



THE ART OF DISARMAMENT
PAUL CHAN IN CONVERSATION WITH KATHY KELLY
CREATIVE TIME AND *THE ATLANTIC* DAY OF IDEAS

November 18, 2006

South Court Auditorium

New York Public Library

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ANNE PASTERNAK: Can you hear me? Oh, you can. How's that, can you still hear me? Hi, I'm Anne Pasternak, I'm the president of Creative Time, and I want to thank all for being here on a November Saturday afternoon, to hear Kathy Kelly and Paul Chan. I want to give you a little background about why we're here, it's a real thrill, actually, to be working with my colleague and friend Paul Holdengraber, who is the head of public programming here at the New York Public Library, and also I want to acknowledge his fantastic team, Meg and Kim and everyone else. We started working together a year ago last fall, I think it was, just a year ago now, with Jenny Holzer doing projections on the façade of The New York Public Library, and it was such a great experience, what a remarkable institution to be working with, and we decided we'd like to come indoors, it's cozier in here, and to be a part of the New York Public Library's LIVE program would be certainly an honor. So we're launching a future series of programming here tonight, and it's an honor to do so.

I want to tell you before I hand the floor over to Paul Chan and to Kathy Kelly, a little bit about each of them. Recently, in the *Village Voice*, describing Paul Chan's work, Jerry Saltz poignantly said, "For an

instant, everything splinters, the screen becomes a hanging sculpture, the picture disappears, near and far blur, and perception becomes abstract. This momentary rapture—rupture—and rapture!—produces the remarkable sense that you may actually be perceiving how a work of art achieves meaning, rather than grasping what it means. That somehow you’ve slipped into an unstable space where certainly is being dismantled.” Those kinds of dismantled spaces and states of not knowing and instability are subjects which Paul Chan has been working on through his art for quite some time now. I first knew about Paul because a professor of his at Bard University said to me, “Anne, you must meet a student of mine, I think he’s the most genius student I have ever had.” That was Michael Brenson. So I just set you up, Paul, to impress.

And it’s not just Paul as an artist that we’ve come to love and admire, it’s also Paul as citizen of the world. Paul as activist, if I’m allowed to use that word. I want you to know that Paul has been exhibited widely for the past several years, as a young artist he’s already had remarkable opportunities to show at institutions such as the Museum of Modern Art, the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, he was in the Carnegie International, the Whitney Biennial this last time around, and Paul, it is great to have you here with us today.

And it was Paul’s desire to speak with a good friend of his, Kathy Kelly, who for three times now, has been a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Kathy was a teacher in Chicago, I think both public schools and community colleges, and she’s had a very colorful past and present, to say the least. Kathy, I seem to recall that you planted cornfields on a nuclear test site, and were arrested and served federal prison time for nine months, for that. And since that time, which I think might have been in 1988, if my memory serves me, she’s been very involved in peace work throughout Iraq and other places, Central America, I think, included. She’s a co-coordinator and founder, I believe, of Voices for Creative Nonviolence, her work focuses upon ending the war in Iraq, both in its military and its economic forms. A former UN Humanitarian from Iraq describes Kathy as “an extraordinary woman, known as Missiles in a US federal prison, and recognized as an American friend in the slums of Baghdad and in Basra. Kathy Kelly shows her love of others, and her commitment to nonviolence, by standing courageously with ordinary yet threatened people of America, Haiti, and Iraq.”

She's long been active in the Peace Team efforts. Kathy participated in the Gulf Peace Team of 1991, in Bosnia in 1992 and 1993, in Haiti in 1994. In 1996 she co-founded Voices in the Wilderness, a campaign of civil disobedience to challenge US-UN economic sanctions imposed against Iraq, and Kathy has traveled over 20 times to Iraq, to build personal relationships and to challenge US policies. She's also organized over 70 convoys to Iraq and has brought both toys and medicine to the people of Iraq. So, Kathy, it is a pleasure to have you and Paul in dialogue, you have a special relationship, we look forward to hearing about it. But before we do, some brief housekeeping, I want you to know that we're going to start with a ten minute video, and then they'll be forty minutes of conversation between Kathy and Paul, and then we're going to have our musical cue. Will you give me the musical cue? Just because I like to be up here and hear it!

(first notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony)

Now you guys know what it sounds like. And then we'll open the discussion up for questions and answers with the audience. So thank you, and I give you Paul and Kathy.

(applause)

PAUL CHAN: We'll start with a screening. It's just an excerpt of works that I thought would be appropriate, to sort of visually frame the evening. And then Kathy and I will talk about whatever we want to talk about tonight for forty minutes. So, can we lower the lights on the stage, and we'll start the ten minute screening, and then we'll go on from there. Thanks for coming.

(video screening)

PAUL CHAN: So we were watching this and you said something to me. What did you say?

KATHY KELLY: There was a point at which we were seeing a scene familiar to anybody who had gone over to Baghdad during the times when we went to bring medicines in violation of the economic sanctions. A sort of standard visit was to al-Mutanabi Street, which was a place where the intellectuals

gathered and they put all their books out on the sidewalk and almost—as long as it wasn't pouring rain they could always reliably be there. It's not possible anymore. It's closed down.

PAUL CHAN: Who closed it down? What happened to the street?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think probably for security it wasn't possible for people to stand outside there and to be so evident and to show their connection to places outside Baghdad.

PAUL CHAN: I was so struck, 'cause when I went with you to Iraq in 2003, when I first walked down that street it was really—it was the *books*, it was—I'd never seen books being sold on the street like that, laid out, and it was such a beautiful day, and what I realized was the rhythm and the movements of the sheets of paper flying through, you know, and it's sort of haunted me ever since, seeing all these books flapping in the wind as you were walking down the street, and I realized also how *diverse* the books were. It was French books, Arabic books, Chinese books, from civil engineering books to mathematic books to a book by Rimbaud, I was just so *shocked*, really, you know?

KATHY KELLY: I lived in Basra for a summer, and there was *one* book in the whole house, it was really a magazine, but it had been read over and over and over again, the pages were all kind of worn out. I think there is tremendous pride, but it's actually your animation of the shapes coming apart and the kind of sinister weapons coming in that I think speaks maybe more clearly to what's happening in Iraq today, but it's just so easy to forget about it all, to back away, we *can't* go in there, we can't see. If you went to visit anybody you went to visit before the Shock and Awe invasion, you'd put their lives in danger, so I think there's a sort of an entrapment, and it's a bit like thinking about Lynne going off to prison—Lynne Stewart—that you just disappear, and there's a kind of a throw-away-the-key mentality, perhaps. The closing of that street, I think, in fact is a good symbol for what's happening to so many people in Iraq today, who just have to say good-bye, say good-bye to a life and a history and a culture, and they didn't ask for any of it, they didn't do anything to bring it on themselves, I don't think.

PAUL CHAN: Let's back up a bit. And I think I knew you—when did I meet you? I met you in Iraq, but before that, I knew you through a punk-rock magazine, named *Punk Planet*, run by a good friend of mine, Dan Sinker, and I used to write articles about the Teamsters for him in Chicago, and he had a real

political streak, so he would, and Jeff Guntzel—is Jeff here? Jeff? Oh, he didn't even make it. In any case.

KATHY KELLY: Well, plug his website anyway.

PAUL CHAN: In any case, Jeff Guntzel was the one who was writing articles about you and Voices for *Punk Planet*, and then I met Jeff and he convinced me, two hours after a bad Mexican lunch, to go to Iraq as part of the Iraq Peace Team, but you guys started in 1996. Can you talk a little bit about your work previous to '96 and then what made you want to start Voices in the Wilderness? Which is actually now defunct, now, which is now disbanded, and we should talk a little bit about that as well. Yeah, what prompted you to start the group in '96 in Chicago?

KATHY KELLY: Well, the question for me is why did we wait so *long*? I was very persuaded by a fellow named Ammon Hennacy who had once said, “You can't be a vegetarian between meals, and you can't be a pacifist between wars.” And it's easy to say, “Okay, I don't include weapons in my personal budget, I'm a war-tax refuser, I haven't paid since 1979, I've done my year in prison for planting corn on the nuclear missile silo sites,” but it seems to me that when we are so readily sending off eighteen-, nineteen-, twenty-year-olds, who haven't had a chance to live their lives, who many of them haven't had a whole lot of other options, and *they* can go off to war zones, isn't there some chance that if the people who would very much like to see an alternative might themselves go into the war zones and try to—to better understand what's happening, this would open up some space—there might be some possibilities that would come out of that. There haven't—I think the Peace Team concept is like a little two-year-old learning how to walk at this point, so I joined a Peace Team in 1991 and we were parked on the Iraq side of the Iraq-Saudi border, and then I came back to the United States in August and I didn't really have any kind of a footing in the academic world, in terms of commentary on the Middle East, I didn't speak Arabic, I certainly wasn't an expert, there were other things to become involved in. And so Iraq receded more and more in my own mind, and I suppose for those of us who'd been over there, either before or during that first Gulf War, if we weren't paying much attention to the economic sanctions, who did we think would?

And those sanctions kept going, from 1992 'til 19—well, they started in August 1990, but what I mean is after the war had ended, I think Iraq went off of almost everybody's radar screen. But then the United Nations workers that were doing some of the studies of infant mortality were suggesting that it could be that there were as many as 500,000 children under the age five who had died because of the economic sanctions, so *finally* a number of us thought well, we could try, we could try to do something, and then realizing we couldn't be a humanitarian relief group, we could do what we do know how to do, which is to defy laws that we believe we don't want to be governed by. So we did. We just decided that we would bring medicines and medical relief supplies. We never talked about toys, really, because it was such a grave situation, we wanted to be taken seriously as people that were going ahead with something that was desperately needed, and that we'd just go to Iraq, and I think that people in governing circles in Iraq were so isolated by then, that they may have thought, "Well, you know, we don't know who these people are, we probably would execute them if they were in *our* society trying to break laws, but let them come and maybe sic them on somebody we don't like," it might have been that that's about as much credibility as we had when we first went.

But this is something that I think is important. If you wait 'til you're perfect, you'll wait a long time. We know that in our personal lives, and we certainly were flawed, and imperfect, and clumsy, and stumbling, all of the adjectives you could think of to describe a *very* motley crew, but we *did* build relationships. I mean, it just happens. You start to meet people, you can't be a good judge of character all your life long and then all of a sudden it suspends because you've crossed a border, so in particularly through a mutual friend of ours named George, we began to meet the extended families of some people we'd gotten to know—

PAUL CHAN: George Capaccio?

KATHY KELLY: George Capaccio, yeah.

PAUL CHAN: Oh, really?

KATHY KELLY: So that's how it began to grow, and it always should have been, really, a small organization, because we worked out of my apartment, a three-bedroom apartment on the North Side of

Chicago. We were funded—I mean, in a way you could say we embezzled from my father’s pension and Social Security check, but we took very good care of him. **(laughter)** And we rubbed shoulders with some of the finest people in the world, and we had a great deal of I think respect and trust.

PAUL CHAN: But here’s a—I just want to back up for one second. There are *many* people who think, who think things are going badly, things will go wrong, in many parts of the world. I mean, even in our country, New Orleans becomes one of those places where things go terribly wrong. Man-made disaster, natural disasters on top of man-made disasters, and there are so many ways to engage. Giving to the Red Cross, giving money, going to events, and things like this, but you guys in ’96 decide to go to Iraq, which is fairly *radical*, still to this day. I mean, I remember telling my friends and family that I was going to go with you guys and the first—they *ignored* it. They didn’t say anything, they wouldn’t even comment, it was as if I was just *whistling*, because it was beyond the pale of what they imagined an appropriate response might be. So, at what point, like what made it possible, what made it possible for this kind of response, going to Iraq, breaking federal *law*, which now we’ve been convicted of. What made it possible as opposed to impossible, you know. I think of that—I think of that graffiti that was graffitied around France in May of ’68 that said, “Be realistic. Demand the impossible.” And in a way hearing you guys and knowing you guys going to Iraq, planning things around a kitchen table in ’96, thinking you’re going to go to Iraq to do something, that’s fairly radical. At what point did you, like, jump off the cliff?

(laughter)

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think it was—in fact, for me it was knowing the two women, they might have each weighed about 103 pounds, they were in their late sixties, they were religious nuns, Anne Montgomery and Eileen Storey, and you know, little backpacks on their back, and quavering when they came back, saying, “It’s *really* bad over there.” And there was a sense that there wasn’t anybody else who was going to cut in line in front of us and say, “We’ll take care of that.” I think I know some of the most *kindly* stubborn people in the United States. And there was a *good* sense of stubbornness. When people say, “That’s off-limits,” I know some people who will say, “Who *said*?”—and take a bit of a risk in that regard, and also if somebody says, “Well, if you do that, you might incur on yourself a great fine,” well, most of the people who went hadn’t paid their taxes in decades in the beginning, and so we’d

just kind of say, “Well, add it to the tab.” So we always said—we didn’t mean to be rude—we’d always say to our local U.S. Attorney and to anybody who’d listen at higher levels, that we understood—we thanked them for the clarity of the warnings, we said we wouldn’t be governed by unjust laws. We invited them to join us if they wanted to, and then if we were threatened with prison, most of us had already done jail time, too. So it’s good not to be governed by fears, we know that.

I think what’s very troublesome is when *whole* societies and cultures—and we see this in our own country, with Katrina, which I know is so much on your mind now, Paul, and on my mind always, every time I leave a prison, I feel like I’ve left a huge crime, and I’m walking away, and I know that it’s just like when you come back from a Third World country, it takes eight seconds to readjust to electricity, right? You know that you’re going to get so adjusted to not having to do four o’clock count and not having any question about when you can pick up the phone or be able to walk freely, well, there are so many people trapped by causes that have *everything* to do with the way we live our lives, with our comforts, with what we take for granted, but it’s just obscured and far away, and I think it’s to our *detriment* if we don’t try to break those barriers and cross those borders and be stubborn, and say, what the First Amendment, I suppose, has said that we *should* be able to do, to assemble peacefully for redress of grievance. We’ve got these great grievances, but sometimes you have to know people face to face and be able to say, “This is what we’ve seen and heard,” to constitute what the grievance is which in my opinion often is that we *don’t* want to keep killing people. How can we learn to live together without killing one another?

PAUL CHAN: You were coming—you’re based in Chicago, but you were just in Georgia. You want to tell people what you were doing in Georgia?

KATHY KELLY: I started out in Alabama, a group of people walking toward Columbus, Georgia. We’re trying to reenact the Selma-to-Montgomery marches of the civil rights era. I think there were some disappointments interwoven in that. It didn’t become as big an occasion as people had hoped. But the reason for heading toward Columbus is because there is a school at Fort Benning, Georgia, tucked inside the huge Fort Benning base, which *does* train people, and you can see it in manuals that were used formerly, but mainly in consulting a list of the graduates of this school and people who have been convicted of some of the worst crimes against humanity in Central and South America. This place, The

School of the Americas is what it was formerly called. They changed their name, also, but they haven't become defunct. Now it's called the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security. And out of that school have come people who were responsible for assassinations, kidnappings, murders, disappearances, massacres. And so every year people congregate. This year I am sure there will be twenty thousand people there today. And I never went to Woodstock, I was sort of always the nerd, but this probably has a Woodstock-y feel to it, you know, it's a beautiful sunny day in Columbus, Georgia. The base people are very familiar with this now as something that on Sunday will transform into a completely silent funeral procession, and people carry a cross bearing the name of someone who was killed by a graduate of this school in Central or South America. All the names are sung out and then the word *presente*. And usually thirty to fifty people will cross the line. And as soon as you cross the line carrying that cross, you know you're going to get three months or possibly six months, if it's the second time doing so, in federal prison.

PAUL CHAN: How many terms have you served for working at SOA?

KATHY KELLY: Just one for me.

PAUL CHAN: How long was it?

KATHY KELLY: I had served three months in Pekin Prison in the spring of 2004.

PAUL CHAN: 2004. You know, before, I know on my list of things I want to ask you about is about prison work. But what I wanted to talk to you a little bit more about is the other defunct group that you mentioned—Voices in the Wilderness—what happened to us?

KATHY KELLY: Well, what happened to us is that initially we were threatened with twelve years in prison, a one-million-dollar fine, and a \$250,000 administrative penalty, and that has shrunk quite a bit. It came down to—

PAUL CHAN: For breaking sanctions.

KATHY KELLY: Yeah, for bringing medicines over to Iraq. Now that ended up being a twenty-thousand-dollar fine, and Judge Bates wrote on page eighteen of his opinion a quote from the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in which Dr. King said, “those who break an unjust law should do so openly, lovingly, and with the willingness to pay the penalty,” and so we wanted to say, “Well, if you want to put us in jail, we’ll go openly and lovingly, we’ve tried to do that in the past,” and Paul, I know, would want to come right with us, **(laughter)** “but we won’t pay one *dime* to help support warfare that we think was unprovoked and belligerent and continues to kill innocent people,” so that’s where it stands right now. This twenty-thousand dollar fine is hovering. We really *don’t* want them to take money out of a bank account that we would run, so we ran down the bank account to just about zero. But we didn’t want to walk away from concerns of people in Iraq. I know that would be a hideous thing to do at this point or from continually trying to challenge the United States’ militarism in general at home and abroad, so we formed Voices for Creative Nonviolence. We’re from Chicago and this is what the Mafia does.

(laughter)

PAUL CHAN: When I heard that was what happened, I don’t mean to curse, but I told Danny, a mutual friend who coordinates for Voices, I said, “This must be the big fuck-you move,” because they convict a group and you just disband and start another group. Yeah, I guess it is like the Mafia, isn’t it?

(laughter)

KATHY KELLY: Well, I mean, if we’re going to do pat lines, I would give money to the Mafia sooner than I would give it to the United States government at this point, **(laughter)** because of what the government is doing with U.S. wealth and productivity. I mean, 527 billion dollars invested into defense spending for many weapons systems that won’t even come into existence, some of them, until ten years from now, and you’re just back from New Orleans, and people in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina were left to float in the water and pull the corpses out themselves.

PAUL CHAN: Yeah, it was really—yeah, it was in lieu of a federal, state, and city response it was people getting together to fend for themselves. And it’s not as Darwinian as that sounds. I think that still

to this day it's Common Ground Collective is the only private all volunteer-based organization doing work of gutting houses in the Lower and Upper Ninth. There's nary a sign of response from FEMA or Red Cross. And I think it's both—it's tragicomic. I mean, Beckett's great word, the "tragicomic," is still with us in New Orleans and I certainly saw that in Iraq when we were there, too. People living their lives—not necessarily depressed, but it certainly has the weight and responsibility of feeling like they have to rebuild their society on their own and I think it's hard to watch, it's hard to look, and then to imagine what an appropriate response would be for someone who don't live in Iraq or who do not live in New Orleans. What can people do? Like what do you do? Besides, like, be melancholic or sad or angry, you know?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I don't have a lot of optimistic things to say right now with regard to Iraq. If it's all right, I'd like to maybe shift. I tend to have a very free schedule, I can go where I want pretty easily, especially—

PAUL CHAN: Because you have no real job.

KATHY KELLY: Because I have no real job, yeah. **(laughter)** So I went racing over to the third round of a trial in Dublin, a group of people whom I know, one of whom I knew quite well, had done two and a half million dollars worth of damage to a United States Navy warplane parked on the tarmac of Shannon Airport.

PAUL CHAN: With a hammer, right? They ran out and started banging on a plane. **(laughter)** That's *insane*, Kathy.

KATHY KELLY: So when they were working out their defense, with three of the finest barristers in all Ireland, who really wanted to get them off, they wanted to see an acquittal, the judge was saying, "Well, what motivated you?" And they said, "Well, we heard Kathy Kelly give a talk." **(laughter)** So this trial has fallen apart and fallen apart and fallen apart because judges have Irish tempers and other things. And so finally in this past summer, the trial was going full steam ahead. There was a woman as judge, and she allowed me in—she *only* allowed me in as the defense witness and that made me very, very nervous, and she said, "Well, Miss Kelly can speak to that," and of course I'm la fringe, and she had dismissed

Dennis Halliday with thirty-four years' experience at the United Nations as the Humanitarian Coordinator in Iraq.

So we were very, very anxious for these five, thinking they were going to face almost certain conviction and perhaps long prison sentences, but one of the barristers—well, all three barristers, in their summations, gave such brilliant oration that I think that is *really* what got them off. And one man, Mr. Nix, he said, “The problem isn’t, ‘Did these five have a lawful excuse to do what they did?’ The question is ‘What’s our excuse for not doing more?’” And he had begun by saying that—he was trying to make the point that these five acted in a faith-based way, not political, so he started, “The greatest political document of all *time* was the Sermon on the Mount, and the greatest *pacifist* of all time was Jesus,” and he started reading to this Dublin working-class jury the Sermon on the Mount, it was a very unusual approach. **(laughter)** And then he changed gears and he described a beautiful day in a London park, in fact it reminds me of some of your animation, Paul, where you know, the kids are humping each other, it’s beautiful, really. **(laughter)**

PAUL CHAN: Hey, I didn’t draw anyone humping, did I?

KATHY KELLY: That’s what the newspapers said.

PAUL CHAN: Oh, right. **(laughter)**

KATHY KELLY: But, anyway, it was a charming, wonderful day for him, the kids were chasing the ducks up the hill, the ducks were chasing the children down the hill, and then he, his face darkened, and he was *thundering*, and he said, “They’re bombing children in a swimmin’ hole in Lebanon, children are swimmin’ in a pool of their own *blood*,” and I honestly didn’t know what he was talking about, I had to run for the *Guardian* and read it that night. A swimming canal, I mean an actual canal, and a swimming hole in it had taken a direct hit during the Israeli-Hezbollah war and eleven children were swimming at the time, three of them were killed. And then Mr. Nix asked the question, “Would you not try, if you could, to stop a Hezbollah missile from slamming into a village in Northern Israel? Would you not try, if you could, to stop an Israeli missile from hittin’ a swimmin’ canal in Southern Lebanon? What will rise ya?” And I think that’s the kind of question—*we* were all on trial, it flipped it completely.

So I did go to Lebanon and saw just massive ashen heaps of rubble, you know, I stayed overnight in a house where there were three cluster bombs just in the garden outside the house. I'd had the idea to take all the broken glass we'd swept up and dump it in the garden, and, fortunately, this young man said, "No, my mother won't like that." Well, good thing, because in that garden were three unexploded cluster bombs. I mean, the devastation, the wreckage. But the thing that's so different from my other experience of being in war zones is that Hezbollah, and I wouldn't be equipped at all to have a long discussion on Hezbollah's past track record, but they did immediately start to stack up money that they very likely got because Iran had had a good year of oil-sales revenue, but they—twelve-thousand-dollar stacks of cash were distributed to each person in the suburb called the Dahia to begin rebuilding. People were directed: "Here is where you can go to get furniture. Here is where you can get your temporary housing," and as we watched it, those of us who were from the United States, we just were saying, "Wow, if these folks could give some advice to FEMA in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, that would be quite a valuable thing."

So it *is* possible for people to take care of one another. It *is* possible for people to have the political will and the determination and to say, "We're going to rearrange our priorities," but it's *not* possible if we're kept so undereducated, so ill-informed, and so caught up in—there's this rat race, you know, the mandatory shopping and the mandatory activities that we all have to pay attention to in our society, we really *lose* a lot, I think.

PAUL CHAN: Do you—a lot of these ideas that you're talking about come through—you know, I don't know if people know, but you write, as well as travel a lot, because you don't have a full-time job, and you go around to different trials, and so a lot of your ideas come through these writings that you do. A lot of your writings are on *Counterpunch*, you have a book out called *Other Lands Have Dreams*, and I think it's interesting to hear you talk about these ideas through these stories and experiences, and I think here's at this point where I wanted to talk to you a little bit about your work in prison, your prison work. I started reading your columns in *Counterpunch* and other places about your experience at the Pekin Prison, you know, it was certainly documented in the book, and it just behooves me to sort of ask you about your experience in prison, and also your perspective on how that becomes a kind of creative nonviolent work, a kind of civil disobedient work, because, like how what you talked about, the sort of

imaginative jump of imagining, “What if we can learn from Hezbollah? And what can FEMA learn from what they’re doing or not doing down in New Orleans?”

It’s like they have these home-loan programs, and only less than a hundred people in New Orleans have gotten these loan programs, and it’s been more than a year now. This has been constant, this sense of bureaucracy, this kind of linking, right, this linking that stops things from actually moving on, so that it’s the *smaller* outfits that get in there and get things done, irrespective of how much money they have. These Common Ground folks, this collective called Common Ground, they’ve been down there since January, gutting houses, and when I was down there two days ago, it was run by like a twenty-three-year-old, from Colby College in San Francisco, Matt Sandin. And the neighborhood, I was just *shocked*, there was no other organization around in the Upper Ninth. Like, a twenty-three-year-old was running it, and thank God for twenty-three-year-olds, you know what I mean? But, in any case, can you talk a little bit about the Pekin Prison experience? And just the prison work in general and how it connects to creative nonviolence?

KATHY KELLY: Well, I think I’m preternaturally extroverted and probably pretty nosy, too, but in my last experience I couldn’t *help*, given where I was situated, on the top bunk right next to a bank of phones, I really couldn’t help but more or less eavesdrop on many, many telephone conversations, and something that surprised me was the repetitive, almost predictable, nature of these calls, and what it brings home to me is this very, very common experience of women who have seven, eight, sometimes *fifteen* years in prison, and they, you know, gear themselves up to make the call and then, you know, have timed it, have sent a postcard in advance asking the grandmother who’s with their children, you know, “Please have the kids home and near the phone at twelve noon on Saturday, that’s when I’m going to call,” and then, you know, the phone rings and you hear a woman, you know, after the tape says, “This is a call from a federal prison. This phone call will be monitored. If you wish to accept this call, press seven, if you wish to reject it, press five, if you wish to reject all future calls, press three,” just, the heart is beating—is whoever picked up the phone going to get it right or reject all future calls? And then you would hear a woman say, “Hi, are the kids there? They’re going to a birthday party, oh, and were they able to bring a present? I know, Mom, I know, Mom, you’re really hurting for money. Mamma, that’s why I called, I’m out of stamps,” and then it would be, “I’m out of yarn to knit an afghan for Grandma, and I don’t have enough money for shampoo, well it’s this new Pay to Stay Program.

Well, is there any chance that Uncle Robert could drive the kids to see me at Christmastime?” And, you know, when women would hang up the phone, regularly, I’d see a woman make a hairpin turn into a shower stall, into a bathroom stall, and then come out and her face would be tearstained, swollen, her eyes red.

But my regular experience was that the people that I got to know would find *some* kind of courage to put on whatever face was needed to face the remainder of the day after a very disappointing phone call, the remainder of the week, of the month, of the year, and of what often are eight-, nine-, ten-year sentences now. When I was in prison in 1988, if we saw a woman with a ten-year sentence, we’d all be whispering, and now it’s *not* unusual. I was there with three hundred women. Eighty-two percent had committed nonviolent crimes, mainly drug-related. Of that number, one-fourth had sentences of eight years or longer. And in the prison next door, you could watch the young fellows shuffling off the bus when they arrived, and they’re manacled and shackled at their ankles, and the median sentence length for the men’s prison, a medium-to-high security prison, was *twenty-seven* years, so these men would be youngsters when they walked in, and they’d be grandfathers when they walked out.

So people have to cope with society creating for them a kind of a new personality. I never knew anybody in prison who *wanted* to be a neglectful mother, who *wanted* to be separated from community and family for long lengths of time, with a terrible stigma, and with memories that she couldn’t erase and with almost nothing—nothing *touching* therapy. I mean, we were here earlier, many of us, for a *delightful* conversation about therapy, and all the wonderful things that therapy can do for individuals and for their romantic life, and their erotic life, and their relational life, and to do away with an artificial shortage of love; it was a challenging and a wonderful conversation. But believe me, once people go behind those bars, those prisons that you drive past and you see the cement wall and the barbed wire. There’s no therapy being offered for those people. There it’s just *punishment*, punishment, and more punishment. I was so glad to read that Richard Gere and his wife—Richard Gere, sorry, I’m—isn’t he a movie star?

PAUL CHAN: The Buddhist guy? **(laughter)**

KATHY KELLY: Yeah, the Buddhist guy. He's going to do a reading of writings from people in prison, here in New York, I think it's November thirtieth.

PAUL CHAN: The Buddhist guy? Really? **(laughter)**

KATHY KELLY: The Buddhist guy. But that's the kind of thing that can part the curtains a little bit. And when we've got these huge walls, at least get a gate, a door, some way to take a glimpse inside. The fastest-growing new industry in this country is the prison industry. And we *know* it's not an answer. You know, we can all say now, "Well, the Iraq War, that wasn't a very good answer, was it? No, that was a very bad answer, yeah that was a disaster, in fact." We all can say it about the War on Drugs and about the consequent locking up of so many people. But it's the throw-away-the-key mentality. The lives are already—which is why I was so drawn to that animation in the final showing, Paul—the lives are already broken apart. **(Beethoven's Fifth Symphony/laughter)**

So, why go into prisons? Well, it is an education. You *do* get a chance to catch some courage from some of the most *determined* people in the world, people who have decided, "My life is *not* going to be over, even though, you know, I've got eight or ten years trapped inside this prison." I think when we look at the environmental catastrophes that could be looming, you know, that we might like to wish away. But that's the greater—that's the real terror we all face—that's what requires so much newness, so much redesigning of our way of thinking, so much stepping outside of the box, so much liberation of ourselves, to really deal with the main problems that the next generations inevitably will have to cope with, and much of it, you know, inheriting *our* looting, *our* criminal behavior toward the planet. I don't want *anybody* to go to prison, but I *do* think we could all stand a lot of rehabilitation. So when you go inside a prison, you get to flip it a little bit, you get a chance to slow down and think hard and wonder, wonder about what a different world might look like. The first time I was locked up I learned Spanish, now I want to learn Arabic, so I think I *need* a ten-year sentence. And you don't feel so governed by fears, you don't feel so governed by fears. And really all the guards know that their prisoners are closer to *them* in many ways than the administration, or the judges, or some of the, you know, high-ranking legal authorities who have helped to design this system.

PAUL CHAN: Ass-kicking.

KATHY KELLY: We have to quit.

PAUL CHAN: Yeah, we do, that's the sound, but we'll take as many questions as we can before they kick us out, so if there are any questions for either of us, we'd be happy to take them.

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: There are mikes on either side.

KATHY KELLY: And we should also say our sincere thanks to the New York Public Library.

PAUL CHAN: Thank you for, and Creative Time, Anne Pasternak, yes, thank you. **(applause)** Are there any questions, I don't know if we need a mike, but if there are any questions we'd be happy to take them.

Q: Hi. I wanted to ask Kathy, I wasn't clear from the presentation if you had been back to Iraq since Shock and Awe, and I was wondering about the destruction of the museum and the cultural artifacts. I'm a public school teacher, too, and I know that no ancient history is really taught, say, in fifth grade in America, and this dumbing-down of culture, I feel like I don't want to—we've lost ten thousand years of history and I wanted to know if you know *anything* about the reconstruction of the museums, or what is being done? If they're locked up? I heard the library was burned to the ground and I was thinking about the books that were for sale. Do you guys know *anything*?

KATHY KELLY: You have here in New York Cathy Breen, in front, and I'll be leaving, but she's a New Yorker, and she's been back to Iraq and I, also, in the North of Iraq in May of 2006, this year, it wasn't possible for us to go into Central or Southern Iraq since 2004, we haven't been there. When we were in the—we were there during the Shock and Awe bombing, and when the Marines came in, it might have been a bit naïve of us, but we thought, "Well, we'll send Cathy over with our friend Ramsi with a little list of things that the Marines might need to know about where the hospitals are and where the clinics are and where there's some blankets being stored and where there is reportedly an outbreak of cholera in Hilla and the garbage hasn't been picked up for a month."

And you know, we'd had a friendly relationship with many of the young Marines stationed right outside where we were. But at one point, big, *huge* refrigerator boxes of rocket-propelled grenades are being removed from the art gallery right next door to us, and so finally we said to the Marines, "You might want to notice what's happening." They didn't *interfere* with the looting, but then when we told them, "You know, those are rocket-propelled grenades being looted," then they went over and boarded up the building. The *only* building to which they assigned any kind of protection was the Ministry of Oil, and so I think that the cards were played in a pretty clear way with that decision. It was just *unbelievable* to us that they didn't have a plan. When Cathy and others went over to talk about this outbreak of cholera in Hilla, Paul Bremer eventually came, but Jay Garner's group asked, "Well, is that a street in Baghdad?" and we said, "No, that's the second-largest city in Central Iraq." I think there was not at all a readiness to see Iraq thrive.

PAUL CHAN: Here in the front.

Q: My question is to you that what do you think about Iraq—are you really hopeful that there is going to be any peace or stability? Are you hopeful?

KATHY KELLY: In the near-term future. The question is am I hopeful that there will be peace and stability in Iraq? I think that it's a situation today in Central and Southern Iraq where chaos has started to prevail more and more on a daily basis. I have *some* hope that if the United States people would *demand* that the troops come home and that a generous package of reparations be entrusted—and I mean a *very* generous one, one that would be on a par with, let's say, the seven billion per month that's being spent to maintain the current U.S. military presence in Iraq. If the bases were shut down, and a package of reparations were made available, and the United States didn't try to say, "but *we'll* control that expenditure." If the United States would admit we are *uniquely* unqualified to be in charge of any reconstruction in Iraq at this point. And I think the United Nations is the only referee on the bench. So I don't know if I'd call it "hope," but I have certainly *read* statements that seem to suggest that there are some thinking people with compassionate hearts at the level of intelligentsia in this country. Certainly go hear Mark Danner when he speaks here in New York City.

Q: Thank you, and I want to add with this question that do you think that the last result and outcome of the election is going to change any U.S. policy to Iraq and it will make the situation any better?

KATHY KELLY: Well, there's a 166 billion-dollar appropriation bill that President Bush has requested, and I'm not aware of one Democrat other than Mr. Kucinich who's speaking up and saying that that money ought not be spent. I think that we *have* to acknowledge that the number-one lobby on Capitol Hill in this country is the defense lobby and that any elected representative that goes out on that limb with the saw behind himself or herself and thinks "I'm going to take them on," is certainly a very *brave* person, and I think we need to say to the elected reps, "We'll take risks, too. It's not just about you. *We'll* take risks. *We* don't want to be people known all around the world as an imperial menace and if we want to change that, it's going to take some very concrete steps."

"Congress shall make no law to abridge the right of people to assemble peacefully for address of grievance." You own those senators' and congresspersons' offices. They rent them and you pay the rent. So we should be in those offices. February fifth marks an anniversary in a sense of Colin Powell going before the world and the United Nations Security Council and saying that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Well, they didn't. And this was not truthful at all. The United States trespassed into a sovereign country and has created huge wreckage. So I think it's a *good* idea on that day, February fifth. We're beginning what we call the Occupation Project. And we want people not just to go one day to your elected representatives' office, go back again and again and again. You could sing the names of the people that have been killed, both U.S. and Iraqi. **(sings)** "Sergeant First Class Ryan Clancy, thirty-five years old, *presente*. Ahmed Mustafa, three years old, *presente*."

Present those names. Go in *wearing* the pictures. We'll give them to you. Have your pre-meetings and have the talking points worked out. And come together in affinity groups. This is *how we take* our freedom. You don't *get* freedom, you *take* it, you *exercise* it. And we *are* a country at war and I think that really there is a risk for the next generations if we don't *assert* ourselves **(Beethoven's Fifth Symphony)** as people who don't want to be an imperial menace. And I'm not a militant sectarian political representative of some—they wouldn't *have* me, those parties. I'm a pacifist. I'm a Catholic high school religion teacher. But we can think really hard about ways to go forward and *change* the situation that will really reflect very—in a most exceedingly difficult way—on next generations here.

PAUL CHAN: I think that second bell means Homeland Security's here— **(laughter)**

KATHY KELLY: I think that's the boot.

PAUL CHAN: So, I think we're going to have to end it. Thank you.

(applause)

PAUL HOLDENGRÄBER: Thank you very, very much.