2011 Guelph Jazz Festival Colloquium Panel with Cecil Foster

Writing Jazz: Gesturing Towards the Possible
Interview conducted by Paul Watkins

Transcribed by Elizabeth Johnstone
Edited by Paul Watkins

PW: So, this is the morning plenary. It's more of an interview, a discussion of wits, somewhat dialogic, with Dr. Cecil Foster, who is a Canadian novelist. You may also know him as an essayist, journalist, and scholar. He was born in Bridgetown, Barbados, where he began working for the Caribbean News Agency. You can read his autobiography, which was published around 1998 and is called *Island Wings,* which describes his experience of growing up in Barbados and eventually emigrating to Canada, which he did in 1979. He worked for the *Toronto Star,* as well as the *Globe and Mail*. He was also a special advisor to Ontario's Ministry of Culture. His most recent books, *Where Race Does Not Matter,* and *Blackness and Modernity,* explore the potentials for multiculturalism in Canada. Currently he is an associate professor of Sociology here at the University of Guelph, and hopefully today we'll talk about multiculturalism, as well as improvisation, and how those intersections may relate to his own writing process. Without further ado I introduce Dr. Cecil Foster.

CF: Good morning and let me say a special hello to all of my friends and colleagues, and people that will become friends and colleagues. It certainly is a pleasure to be here. I rather enjoy being here at Guelph. I have now gone through the ranks from assistant, to associate, to full professor, to end up being, one of the, I hope Ajay would consider me to be a writer. So I guess, I don't know if [Paul] had me in mind when he talked about someone who is kicking ass [laughs], but if I can get the proceedings going on with a bit of levity, as well as some serious considerations....

Now as an introduction let me take as a point of departure Houston Baker and his notions of black vernacular and ideology expressed in blues and jazz. This is the idea of a.) blues geography, and b.) the idea of motion (migration, trains, building new communities, finding a new home). This is Baker's notion that jazz/blues is the music of America–and I say by extension, of the Americas–and that the railroad, or the railway as we say south of the border, as central to this vernacular.

Then we can look at Canada and trace its development, and continued development, from its earliest times to official multiculturalism now. When you look back at the Royal Proclamation of 1783 that started all this national development, we see how transportation was so central to the development of Canada – for what started as the place to exploit Aboriginal resources became a home for peoples of the world looking for a just society. And we look at Canada through Confederation, where the railway was so central to the notion of a home – the railway "that ribbon of steel" that kept Canada together, that kept Canada humming.

Then we have that important motif of the Underground Railroad, and an entire language and code that goes with it, about dry goods and captains, and the idea of the early Canadian national pride and identity, one that is fostered in slavery. And we see the idea of blacks on the railroad, railway, hidden in the seminal works, such as *Two Solitudes,* and those smiling darkies faces on the trains of Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Small* [sic]*Town*. Then there is

Quinte Brown with his banjo, who one might argue is the main keeper of the history and claims of Canada, in A.R. Davis' important novel of 1908, *The Old Loyalist,* and which carries the subtitle: *A Story of United Empire Loyalist Descendants in Canada*.

And then we come into the era of official multiculturalism, and I contend it is hard not to hear it in those discussions the refrains and riffs and digressions from the Civil Rights Movement down South, but also in Quebec and in Halifax, and in Toronto, where blacks (whether they are Negroes or French "white niggers" of North America) are "in motion" traveling to a new land and new times. Again we think of Baker's motion, blues vernacular and blues geography, and hear the refrains of a new society in the liberation theology of James Cone in the *God of the Oppressed,* and in *The Spirituals and the Blues: An Interpretation*, and in Amiri Baraka's *Blues People: Negro Music in White America,* and in Ellison, and Wright, and Langston Hughes, and Toni Morrison, and Wideman, to name our pantheon. Of course, equally here in Canada we have people like Austin Clarke, Dionne Brand—one of our colleagues—and Larry Hill, George Elliott Clarke, all writing about searching for a home, for freedom, for full citizenship. Multiculturalism as blues/jazz, in its improvisation and intermingling, in its always gesturing to the new and the future promised land, to how we can make better what we already have, for the blues are just too much the blues. Much of this I have attempted in my academic work, *Blackness and Modernity: The Colour of Humanity and the Quest for Freedom,* in which I argue that multiculturalism is idealistically—and even culturally—blackness, and for me it is using the different cultures and bodies from around the world and working them, just as we would expect in a good jazz ensemble, where individuality and collectivity are always in tensions. I also look at this in my other book, *Where Race Does Not Matter: The New Spirit of Modernity,* where the only place that I can think of when race is present and still does not matter, is in the books, the negro spirituals, and in jazz.

So the novel, the one that I am playing with now, and I'll share an excerpt with you, I tried some of these things, some riffs on some of them, trying to write about jazz/ blues while making it as second nature to the story, and storytelling, as jazz/blues is in Baker's way of saying second nature to the Americas and this experience. Right now the working title for what I'm going to read from is *George's Run*, or I was thinking maybe I should change it to *Jazz's Run*. I'm not sure with that cadence it would work. But it's about the Pullman porters, the music on the trains, the music in the tracks, the music in the silences, the music in the churches, the juke joints, in the search for a home in North America– in Canada –a home where everyone is free, as free as Quinte Brown and his banjo, as the home loyalists. Let me give some examples and then perhaps we can talk, and Paul can question.

Now I'm going to read an excerpt from the novel, where...to set it up: this guy who is a Pullman porter...is reflecting on a trip that his father once took him on across Canada, in which the course on that trip, it was about his seventh or eighth birthday, was to introduce to him the notion that Canada is his. Well of course this is in a time when the notion of Canada being his, to a black boy out of Halifax, would be quite absurd because this was Canada, the white man's country. So they are taking this trip across Canada. The train they are traveling on, number 15, or 'the *Ocean*' – on the way back it becomes…Oh, I forgot, but on the way out it's the *Ocean*. [Dr. Foster begins to read]

So the Ocean rocks side to side. It is as if this train too is shaking, not only me. The brakes squeal against the curves in the rails. Horns blaring. Rugga-rugga-rugga. In the beginning this train seemed as determined as me to get away. We were in collusion. For almost an entire day

and night from Halifax, the Ocean and I had run parallel to the St. Lawrence river, heading for Montreal, still so many hours away, and in this bone chilling weather. It shielded me and within its dark crevices I found the anonymity I desire. I was free, without a past, without an identity, no longer anybody's son; I was starting all over again, this time as myself; this time finally free of him. My part in this pact requires me to trouble no one, to just keep to myself, letting time and distance slip away, letting this train take me far, far away. This way we can steal away together.

Now rocking and hooting, the train is joined with those calling me out. Such betrayal this is. Now I am exposed and helpless. Once again I am thrown back into the briars, there to join my father. I look through the window into the mist. What country is this, so big and yet there is no place to hide and to simply be myself. My father is always so fond of quoting someone or the other as saying on a map of this continent the St. Lawrence looks like someone of superior strength took a great big sword and thrust it into the top of North America. All he left is a long gaping wound all the way to the heart. That wounded heart means everything. For Poppa is always saying the tracks of the trains, oh yes those ribbons of steel, even if laid by mere mortals, well they are like stitches binding a wound. They might produce keloid scars right across the land, but such is a small price for stitching everything from one coast to another. Even now I hear him saying this land is like so many beads on a necklace, just like the many rail carriages forming any of the countless trains snaking across this land every hour of the day. He's saying the train tracks are like the dried buffalo hide of the people native to this place. They string together the stations, provinces and regions, just like beads on a necklace or rosary by the older women in church. The result of such linking is a new dominion that could not be more loosely sewn together. Nonetheless, it is a union as old and imperfect as any other on this continent. And it is all because of this, of the trains and the black faces on them. For like a reader's finger across the page, the trains on those tracks that provide a focus and hold together the Confederacy. At least that is what my father preaches.

"Reverend Freeman's son, isn't it?" The voice is strident. It demands a response. "Isn't it, sonny?

"I guess so," I mumble, for no matter how hard I try I still cannot lie to an adult. But by answering, I am now cornered. So I shift my position on the hard seat and pull up the collar of the black sheep skin coat, still smelling so new, a Christmas gift from my mother. Man, I tell myself, I can never hide; somebody is always recognizing me and linking me back to my father. I feel sentenced and I am tired of feeling this way, of living in the shadows. Still I must continue to endure this scrutiny, and I must remain respectful, trying not so hard not to lose my temper.

I glance out the window. The temperature is still falling even with the sun rising. The effects of the lakes, the porters had reported, and because the steam pipes never fully thawed. The cold, or is it the exposure, makes me shudder. Indeed, this is a cold country. So remote and so scattered. Canaan Land, he'd call it. Not like a house still divided, he said, with different people living as if prisoners in different rooms. Not with each section so separate and distinct those living in it cannot even share the furnishings, cannot share a glass of water or a morsel of food. Not in Canada, he'd say. For despite past failures and betrayals, it is the hope for a better future, for something new. That's what my father told me so many years ago. I was a little boy. Obviously he thought I believed still in fairytales. Canada is still that Promised Land, I remember how he kept telling me at every turn, not of a place of milk and honey, the streets paved with gold, but a home with water, plenty water too, and possessing as much land as anybody would need for daily bread. Canaan Land, he said: for so long the end of some railroad or the other, but a place destined to become so much more than an end of the run. All that is

needed is for all to be humble, to fall on our knees and lap up the waters of forgetfulness. Of course, back then I did not understand a word he was saying to me. And, perhaps, today I still don't. [Dr. Foster finishes reading]

I'll pause there, and there is another section a little later I will come to, but I wouldn't continue to bore you with my work [chuckles].

PW: It certainly wasn't boring. Thank you for sharing from a forthcoming work of yours. I noticed you talked a little bit about Baker and blues vernacular, and change... [to the audience] he talks about the matrix as kind of a signifier for the blues as being a kind of point of ceaseless output. It seems that change is quite important, mutable change, constant change, particularly to improvisation. I wonder if you could talk about improvisation in relation to the writing process, how that works. And if you could tie that, and make that connection to multiculturalism as well.

CF: Well, there are kind of three things you are asking there. One is the notion of change. Change is life. For me, that is the quintessence of being human: how we deal with change. Change is time, the passing of time, if you ignore time you don't change**.** So if we are in time, we are in change. We are in change mode. And I think that is one of the things that we often lose sight of, especially when we live in societies, and we want to be social, and we want to do all those things, or plan societies, and have societies remain the way that they are. And I think, about the second part of the question about multiculturalism, to me this is one of the key things about multiculturalism, that multiculturalism is predicated on the notion of change. The old is always giving away to the new. And it is a very democratic notion for me, something that I'm dealing with in another book that I hope to have out with McGill Queens Press early next year, in which I look at the dynamic within multiculturalism. One of the important things, for me, about multiculturalism is not a question of nationalism, Quebec and the rest of Canada debate. That is important, but to me what multiculturalism does is allow us to transcend those issues. And to say, let's sort of bracket them, and see if we can get on with other things in life, and if in so doing, we might not stumble on a solution to those problems. Because these problems have proven so intractable in the past. So multiculturalism is about the changed-ness of the present into the future. In my way of thinking it very much calls on us to reject much of the static life of the past. So in that regard, change is the key element. How do these things influence writing? Well, I can only speak for perhaps the process that I go through, and this manuscript that I'm working on is now probably on its eighth or ninth draft. So that indicates a kind of improvisation, to use that concept, but the fact that it is always changing, it is never completed. And indeed, it is always a concern that some of us as writers we end up writing one book, title it many different ways and publish it many different times, although what we are doing is trying to perfect what we have done before. But I also want to suggest that what the writing process does, and what I think is also important to multiculturalism and improvisation, is that it allows us to bracket and to reflect on that moment of mediation, how much mediation there is, even in improvisation. Because here I am not talking about willy-nilly stuff. I'm talking about making moral decisions, and having choices, and coming to a specific point and having all these choices and opportunities, like a train coming to a junction and having to decide which of the tracks, which one to travel on. And to me that is very much like the writing process. When you sit in front of a blank screen, you probably have many different things swirling in your head or you already have something down on paper. Where do you go next? It has to be mediated.

PW: That's interesting. I like the way you brought up the point about the old and new, so there is the continuum, or a riffing on past traditions. It makes me think of what Dick Hebdige terms "versioning": borrowing from Afro-Cuban, and Calypso, and jazz, and hip-hop, and all these forms that are building on old traditions but at the same time they're improvising on them with their own unique soloings. Ellison talks about identity being in flux, saying that the jazzman must find himself even as he loses himself. So this seems really important, this element of fragmentation, a discordant democracy, if you will. The discord seems to be important. So I was wondering if you could touch on how discord functions as a democratic principle. And, for you, does that define genuine multiculturalism? Is there a genuine multiculturalism, or is it just fragmentation? Can we have social harmony, or is it just idealism?

CF: And that's the key point: how do you define harmony and discord, and how might it occur differently for different people? How do you arrive at the point of what is harmonious? And for me that is the key to what I refer to as genuine multiculturalism. Because genuine multiculturalism, in my way of theorizing it, gestures towards chaos, and gestures towards a normless society. It becomes paradoxical, because how are you going to have a society that doesn't have norms? But how are you going to have norms in a way that do not imprison and enslave, and are libratory, so that you can absorb change. So that you do not find yourself in a position where you are second-nature, and ideologically, opposed to any change. I want to open up the field where you are readily open to change, that change does not cause—like the invasion of a virus in the body—for you to spontaneously go into some kind of a protective mode. But that you can see the new potentials, the liberation that is there, the opportunities that come from, as Toni Morrison would suggest, dancing in the dark. From going beyond the light, from going beyond your epistemology, from going beyond what you know and taking a chance. That, to me, is a challenge, but is also an exhilarating one, to try something that is fairly new. And for me, genuine multiculturalism, then, has that newness element, but at the same time if it's going to be social...And this is where the contradictions come in, because multiculturalism is shot-through with these contradictions, and it will continue to be shot-through with these contradictions because it is about life and life is contradictory. There is no natural justice. Justice is always something we are always in the moment of creating or recreating. Multiculturalism, as a search for justice, is going to be shot-through with contradictions. And indeed, some of the things that we might accept now, we might very well reject tomorrow. Which speaks to the idea of how we always need to be on that leading edge, always at the point of imagining newness, imagining new societies, but coming up in the moment with ethical codes of behavior that allow us to get through the moment. But at the same time, very much aware that this moment might be a very short moment.

PW: Well, that's improvisation, and it's a very liberating thought. Essentially you're claiming there are no essences, right? Identities are always in flux. This is something that cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, talks about, that identities are not just formed in the self but also in relation to the other. We need to yield. It's that kind of precarious act of yielding to others. In many ways, that's improvisation. That's what it means to live in a society. I wonder if you could possibly touch on, it was briefly mentioned, and this is going back to the whole jazz movement in talking about multiculturalism, but in relation to blackness. In particular, I'm thinking of the spirit embodied in the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King was gunned down and then

the following day Pierre Elliot Trudeau was talking about the just society. I'm wondering if you could talk about how multiculturalism might embody some of spirit of the Civil Rights Movement.

CF: It's very difficult—and yet it's done—for me it is difficult to see a separation between multiculturalism and the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, when we read and reflect upon much of the literature on multiculturalism you would think that it is something that sprung from Athena, out of the forehead of God, and that it didn't have any parents...that there was a headache and to solve this Canadian headache we decided upon multiculturalism. But my argument is, and my research suggests, that multiculturalism is the culmination of a process, it is part of the second reconstruction, the second reconstruction that occurred in North America. Let's go back and think of Canada. Canada was founded in 1867. Modern Canada was founded in opposition to what would become the first reconstruction in the United States which came at the ending of the American Civil War. Canada chose, in fact, to be a confederation, and Canada did all those things that today still have us kind of handcuffed, not like the Americans, when it comes to state/ federal union relationships—when we have provincial/ federal relationships—because under our confederation, provinces/ states are sovereign in many areas. The United States...the Civil War took care of that. The sovereignty of the states is in the nation—at the federal level. Part of that was really the result of the Civil War, over questions of annulment, over questions of state rights, but ultimately over the question of citizenship. And we see that culminating in Amendments 14 and 15 of the U.S. Constitution—the right to citizenship, the right to vote—really showing that all former slaves, including Freeman, the character in this novel that I'm writing, his last name is Freeman, became full citizens. And at that time we must remember that Montreal, in particular, was a hotbed for confederates. Indeed, the plot to assassinate Lincoln was hatched and developed in Montreal. Booth was in Montreal. When Booth and others were captured he had quite a bit of money from the Bank of Ontario, which sort of suggested that quite a bit of the funding that was given to the group came out of Canada. So there is a long history of Canada and the Civil War. The Canadian confederation was very much the "other" of the U.S. federation. The president, the confederate president, you'll remember that he was captured and then ultimately he was released. When he was released he went to what was considered to be the second capital of the confederate states of the United States, and it was Montreal. His kids went to Bishop, he lived in Montreal. There is still a plaque in Montreal honoring Mr. Davies. The *Montreal Gazette* very much supported him. He came into Toronto, Kingston, Niagara Falls. The literature is there of all the stuff that he did. Setting up Dixie. He became one of the first refugees. Ultimately, he went back to the States. But Canada, the MacDonalds and those people of the day, when they were looking for a model of what the Canadian federation should be, they decided it would not be the United States. It would be other than the United States. It became a confederation, where power, a great deal of the real powers rested at the provincial level. So we have to this day the Quebec situation, the War Measures Act. Similar to Trudeau, it was sort of like in a Lincolnesque moment when he went through the War Measures Act. And even to this day we have a legacy of immigration policy, where there are still some in Montreal and elsewhere who argue that Quebec should have very much its own immigration policy so that it does not go the way of the union, which would be the rest of Canada. So we have in the 1860s a sort of reversal, where we have the beginning of Jim Crow and Plessy, and other formalization and codification in the United States, but it was already at work in Canada. Where, by then, the notion of Canada being a place for blacks had long hit the Underground Railroad. It had gone

the other way. Instead, what you had was that very often Canada was cited as the site for a white man's country. As I argued in the book on the table, Canada became very much the prototype for apartheid in South Africa. Much of what was pioneered here was adopted in South Africa. But by the 1960s the system was bankrupt, ideologically the system was bankrupt. We see this for example in the *Bi* and *Bi Commission*, certainly not as a bicultural country, certainly not as a white man's country. But this also coincides with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, where the pressure was on for a second reconstruction. And it is key to think of Trudeau and John F. Kennedy in terms of the parallels. Where both of them were personalists in terms of their ideologies: Roman Catholic, left-wing personalists. The same ideology that produced Martin Luther King, that produced many of the leading leftist leaders, people who gave the world a universal declaration of human rights, people who fought against nationalism. So Canada, in terms of America, was caught up in that, in what James Cone, I would argue, would present as a black theology, a black liberation theology. So this is where I'm going, with the notion that these things are all part of a black liberation. And Canada was caught up in it. Not only those who went to the United States march, but also the fact that we have Martin Luther King coming over to Canada and speaking in the Massey Lectures. The very last Christmas they broadcast a sermon that Martin Luther gave. It was broadcast live on the CBC. Trudeau was the Justice Minister around that time. Kennedy came to power with the notion that indeed he and his Dixiecrats from the South were going to reverse what was left out of the first reconstruction. And by the end of his life he had done a complete turn around, as Brauer and others show, in fact, with the help and through exchanges with Martin Luther King and many of the leaders in the civil rights, he had come to recognize that the only way out for the United States was a second reconstruction. And he was assassinated, and then Martin Luther King was assassinated, as Paul said, the very day before the opening of the Liberal convention that brought Trudeau to power. And indeed, which is also of note, Trudeau was the only candidate to mention Martin Luther King, to mention the importance of what was happening, and the fact that there were weapons in the street. And he would then go on to argue in much of his speeches, especially when he was facing down the nationalists in Quebec, that the kind of violence that they were suggesting—he said, "there is a right way or wrong way," and I'm not passing judgment on that—he said that kind of violence was the same kind of violence that had resulted in the death of Kennedy, the second Kennedy, Robert, and Martin Luther King. So he always had those frames of reference. Lyndon Johnson comes in, and Lyndon Johnson continues the second reconstruction. We see it in such things like the Civil Rights Act, the new Civil Rights Act. We see it in new immigration law. And what do we see in Canada as well? We saw as well the personal Charter of Rights and Freedoms, even back then, for a Canadian Constitution. We see it as well with the New Immigration Act, which was two years after the Americans. We even, to some extent, became even more a liberal group than the Americans. We saw it then in a new citizenship act. And those are many of the same parallel things that you can see. And then, ultimately, the umbrella under which all of those were done, the notion of what kind of state we would be. That we would be a state that is a just state, or just society, is captured in the notion of multiculturalism.

PW: It seems in many ways that writing jazz is about writing history, or rewriting history, or responding, thinking about citizenship. How do we define citizenship, particularly from different contexts? Particularly, you talk about fluidity but also a lack of fixity in multiculturalism. And I'm wondering, perhaps as a sort of closing question, about the future of

multiculturalism. You say in *Where Race Does Not Matter,* and I like this quote, you say, "The future of a world that knows its blackness is a place where boundaries are not fixed for humans or capital, sovereignty and responsibilities are negotiable, and transferable from one living space to another." In many ways that could also be a quote that describes improvisation. Perhaps as some closing remarks, before we open up some questions to the audience, I was wondering if you could touch on what kind of future developments you think particularly this conference is dealing with...future developments on interactivity, inter-medial type improvisations, particularly with the idea of social change and community, new community formations in mind.

CF: I agree totally with all that you have just said. But let me try to put it differently. [Northrop] Frye has an interesting way of talking about the interaction of literature with reality. He said that if a poet read you his or her poem and you said, "What does it mean?" the only thing the poet can do is read it to you a second time because he can't explain it. The poem speaks for itself. If you don't mind, I'll read a little bit more.

PW: Sure! Sounds good.

CF: And that will capture some of what we are trying to say. And here I am thinking that maybe we'd have some fun. As well, jazz is about the aesthetic, and it's about the beauty and the challenges, and something Toni Morrison has told you she has encountered herself. How do you write and capture that in the writing? And that itself is always an improvisation and a challenge. So our character, Freeman, is in a club in Montreal. A jazz/blues club called Bistro Blues, or Bistro Bleu, and he's had a hectic day travelling on the trains and coming back into Montreal, meeting friends, and he just wants to chill. So he goes into a smoky room where he hopes to have some music.
[Dr. Foster begins to read]

The saxophone begins a special flurry, instantly bringing the joint to alive. The solo starts as a painted wail, way down in the toes, increasing in intensity, as if the sound itself is grasping for something that is far out of reach, as if it is coming out of a different history and telling a different story, telling the truth. Finally I can close my eyes.

Tumti-tumpti-tum-tum. The music is the perfect balm, the best way to celebrate the news in the letter from Chicago. *"Tummuti-tee-teee,* te. *Now, all I have to do is wait, until spring. Maybe I can start in spring. Sprinnnnng* [sings]. *They are interviewing in a few weeks. That's what the letter says. Tummmmtiiiiii—e. All I have to do is flow—flow—floooow with the music. So I settle back. Be ready for the call for the interview. Then I can begin in spring. A free man. Another new beginning. In Chicago, in the springtime. A new man. A new Negro. Out of the cold coming newness. But not my father's son. Not even like Tar Baby and how he's pulled to one side by his father and to another by his grandaddy, and then a third way by his wife, Glenda. No not me. No, never, ever, eeeever. I hear the pounding behind my ears, a river flowing through this place that is new, yet still so ancient, dark and dusky. Swaying my head rhythmically, I surrender to it, to what I do not even know. This is how I think I have managed over these years, and how I have grown deep, as deep as any river, on my train. And I sigh loudly. Finally, everything connected to work, to all those long hours, all the bobbing and weaving and the rocking from side to side, is draining out of me. I am now like a man in a mild trance, as the tension in my shoulders melts away, as my calves and toes relax, as the pace of my heart slows,*

finally. This is my moment. No more trains. No more responsibilities. No voices. And the sweet taste of the peppercorn steak in my mouth.

Me and this magician on the sax, taking the two of us out into the swirling, into a witch's brew with a bit of this and a touch of that, of that old black magic with its spells. All so magical, like I only wish I could blow, to make it all just come together so, like nothing I've ever heard, all the pieces tied up and completed, a perfect union. Tummm- tummm-tummmmteee-tummm. With this bugle boy, a mere warm-up act, just wailin' 'way, as if his mother's done dead and gone. A warrior he is: so separate and distinct from all the other members in the band, from all of the people listening in the club, and from even those passing by outside; yes, he is blazing his own trail. And yet, he is part of all of them just as they, too, are part of him. As this hornsman clears the boundaries one after the other and takes them to a place none of us has never seen, but which, perhaps, we might have only dreamt about, which even this hornsman himself may not have known before. Like the latest voice of inspiration and hope. Making it out as he goes along. As necessary, adjusted and adapted to the surrounding, rapping and styling to the rhythm of the times. So that it is just one note after another that brings us to this point: a pattern that was unmistakable at the beginning. Epiphany so brief, where all of us believe we are flirting with something special, maybe with destiny even, and then all we see is eternity, is freedom. So that he, too, the one with the sax, like a rod or some wand, like some scout or the other, climbs the highest mountain with them behind him. And the pounding behind my ears, just like some drum, starting in my chest and reverberating over all my body, over the entire world.

And even then, the saxophonist pushes further, willingly risking it all, leading everyone into a place which is now deeper and darker than anything anyone could imagine. With the other musicians, like Lemmings spontaneously whooping and egging him on, daring him, begging him to take them further, saying them not 'fraid yet. For this solo is sweet, sweet, sweet. And all the listeners just clapping, stomping their feet, whistling, applauding; for they have never heard anything so sweet before, and perhaps never will again. All they have in this moment and this young man's doggin' it. Cause the whole place is jumpin'. Groovin'. 'Im and his strange notes and vision. 'Im out on his own, out where there can only be more risk, but also the hope of discovering what is really good, with each member of the band following in his own way, meandering and dallying when the spirit so strikes him, turning up stones and skirts looking for what could only be evil; all o' them going every which way searching for that special tree, gyrating to his rhythm and speed, all at the same time. So many different rhythms: some fast, some slow, some jerky, some nothin' at all.

I'll stop there. [everyone claps]

Audience Member: Multiculturalism has failed in many countries. What is Canada doing differently?

CF: Thanks for the question, Banji. Merkel, Cameron, and others, but before that we could say Stephen Harper as well, back in the 1990s, he certainly thought that multiculturalism was a very bad thing for Canada. But there seems to be a conversion along the way. I was watching the leadership debate, and there were three of the four leaders, and I thought I saw a moment of epiphany in Stephen Harper. And the next day I sent an email to quite a number of people, saying, "Was that Stephen Harper that I saw on television last night? Someone who actually was defending multiculturalism." Who took on Gilles Duceppe on the notion of ethnic ghettos, who

left Jack Layton at a loss for words. And Ignatieff, who you would have thought would be the one who would have carried on the Trudeau legacy, caught, like a deer caught in the headlights, not knowing whether to come down on the side of multiculturalism or not to defend it, ended up saying nothing. And Stephen Harper, like a jazz musician—so maybe there is something to be said about his piano playing—grabbed the moment and critiqued multiculturalism for himself. Now the point that I want to make in using that anecdote is that multiculturalism is indeed about change. And I would argue that the kind of multiculturalism that Merkel and Cameron talk about is not multiculturalism. It's a form of pluralism. But it is not, say, the kind of multiculturalism that was pioneered in Canada in the 1970s onward, where in fact multiculturalism was an attack on the state. The state had to be remade. Canada could no longer continue to be a white man's country. It had to be a country of the people. Merkel and Cameron start from the position that there is something called Germany, where an ethnicity that is called German, however defined, will always and should always have privileged positions. And anyone else who comes in will have to have a secondary position, almost a second citizenship. You might try assimilation, but in the multiculturalism of Canada, assimilation is a no no. Similarly, the same thing happened in Britain, if you're going to talk about the kind of multiculturalism that Cameron is talking about. He is talking about pluralism, which allows diversity to be in the body and to be recognized in the British body, but at the heart of that body is still an ethnicity and an ethnic root that is English. One of the things that the separatists in Quebec were right about is that multiculturalism is an attack on the entrenched groups—on the old, as I call them axiom ethnicities—and [it] seeks to create an organic ethnicity, whatever that might be. So when we hear the discussion coming out of Europe, that multiculturalism is dead, you have to ask yourself "what exactly are they talking about?" Maybe the form of pluralism [is what] they are talking about. Maybe they are talking about the kind of situation we had when we were trying biculturalism. And biculturalism ended up being, in fact, bankrupt. But they're certainly not talking about multiculturalism, as [it] was idealized in Canada in the 1960s and 70s.

PW: More questions?

Audience Member: Early on in your introductory remarks you talked about blues as a practice of location and cultural space where race doesn't matter. Perhaps the only one. Could you just elaborate on that?

CF: Yes, because to some extent I'm reaching for that notion of the sort of always inherent contraction that is there. Where in blues the melody offsets something. The pain is there, but maybe the lyrics offset the pain. So there is the presence, the absented present, and there is also the notion of the present that you wish would be absented, and is there. So I am reaching for that notion, and suggesting that we would always in a social setting have notions of race. Utilizing the idea of race, not as something that is essentialized as a colour of the skin, but is based on the notion of those who are deemed to be superior and those who are inferior. And even the very notion of citizenship is a racialized one. Giving space to those who are superior, have superior claims, and those who don't. But at the same time we are hoping for a citizenship where everyone would be equal, or would be unequal only when it is reasonable. So that it becomes very much a matter of the ethical code of the day that is developed in the moment. So that we may very well have people of different importance, but when we deal with them in a social way we do not racialize them.

PW: Any questions? Responses?

Audience Member: Just to follow up with Banji's question, talking about the States in relation to multiculturalism. I'm thinking particularly of Clyde Woods' comment about the Katrina moment as a blues moment. He calls it a blues moment because it stripped away all the veneer of acceptance and tolerance and showed racism to be really still alive in the States. What would you have to say about the States in relation to Canadian notions of multiculturalism?

CF: That's why I want to push this notion of second reconstruction because the second reconstruction allows us to get back into this discussion of citizenship. What does citizenship really mean? And it allows us to look again at Amendments 14 and 15 in the United States. Even to this day, the American blacks are not even aware that they do not really have technically the right to vote. Their right to vote is extended every five years. And at the end of the five years Congress then decide, "Well, no, we're not extending this another five years." So then when you get to the question, then, if citizenship is about equality and anyone who has the notion that being a citizen is equal no matter what, then a Katrina moment really leaves, in glaring relief, the notion of inequalities of citizenship. It might be inequalities based on regionalism. It might be inequalities based on the colour of skin, or the historical construction. So a Katrina moment really brings this forward to us. By the way you might want to look at Dionne Brand's *Ossuaries* to refer to those kinds of things. And in Canada my suggestion is we're not there yet, but it is those kinds of things that we are hoping with our model of multiculturalism to avoid, or to reach the point where a Katrina moment—which is the response to Katrina, not the hurricane but the response to Katrina—would not occur. So that the difference is... whether you are living in Newfoundland or you are living in Vancouver, if you are First Nations, or in the state, or black or white, those kinds of historic racializations will not matter. You will be treated first and foremost as a Canadian. And I think that is one of the key things that Trudeau and his just society and those who were of that thinking were aiming for when they wanted to create this universal Canadian, who might in fact be living in a specific province but ultimately the primary identity, the identity would flow from the citizenship, not from the residency or the place you belong.

Audience Member: I'm interested in your notion of entrenched historic cultures and how they relate to the new cultures coming in to create multiculturalism. I wonder how in North America, which is considered to be the New World, that has a relationship to mixing cultures because the entrenched culture, we either weakened or we destroyed it. So how does aboriginal culture in North America relate to multiculturalism?

CF: That's the point, I guess, to me. Civil rights for blacks and civil rights for Aboriginals, those are the questions that we deal with. Until we can create a society that offers justice, and a sense of belonging, and a sense of inclusiveness for those two groups, then I'm not sure what we are creating. Again in this book that I have next year, I talk of something that I refer to as a congenital flaw, in settlers communities in the states that were created in this part of the world. We have societies that were created in the Americas that were not intended for the people that were supposedly natural to the land. And then we developed a narrative that suggested that at some point those societies became organic and natural to the land. Well, at what point did they

become natural and organic to the land? And how can they be natural and organic to the land when we have had previous societies, societies that have been marginalized, that have, it can be argued no matter what measurement you use, some indication of a more organic relationship. And this was the issue that was so much at the heart of the Bantustans land debate in South Africa. So until we deal with those issues, I'm not sure how we can get to a just society. That's why, for me, multiculturalism provides an account because what it gestures to is that we are all aboriginal. We are all aboriginal to the state, and I'm using aboriginal in the wider anthropological sense, where aboriginal means we are not from the state. So immigrants are aboriginal to Canada. So in a sense, the entrenched states that were there, those that were the ones we were trying to meld together under biculturalism, we all become aboriginals to those states. And we become members of the new state that was created since then, the state that is that of official multiculturalism. That is how I see aboriginality working today. And the final thing I'll say on that is that one of the key problems that we will always continue to confront, no matter how idealistic we get about multiculturalism, is...what can we do, or what can we really create as a society, until aboriginal people have self-determination, until they determine that they want to be part of the state? Until they have determined that they want to be part of the state as an expression of their free will, I don't know what we can do.

PW: Do you think that genuine multiculturalism rejects assimilation, in a sense, at its core? I'm just trying to think back to the *White paper* and responses by First Nations authors, such as in *The Unjust Society*. Does multiculturalism have to allow for that type of fragmentation?

CF: I would argue that is does in that it rejects cultural assimilation, but it hopes that at the end, for a kind of a nationalistic assimilation, that out of our many differences we then adopt something that we say makes us Canadian. But that Canadian can be aboriginal, can be black, can be white, can be American, can be European. All those things can become sort of irrelevant. So we do not assimilate at the level of irrelevance, which is sort of what the cultural practice is. But we assimilate at the level of an importance, whatever we deem to be important, which is the notion of citizenship, equality, creation of a just society.

PW: I think we have time for one more question.

Audience Member: I just wanted to ask in response to that. One of the many powerful images in the reading of your novel, was the image of the wound, and the stitching of the wound. And I'm wondering how the wound sort of haunts the vision that you are articulating, and no matter how much we stitch it together, do we have to always be aware that the wound has to heal? It just feels like it haunts.

CF: Well, I hope that's a sign that the novel works, because that's what I want. The wound reminds, even when it appears to have healed. There are the keloid scars, the tracks are like stitches, and so that even if the wound is healed—if it ever heals—we still remember the pain, we still remember the blues.

PW: I think we'll end there, but I'm sure Dr. Foster is happy to speak with you later. Once again we thank Dr. Foster for a wonderful talk.