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I'm going to begin this speech by doing something I don't intend to continue, and that's attempt to speak for my entire class. I feel justified in speaking for all of us when I address you, our families and friends, without whom we would simply not be who we are, and you, the faculty, staff, and administration of Bennington College who have inspired us these past years, and say how grateful we are that you are here celebrating with us. Thank you, and welcome.

Much of my work at Bennington has been concerned with building structures. These structures are conditions within which people work do things. Sometimes, a structure might be complex and formal – like a play that has specific lines that you have to say and a story that you have to tell, or very open and informal – perhaps just a place and simple rule like not using language. The reason I like to think of my work in terms of structures is that it provides for a delicious openness. I might choose what the structure will be, but there is no way I can anticipate what the result will be. Even if I design a structure with a particular outcome in mind, the complexity of the experience that emerges is impossible to anticipate before hand. It occurs to me that a Bennington education can be viewed as a structure in this sense. It is a very complicated one, involving a plan process, living together in small houses, a location tucked amongst Vermont mountains, as well as many other elements. We have now all passed through this structure, and I feel fairly safe in imagining that our experience was not one we could have anticipated on entering. In the

structures derived from the teachings of the great Polish master theatre artist Jerzy Grotowski, one finds a period after a structure called the “hunker.” Grotowski’s structures generate tremendous amounts of physical and emotional energy. Much like the structure we have just experienced, they are designed to push one through one’s perceived limits, to find and transcend where fear and closure is holding back one’s abilities. Grotowski believed, as I have come to as well, that one’s intellectual, emotion, and spiritual life is deeply tied to the experience of the body. [ *Demonstration of hunkering position*) Hunkering is usually done in a position where the spine is extended, like this. In this position, the information in my legs, my arms, or my mind can use my extended spine like a highway – bringing to my awareness what I have just experienced, processing what I have just learned, noting how I have changed.] Unlike many of Grotowski’s structures, however, Bennington is not a solitary experience. It is a collective one, and as such I believe it requires a different sort of hunkering. We can’t close into ourselves, but must close in together around each other. The idea, though is the same as the individual hunker, to allow the experience of what has just happened to flow through us, to not categorize it only to put it away but to mark where it has left us changed both and individuals, and as a group. In my own work, we usually simply find a quiet place to be together and have some snicky-snackys (I am particularly passionate about this part – food is extremely important. I’ve tried it without and regretted it). I can’t take credit for designing this particular situation, but I find striking similarities between this event and my application of a collective hunker. Here I am together with many of the people with whom I have experienced this structure. We’ve even had some snicky-snackies. I propose, then, to use this opportunity to begin our own collective

“hunker.” I have no illusions of replacing the serious work we all will have to do in processing this work individually over the next months and years. What I hope to do – here and now – is begin to ask the question: To what did this Bennington education structure give rise? In the spirit of the hunker, allow me to say two things that come to mind.

First, the experience of doing something for which one is altogether unprepared. It is strange that I never noticed the boldness of being asked at 18 and 19 years old, to create an education for myself – seeing as many intelligent people have been debating for centuries how to do this. If this did not seem unusual in my college search, it certainly did once I was in the midst of the process. Somehow, this feeling seemed to be a part of what Bennington has been. I call to mind a particular experience of mine in my Directing I class with Jean Randich. This is a wonderful class in which one isn’t taught how to direct, but is asked simply to do so from the first day. We were all working on scenes from Chekov’s *The Seagull* and we all acted in each others scenes. Near the time when we were to present the scenes, Jean did something, perhaps unintentional, but nevertheless brilliant. She left for a week. As a class we worked along, and on her return tried to hide our exhaustion and lied that everything was going “great.” This is not to say that Jean or Bennington do not offer help and support as we try to make our way, but that at some point, inevitably, we found that the time for us to act had come and there was no way in which we could have prepared. One could call this process simply “learning by doing,” but I think it is more than that. It is a forced necessity to trust oneself to delve into the unknown that seems to be a fundamental result of Bennington structure. What

this experience will mean for us, I'm not so quick to say. Perhaps it will enliven us a boldness to tread where our inexperience might otherwise have made us fear to, perhaps it won't. The experience, however, was a powerful one, and its recurrence in my own experience and that of my fellows suggests that it is thematic. That exhilarating and terrifying free-falling type of experience has emerged from this structure, and seems to in some way to have defined it.

Aside from this first observation, finding the emerging elements from this structure seems hard because everyone has had such a unique experience. This observation is worth remarking in itself. The defining goal for which we are all here is collective only in the vaguest sense. We are all here do something along the lines of educating ourselves, but what this actually means is as varied as the personalities that make that make up this community. The result, in my experience, was an unusual kind of *communitas* – one in which our communal passion was passion itself. The bonds we formed were less about how to help each other to reach a common goal, but with to each other as individuals. Because we were here in the exercise of our passions, in pursuit of the ideas and questions most vitally important to us, and because we were doing this all together in a relatively small place, we found ourselves frequently vulnerable, frequently unable to hide the overabundance, of hope, fear, excitement, disappointment, weakness, and love we were feeling from each other. When, for example, I came swaggered into the dining hall flush with the excitement of having talked my way into a class I very much wanted to take but didn't exactly have the prerequisites for, you were there. When, at 1 am, I was in despair that my paper, which was due tomorrow, would ever turn out

right, you were there. When tragedy struck this campus and I needed someone to be with, you were there. When the tension of work began to take its toll, you were there when I started giggling uncontrollably about something that in retrospect, wasn't very funny. And when you did these things, I was there. These situations came about because you really wanted to get into that class or make that paper the best it could be. The result was the bond of friends who have shared their deepest secrets. This unique community seemed to enliven our boldness – to spur us to greater leaps of creativity, vulnerability, intellectual daring, and expressions of joy, sadness and love. In the classroom we channeled together our varied passions and struggled together, challenging each other. Outside of class we played together like children, comforted each other in times of sorrow, supported each other, took pride in each others accomplishments and were sorry for each others disappointments. That a group of people can come together with little in common but a passion for learning, an openness to ideas and a hunger for life could generate the kind of outpouring of life, joy, and love, with which I have been overwhelmed in these past years – what a powerful sign of the hope that is. And as I extend my spine to hunker, it is this experience which rushes through with the most abiding power -- and it is this experience that I know I will feel quivering in my vertebrae for as long as I live. And I am grateful to be able to be amongst you, with whom I have shared this experience and to have the opportunity to say – with all my heart:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.