binghamton. So I thought I was going to go to do sports in college, then I was going to the Great White Way. I had never even seen a Broadway show. I never did. So I started—my niece, who was my age at school there, said, "Come to these classes," so I did. These modern dance classes—no, they weren't modern dance, they were African dance, because that's where all the action was. It was where everybody wanted to get real. So if you were from Long Island and you were a Jewish person, or you were a young gay man from somewhere, or if you were Egyptian—I remember there was the Egyptian daughter of a magnate—everyone was in those classes. And it was the time. Everyone was sweating together. Of course the black people were down in front, the black women in particular, all created in the image of Angela Davis because it was their culture. And everyone else was allowed to be there, in the back. The politics were thick. Literally a gesture was political. And I think at that time—so that was a place to be. And as I'm talking the dancers in the room maybe know

what I'm talking about. When I opened that door, it reminds me of a story, you know Bessie Smith, while on the Chitlin' Circus—I mean Circuit.

**BOGART:** You can say circus. It was a circus.

**JONES:** Yeah. Would, after a performance, believe me, she made it one. She would go out after a performance to get food, and she wanted to go where the people were, right? Where her people were. And they say one night she opens the door of this joint and the smell coming out, and she said, "Child, the funk is flying." I love that term. That's how I felt opening the door to the dance studio—that smell of human bodies. Whew! It's something about your whole body—and I was hooked. So I stopped going to the track practice, and theatre became pale. Because here was something where I didn't have to quote "say other people's words," which is what I thought theatre was. I also didn't have to hone my technique as a speaker. And I was an athlete already. So dance was a place wherein you could, in the most profound way, express. And also dance had been unmoored from storytelling because of what Merce had done, George Balanchine had done. So already it was supposed to be this essential communication that needed no explanation other than an articulate body, a relatively unencumbered space, and an audience that is able to watch with other parts of themselves other than their minds. Now that's a—could be a real putdown if a critic said it, couldn't it? What I mean by that, there's something about—this was supposed to have be the language that truly, the universal language that we've all been looking for, when people are just moving on stage. You don't have to worry about their nationality, their origins, anything like that. It's about the language of being moving. Now. That's what I thought when I came into it. The dance world was in a very intellectual moment.

**BOGART:** But you've somehow made a full circle, haven't you? You're clearly an extraordinary storyteller. We all feel that in the room. And yet, how do we tell stories now? And I'm thinking in the broader sense when I say it's the end of postmodernism. I'm thinking of people who are telling stories different, asking whose stories. I'm thinking of Anne Deavere Smith, I'm thinking about Emily Mann, who's here, thinking of stories differently, Moisés Kaufman, thinking of stories differently. Whose stories, again. And you're talking about doing a play—a play—a dance-theatre piece about Lincoln, but you're not interested in a biopic story.

**JONES:** Yes.

**BOGART:** How do you tell stories?

**JONES:** How? I guess maybe why do I do what I do? Because I still—I guess I've got the religion of postmodern dance. I was converted back when we decided that classical modernists, Martha Graham, all those people, the ancient Greeks, were off the mark. We want to make something as real as the way the paint in Jackson Pollock drips down. Why does it drip? Because there's something called gravity. Why does the art drop? Because of gravity. Movements don't come from the fact that I want to express my love for you.

Movements come from my physical body and your physical body having something like physics that happens. This was the religion of postmodernism that was going on.

**BOGART:** Did everybody understand that? I didn't. You did? I'm so interested though—in the differences between “I love you” and the physics. Could you say a little bit more?

**JONES:** Well, we'd have to do it, Anne. Well, no let me give you an example. This is basic contact improvisation, which is a great democratic technique. We're going to do something called counter pull and counter balance. All you have to do is lean back and trust me and I'm trusting you. You're holding me as much as I'm holding you. Right? Now, if I let my left knee go, it changes the relationship between us. If I shift towards you too much—you ready?—you will go back. But you didn't. Yeah, right, right. Now try it with me. I'm going to give you my weight. You come toward me. We move. Right? And it's just like that. Now, this. No, no, no, no. We aren't doing social dancing. Take these two points here. No, no matter what, the point is going to stay. I happen to be the leader now. Now the virtuosity of this is how can I be engaged with you and not be the leader, but be responding to you. Right? These are basic ideas of partnering that were very important—it meant that I could dance with anybody. And it could be free of gender. It could be free of all the power dynamics that go into telling a story. And yet the audience sees a story being told. They learn something about our bodies. Now, those are just the beginning exercises that would develop a whole way of partnering and so on.

**BOGART:** I understand.

**JONES:** So, Lincoln. Now, what's happening with Lincoln curiously enough is that it's in this big, popular venue.

**BOGART:** Big audience.

**JONES:** Big audience. You hope a big audience. But a lot of it is things you've probably been talking about all week—getting butts in seats. And that is the big, the heavy lift right now for dance. How do you make people feel—it's like medicine. “We know it's good for us. But you know what? I don't like what's good for me. I know what I want. I want a candy bar over here.” They say modern dance is supposed to be good for me—and unfortunately, a lot of people have made up their minds. So we're always now trying to—without totally pimping ourselves—saying dance is exciting and sexy and groovy and fun. Don't worry about getting it. Dance has been very, very serious. I'm very serious. So I have to lighten up—and at the same time, what do the presenters want in a piece about Lincoln in 2009?

**BOGART:** Was it your idea?

**JONES:** No. No, that's the other part of your introduction. I don't know how you feel right now, but I wouldn't say the battery is low—there's always some idea, something exciting that can be fluffed, to use that term. Why? I heard somebody over here got it

immediately. To be developed in such a way that it becomes a piece. But. Commissions: Ain't they nice? When someone says, "We'd like you to do something about this." Now you have that moment, you know, "I don't take anybody else's instructions," and you cross your arms and take the high road. Or you think, "Hmm. I have these 11 dancers. They have 35 weeks of work. We all want a permanent home." They all need something to work—everyone in the organization from the executive director to the smallest dancer—they need a project. Here's someone saying we're going to pay you to do what you do—if you just do it about this topic. And that's what Lincoln was. It took me a while to decide to do it because immediately I said, "Bah. They want a black history piece"—which has become anathema to me because praise black history and so on, but that idea about there being a Black History Month—I mean, you've all heard it by now. You've heard black people complain enough, right? Why isn't it Black History Month 12 months a year? And so, and now you're going to ask me to do something that's going to be put into your little politically correct—see, we've done a piece about slavery. Because Lincoln equals slavery in the popular imagination. Lincoln is a much more complicated—I call it Planet Lincoln, you know? And unfortunately, it's Planet Kitsch, a lot of it. But once I understood what I didn't know—once I understood that here was an opportunity for me.

**BOGART:** Did you understand that by reading a book on Lincoln and immersing yourself?

**JONES:** Yes. I've been reading, and the blog entry—if anybody is interested enough, at [billtjones.org](http://billtjones.org) I have a blog, and this one is about an address I gave to the historical society about the problems of doing a piece about Lincoln. And one of the things I report that I told the wonderful Welz Kaufman, this young, energetic director of this celebrated music festival in the Midwest, I told him, "I don't know what I'm going to do, but I'm going to lead with my heart." And he said, "Yeah, you do that." Now, the cynic in me said, "Now, Bill, where the hell is your heart? Do you really know? Isn't that why you're going to a therapist?" And my whole thing is to not do my schtick.

**BOGART:** And that's what leading from your heart would be?

**JONES:** My whole thing in my life right now is not to do it from my schtick, which sometimes looks like a heart, but is actually a well-honed routine about authentic feeling. So, what is it about Lincoln? Yes, I did cry when I saw his hat and his fingerprints on it. Yes, I do remember—as I say to people, and they're kind of like, "What do you mean?"—I say Lincoln was the only white man I was allowed to love unconditionally. "Literally?" No. My mother didn't sit around and say, "You can love him, no, no, no, no." No, no, no. But you knew the way people were taught. I mean everybody who is a minority in this room, and maybe some of you who are not, your family teaches in ways that are not, "You do this, this and this." You know what is accepted. That was the only one of them that you could trust, and he was dead already. Look what they did to him. That was the other part. Look what they did to him! Kennedy: Look what they did to him! Bobby: Look what they did to him! So that was a message: Yes, there's some good white men, but they're dead. Because if they were really good—good to us—they would

have to be killed. So I realized all this stuff that I had buried a long time ago I thought I had buried—then all of a sudden someone is saying, “Okay, you’re making a work,” and I’m saying I’m going to lead with my heart? Bill, what does that mean? Do you really want to go through that again? You did *Last Supper at Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land*. I said, no, no, no, that was done by a man in his mid-thirties. This is now a man who is in his fifties—and a man who is getting a lot of awards. I’m nobody’s victim, you know? I’m not—I don’t want to be sad. So this is maybe what I would like to be worthy of today, you know.

**BOGART:** So, perhaps more practically, how do you tell the story of Lincoln?

**JONES:** It’s maybe going to start out—we always start out with movement first. And that’s what that long diatribe that got lost was about—is that there are certain rules in postmodern dance that I think are very good for art-making in our era.

**BOGART:** And what would those rules be, Bill?

**JONES:** Yes, yeah. Any movement can follow any other movement. Test the physical forces at work at any one moment. Don’t go immediately to the psychological.

**BOGART:** I think the theatre world needs to write these down.

**JONES:** But then you do theatre, see.

**BOGART:** No, I think it’s appropriate for the theatre.

**JONES:** But I wonder if that’s eviscerating the theatre.

**BOGART:** I don’t want to interrupt. You’re on a roll. Number one: Any movement can follow any other movement. Number two:

**JONES:** Don’t go immediately for the psychological. Go for that which is rooted in the physical.

**BOGART:** I agree.

**JONES:** Oh, really? Wow.

**BOGART:** From the theatre world. Yes.

**JONES:** Well, “To be or not to be? That is the question.” Don’t you wish I had a phrase that I say that everyone immediately gets it? So you don’t want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. We are looked at sometimes condescendingly as this art form that is just over a hundred years old. There is no repertoire. There is no committed audience that will, as Mr. Lincoln cursed and said in writing about how he felt for the modern dancers like Merce Cunningham, poor guys, because you know, we can sell the New York State

Theatre for six to ten weeks every year, twice a year, but look at you. You're newcomers. This form has no masterpieces yet. End quote. So we are trying to have this body of literature. This body of great poets and thinkers who have put down their words and you can respond to it. Now, I know it's a lot of original people here, people who probably do physical theatre with no text—now is that true? Yeah. Okay. Well, excuse my ignorance. When I think theatre, I'm probably thinking the way that some people when they think dance they immediately see New York City Ballet, or they see, even worse, "Dancing with the Stars" or "So You Think You Can Dance." So if I'm doing that to you, please excuse me. Because now I'm one of you, right? I'm a director who has a show moving to Broadway—and I feel there's always this fight with theatre people advising me on what is working and not working.

**BOGART:** That's called a disease in our field.

**JONES:** You guys got it bad. You got it bad. Well, you know, I really like that—

**BOGART:** Wait, wait, wait. You were on a roll. One move can follow another.

**JONES:** There are books written about this. Well, okay. There is a sense in pathways and energy that are informed by our tastes and our suppositions, but they are not determined by them.

**BOGART:** One more time.

**JONES:** There are pathways of energy and force informed by our predisposition, if you will, but they are not determined by them. In other words, technically I can go any direction. This. I don't need an explanation. Now why did any of that happen?

**BOGART:** Predisposition?

**JONES:** I didn't know I was going to do any of what I did. Now I often start my work improvising in that way with a video camera going.

**BOGART:** Can I just interrupt for just a second? Because I now am digressing back to you saying that theatre has this vast—and you used the word "body." Now my question is when you approach say a classical work, not what is the psychology of it, but what is the body that would speak those words, which is a very different approach to acting.

**JONES:** Can we really understand—I recently saw in London a wonderful production of *Twelfth Night*. Is that it? Derek Jacobi? Do I really imagine the body of the Countess? Am I even interested in the body of the Countess who can't even understand that this is the body of a buxom young woman and not a boy that's she's—I mean, come on. The body? It has nothing to do with what I understand as psychology. Let's not say psychology. What I call the way real bodies behave in the world. This is a poet painting a picture of the world. You know what I'm getting at?

**BOGART:** But an actor who was playing that would have to find a body that would speak those words.

**JONES:** Okay. Fair.

**BOGART:** Which is different. My problem with choreographers who do theatre—and it's not with you.

**JONES:** I hope it isn't. You haven't seen the latest thing.

**BOGART:** I haven't seen *Fela!* yet. Is that choreographers who say they're going to direct, often forget they have choreography. And that's a big mistake, and I always long then for choreographers to use their choreography.

**JONES:** Yeah, but particularly when it's going to be a commercial work—and that's my quandary now.

**BOGART:** We have now moved into the Renaissance section now, ladies and gentleman. We are in the Renaissance.

**JONES:** Well, if you're going to do choreography, and I'm trying to make a show that is driven by the logic of dance and even more, Afro-beat logic. What is an Afro-beat concert like? Fela Kuti. Here you come into a room and the air is thick with the smell of people smoking pot. There's this air of all these things going on inside and outside. There's this man who is part rock star, part Yoruba priest, part just plain crazy person who happens to be a brilliant musician. And this shrine is his bully pulpit, his temple of transformation, all these things. And you want to capture—its chaos. It's chaos in there. Now, first of all, to do Broadway, you need a story. Now we've got to come up with a story. What's his conflict? And we need to know that in the first 11 minutes. Because what's going to keep them watching this?

**BOGART:** And that's why you hired Jim Lewis to write the book.

**JONES:** No. Jim and I worked together on the book. Because just like I'm talking to you right now, Jim comes in and he says, "What did you say?" And he writes that down and that goes into it. That's how we do it. And Stephen Hendel, who is our producer, loves Fela, and he has a lot of ideas about the music.

**BOGART:** He brought *Fela!* to you?

**JONES:** It was his idea.

**BOGART:** So it's again, not your idea.

**JONES:** No, no, no. I'm telling you. I am in waters I've never swum in before.

**BOGART:** Excellent.

**JONES:** But you know what I'm getting at. You need an "arc," quote. The theatre experience—people need to see a transformation on the stage. Anyone ever seen a Merce Cunningham concert? Well, the transformation happens every 50 seconds. And, in theory, Merce could take the ending of the piece and it could be the beginning of the piece.

**BOGART:** And he does.

**JONES:** And he does. But if you do that in your world, then you're told, "You know, it had a lot of good energy, but it was so shapeless. I couldn't understand how to care about the protagonist." Okay, now you're saying, "Bill, be humble. Because you're not in your world anymore. For some reason you weren't satisfied over there in the dance world. You're in a world that has its own expectations and—now, listen. What are they telling you?" This relationship with his mother. I had this idea she would never be on the stage. She's already departed. She would be a shadow evening until the very end. "Well, that device was so intellectual because I couldn't feel the relationship. I need to feel their proximity, because this is theatre after all." In other words they want me to have a scene where he looks in his mother's eye and he cries.

**BOGART:** The "they" again is?

**JONES:** Well, who is the they? Who is that they?

**BOGART:** I'm asking you.

**JONES:** Probably some of them in this room. You know? The producers. The journalists. The other artist people who have their own experience in the theatre. I must admit, not to be boorish about this, but there are so many people who could tell you what is not working, and yet why do so many of them fail? Thank you very much. Hope you're applauding after opening night of *Fela!*—because to stay free as a choreographer is what you're saying, but I don't think you can be free like that. Unless you're doing—and I think there are people making close-to-the-ground, very personal theatre in this room, I suspect. But then if you're going to try to go into a production that you already know up front is costing \$11 million—right?—and you know you're dealing with the union. I'm doing what you say has been happening all week. So now going there and today I've decided that we're just going to throw out this whole script and we're just going to dance this section and we'll put a program note in and it's going to fly in the Broadway theatre. Maybe it will. But there's so much second guessing.

**BOGART:** So this is, in a sense, you choosing the renaissance section of this discussion, which is you're not staying in the dance world, and I think every time you switch frameworks, you're dealing with a whole different set of rules—and literally rules like union rules, unspoken rules—and how you find freedom in that is the deal.

**JONES:** And being—showing enough humility to know that I have a learning curve everywhere I go.

**BOGART:** And somehow despite all that there's a personal expression and connection to the material.

**JONES:** I'm having a difficult time calling the work that I do for the commercial theatre my work. Maybe it's just a psychological protection, you know. I've been making work now for 30—well, the company is 25 years, but I've been at it longer than that, more than 30 years. I know something about what that is. I know what it's like to start with nothing, an empty room and build something. And now you walk into a room where there is all of this. I would always say that is work for hire. You're doing this because that's supposed to give you the means to do what you really do. That's what I thought maybe a couple of years ago. Now I have—everything has got to be hotwired to what I call “the Hallelujah spot,” those two spots. It has to be really good when it connects, right? Then something comes out that you couldn't imagine. It could be a phrase in the studio or some connection. And now that's supposed to happen and it's supposed to sell tickets.

**BOGART:** It's just a bigger problem?

**JONES:** Is it? I'm trying to learn how to solve it. Because I know how to do the one.

**BOGART:** I think the wider the framework you're in, the more you have to concentrate on that Hallelujah spot more intensely and let go of a lot of other things. You actually have to intensify. Because you can't control everything. There's no way. It's so huge.

**JONES:** Okay, well, what about that critique: “I need a stronger arc. We need a narrative.”

**BOGART:** I'm going to tell you my trick.

**JONES:** Please.

**BOGART:** How to receive criticism. Which goes like this: If the person or people criticize your work and you feel furious when they say it—they're right. And if they criticize you, and you feel nothing, they're wrong. The body is a barometer, and I find it very useful because it completely removes you from taking it personally. Your body tells you whether it's true or not. Otherwise you get very confused.

**JONES:** Well, let's talk about that, Anne, because that's very—thank you for that. I'm a bit of a mad person. Everything affects me immediately emotionally.

**BOGART:** We have just moved in the Revolution section.

**JONES:** Is it? I don't think revolutionaries can afford to be as thin-skinned as I am.

**BOGART:** Absolutely. You need thin skin. We were talking about that before we came out here today—ambition and what that means. The world demands, needs to see this thing I'm doing. And that takes a certain amount of asshole-ness.

**JONES:** Chutzpah.

**BOGART:** And anger. And I think revenge is good in the mix.

**JONES:** It's true.

**BOGART:** If it gets you through the day.

**JONES:** I don't know if this story is apocryphal or not, but I had read some years ago that they asked Georgia O'Keefe—you know the great myth of her being out in the '20s alone for months at a time doing those paintings that had to find an audience, and they asked her years later when she was the great lady, "How did you keep going?" And she said, "Well, I think it was out of spite." She said that she kept going out of spite.

**BOGART:** And that's exciting to me because of the discussion—you haven't been around in the past two days, but listening to how to get through these next few years, and I think spite is great.

**JONES:** Well, no, I'm on a diet of positivity right now. I think I used up my negative emotions.

**BOGART:** We'll see. You're going back into rehearsal when for this Broadway show?

**JONES:** I tell you, I have seen something, Anne. The tricks that worked for that 33-year-old dude who could throw tantrums and throw chairs and all that—you know, they're much more costly now. Jim always encourages me—sometimes they need to get their ears set back. But you can't make a regular diet out of it, which is what has happened to me as I'm no longer dancing, and I am more anxious and feeling inadequate and all those things—is that I'm oftentimes letting it hang out too much. "I'm demonstrating to this people what it means to be free! I'm free to be asshole at this moment because there's something I need to happen." No, no, no. You're not allowed to do that.

**BOGART:** No, you're just adjusting. You're not the same person you were 20 years ago. You're not.

I looked at my watch and I realized that we need to open this up for questions. It's gone very quickly.

**JONES:** I talk too much.

**BOGART:** It's what you're here for. We have an opportunity to open this up. I wonder if anybody has a direction you want to take this conversation in. Maybe we could have

more lights. Yes. Hi Rachel. [question inaudible] The question is: What are the rest of the rules? Yes, I thank you for that.

**JONES:** But you have to realize that this is years of people thinking about what a well-constructed dance experience was—so it's hard to just say it in a series of rules. It depends. If you're interested—do you know Yvonne Rainer? That's the ur-text of postmodernism: Say no to audience manipulation. Say no to virtuosity performers. Say no to being moved or moving. There were a lot of “no”s back then. It was very doctrinaire. And then it became what we look for to be we are not theatre. What does it mean—we use gravity, space, time—pure elements that were the domain of dance. There's a whole list of what to say yes to, but I won't bore you with it. But if you're interested you might look at her work, and you might look at something like Sally Bane's *Terpischore in Sneakers*. There are two versions of it, one from the '70s, which is very much about postmodern dance, and then there's another one made afterwards when the young philistines like myself were allowed in. People were telling stories again. And, who else is a good theoretician right now? Movement research. If you go to movement research you'll see where the discourse is now around these issues of narrative, presentation, performance, and how it's changed since that moment back 30 years ago, 35, 40 years ago, when everyone was so young and they knew what was hip. “It was a small group of us over here who really knew what was going on. Everyone else had sold their souls for money, and it was called theatre. We're doing something pure over here, which is—which doesn't need large audiences.” They couldn't have foreseen this moment. So I hope that helps you—that's a short bibliography of what you might look at.

**AUDIENCE:** Hi Bill, hi Anne. Bill I want to challenge you actually a little bit on something you said. Thank you so much for your fabulous story. When you spoke about your rules of making choreography, I thought that was a fascinating process, and a lot of that chimed with how I approach making work, which starts off with movement, and starts off with emotionality, and the connection between bodies in space in the rehearsal room. Now any context—

**JONES:** You start out with emotionality, though, right?

**AUDIENCE:** That comes from the body.

**JONES:** Okay.

**AUDIENCE:** That comes from the body. There's no, “you're going to explore anger with somebody's...” We're just going to explore physicality and see where that takes us. Okay. Apparently I'm a theatre-maker, and I have a problem with the sectioning off of what something is—theatre, dance, so forth. So I'm excited by the notion of you talking about your past of making work and bringing that into the mainstage, into the commercial world.

**JONES:** Now you realize I was responding to Anne. She asked, “How do you start to make a work telling these stories about Lincoln.” I said we start with movement, and then

I talked about how movement has to start with a blank slate. What we didn't get to, which is the dicey part, which my critics are shooting at, which is: What is the connection between this interesting movement and this objective, or what is being talked about. Now that's where my struggle is right now, and that's why I need a dramaturg. That's why I need to understand about words.

I didn't let you finish. I just wanted to finish my idea. But please, what were you going to say?

**AUDIENCE:** Well, all I was going to say is that I don't use any words in the work that I make, and I think there is a over reliance on psychology and narrative, and I think that a commercial—I believe that a commercial audience can take more of what you would naturally want to do. I believe that you have to be bold about that, and I think that it's difficult, and I appreciate it.

**JONES:** Do you know the work of Fela Kuti?

**AUDIENCE:** No.

**JONES:** Go investigate Fela Kuti, and then say what you just said to me. Because my job is not only that they have to come into a theatre. They're probably paying over a hundred dollars a ticket. But they've got to understand why am I watching this crazy black man up on stage smoking pot and with all these women. He married 27 women in one night. Why am I listening to this repetitive music with these horns blasting? Why am I listening to his diatribes and his rage? All of that—so I have a lot that I've got to seduce you into in the first 20 minutes of the piece. I've got to make the case that he's somebody that you should want to know about. I've got to make that case that the music actually has something that—it may be alien to many people's ears. It's very abrasive. And I've got to make the case for his personality. And his personality—he's not a cuddly type. He's a megalomaniac. And I've got to actually hang this now, or I'm told, on something that is undeniable emotional payoff—"Ah, he and his mother. Genius!" The only person he really loved is his mother. Now we've got to work that line throughout the whole piece. This is where I'm at right now. So I have to use text. There is a lot of exposition going on. And it's got to be very clear about its musical—the fact is that this is a musician. No, it's not a modern dance concert. No. That's why I'm saying that I'm reluctant to call it my work. I'm trying to use my notions about time and space and sequence that come from dance—but this is not the kind of dance that I was explaining to Anne. No, this is very, very specific dancing. This way. And my associate choreographer, Maija, is brought in because she has a deeper understanding of African practice and Yoruba practice than I do. So all of that is happening in the work. It is not as free as someday I hope when I've earned my stripes and I no longer get things that have to do with the black experience. When I'm actually allowed to make something from the ground up for a commercial audience. I'm not there yet. I'm trying to sell something still.

**AUDIENCE:** I appreciate that. I appreciate that you have your hands tied as well, a bit. I understand. It's just a question of whether or not you can bring some of that in to the mainstream.

**JONES:** Oh, we're trying.

**AUDIENCE:** Hello. Anne, you opened this discussion by saying that postmodernism is over. So the deconstruction efforts are now being overshadowed, followed by what might be reconstruction. And Bill, you've been talking about a lot of cross-disciplinary efforts. Do you think that these efforts might be the direction in which post-postmodernism is defined?

**BOGART:** Absolutely. Crossing boundaries. Has to be. And I think that historically that's when the last massive cultural change happened around 1915 when Cubism, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle, discovery of the unconscious all happened at the same time. So science, arts, every innovation seems to crash into the other. So I think that this is the exact time to cross the boundaries, which is the exact time to not know who you are. Which is I think what you're feeling with *Fela!* You don't know who the fuck you are because you're not in comfortable territory. And I think it behooves all of us to live there if we want to see this next thing happen.

**JONES:** It seems to be the discussion in a lot of universities as well. I thought it was coming from the young, media-savvy generation of people who expect channels to change quickly, who really don't have a lot of time to give to any one thing—get it quickly, not need to go too deeply. I thought that's where that was coming from. It's expected that that's going to be mixed media, multimedia—what's the term? Multidisciplinary. There's been so many terms. Am I wrong about that? Isn't it coming from that?

**AUDIENCE:** That it's coming from the universities?

**JONES:** No, that it's coming from the people coming up.

**AUDIENCE:** This is, if I belong to that generation, this is exactly what I've been striving to find.

**BOGART:** Are you a Y-er or an X-er?

**AUDIENCE:** I learned yesterday that I am a Y-er. I've learned a lot about myself.

**AUDIENCE:** Bill, you did *Dream on Monkey Mountain* at the Guthrie Theater.

**JONES:** In 1994.

**AUDIENCE:** And now you're going on—I actually photographed it, that's why I know. And it was an unforgettable experience for me. And I'm wondering why going onto Broadway is a different experience than going onto the Guthrie stage—in terms of this narrative story.

**JONES:** Oh, I think at the Guthrie—at least it used to be, under Garland Wright. I don't know. I haven't seen productions in recent years. That was a place where people were looking for ideas. People were playing with form. New plays were developed there. I think that's—Broadway... Tony Committee, please, what I'm saying.... There's this feeling I have that I'm going to say something and turn somebody off. But I think—

**BOGART:** Heaven forbid.

**JONES:** No, no, no. Heaven forbid is true because there's a lot at stake. They think—people think they want the new. They don't really want the new. I don't think people are even being told that it's okay to leave the theatre and not feel like you understood it. And it's even good. There's stuff to learn. I don't know about you—but that's what I'm proud about the Baby Boomer generation. We were—I don't when you saw your first Bergman film, but I remember seeing my first Bergman film, and making sense out of what Andy Warhol was about, or making sense of John Cage. You know, making sense out of it. We were taught, “Now you're having an aesthetic experience.” “I was bored out of my mind,” I went complaining to the teacher. They said, “Ah. But. Did you remember it?” You know what? Yeah, I did. I realized that for years my most profound experiences were the ones I was most bored or alienated from. Now this is not a punch line. You're laughing. Don't you have that experience anymore? If you do that now, something is wrong with the work. Your timing is off. Now this is what “they” are always saying. There's no room to have a piece that is indeterminate on Broadway. Can I get a witness? Am I wrong here? All right, sir. Who has put an indeterminate, alienating work on stage—right?—and had it run and had it make back money—because that's the other thing. It is a commercial theatre. Nobody's asking you to come and make your masterpiece. You can go make your masterpiece at their community theatre where, if it's still getting any funding at all, you can do that. You understand what I'm saying. There's a big difference if you step into that stew—now step in with your indeterminacy intact. Now that's a challenge. And hopefully you're going to get farther than I'm going to get. I thought I was a badass. You could wander in there. I could do that. I thought I could work people through their breaks on Broadway. No! That union is standing right there. And what's more, if word gets around that, buddy, you are that way—you're fucked. You know what I'm saying. Am I sounding crusty? I'm bending under the weight of—what's the word? My therapist used to say success is conservatizing. Oh, did I hear a groan? Success is conservatizing, particularly in this world, in the world where we have to sell tickets. Sorry.

**BOGART:** This is the last question, then we have to move on to the closing.

**AUDIENCE:** I think I heard you say that you don't dance anymore, and I know I saw you dance several times today and it was beautiful and I would like to hear you describe what you mean by you don't dance anymore. And can I change your mind?

**JONES:** Yeah. Well, thank you. You're very kind. But I dance when the spirit moves me to dance. I am not dancing like my 21 to 30-year-old dancer, who is expected to be in class certain times a week, expected to be there all day working on, “What do we mean?”

Do we mean this? Or that? No, we mean that! Now do that 20 times.” My body is aching. I’ve been there. Now I want to go from the top and run it through again. And then we’re going to do this tomorrow. And then we’re going to go to hotel rooms in bad hotels and we’re going to be playing in places where the audience may be half full, and Bill’s going to be upset, and then people are going to be injured, but you have to do it. That body—your back is hurting from yesterday’s rehearsal, but to heck with that because you’ve got to get up there and do that. When I say dance, that is a professional dancer that I’m talking about—not a person who wants to dance because it feels good to do it. You know? And that is what—I’ll tell you something. For every Bill T. Jones you see here at age 57 who’s able to tell you what I’m doing, there is probably a couple of hundred of them who are bitter because they never had their moment. Their youth went away from them. They never got the reviews, the attention. They never had the opportunities. They thought they had this gleaming vision of what they thought dance was—freedom. And then nobody was interesting. No, no, no. I dance because it feels good. I don’t dance because I have to dance, which is what I expect my dancers to do.

**BOGART:** Thank you, Bill. Thank you so much.