The word butterfly

Lin Hixson and Matthew Goulish

LH: We like to talk about audience. Who are they? we like to ask, as if they might be an object, a fixed identity; or Who is your audience? as if we can possess those who would hear us. Let us begin with this: every person is a society.

1. Every person is a society

MG: Lately I have been thinking about dividing any audience into three sub-categories: 1. people I know well; 2. people I know a little; 3. people I have never met. I wonder then what mode of address might be appropriate for all three. By "appropriate" I mean "in common," or "honest enough," or anyway, "not too embarrassing." Sometimes I think there is nothing a speaker can hope to accomplish other than to locate such an appropriate mode of address. To find it, to speak in it, is the first task of the speaking, and in some ways is already enough. I take to heart the possibility that one need not try to accomplish more. Why is it enough? Because if first we say every person is a society, and second we set three categories of familiarity, then third we must allow people temporary membership in any of the categories. A person I know well can become a person I know only a little. A person I've never met can at the same time be a person I know well. Such allowance is simply a matter of the speaker's respect for the listeners.

LH: I am thinking about the essay as a form for performance. That seems like a simple enough idea. When I think of essay, I think of learning. In order to learn, something needs to be said. In an essay, the said gets said. There it is solidly on the page. But this is not how I learn. I learn when the said gets unsaid. When the knot tied, unravels. The said can only be comprehended in its unraveling, in its misapprehension. This is how the said of the essay operates in our performances. It unwinds, fails, and goes wrong while at the same time unscrambles and clarifies. We do this with caution and hesitation in order to craft the work with attentive care, yearning toward an understanding that is always just a little beyond what we know. There is so much to disconnect.

MG: In the early grades at school, we in the Midwestern United States in the 1960s learned a practice commonly known as Show and Tell. It was, and maybe still is, a widespread classroom activity in which the pupils take turns standing in front of the classroom showing some object of interest, and telling the class about it. At least that was how I understood the constraints. Now, all these years later, the only memory I have of it involves those rules bending to the breaking point. The events transpired at the very first Show and Tell session, immediately after the teacher explained how it would work, and gave us a week to prepare.

2. The Joker is Wild

MG: After several students had obediently shared their favorites toys, books, hats, or souvenirs, Jeff Kiester stood up with nothing in his hands. Immediately, he had everybody's attention. Then he began to speak.

LH: Last night on Batman, the Joker escaped from prison. He used a spring machine and flew over the fence during a baseball game because he had an exploding baseball that made a cloud of smoke. Batman and Robin went after him. He was planning to steal the jewels from the museum.

MG: The Batman television program starring Adam West had recently premiered on ABC. Jeff continued his narration in exhaustive detail until he reached the cliffhanger ending, with Batman and Robin captured and the Joker about to unmask them. It took him some time. In fact, he took far more time than any other Show and Tell participant. When he finished, he unceremoniously sat down, and the class applauded politely. The to be continued ending should have clued us in to what was coming, but for some reason, we were all blindsided the next week when Jeff stood up to take a turn, again with nothing in his hands, and began.

LH: Last night on Batman, the Joker –

MG: NOOO! The entire class shouted in one voice. NOT AGAIN! Jeff instantly broke off his narration and calmly sat down, apparently untroubled by the spontaneous unforgiving reception. I puzzled over the meaning of these events. Later I watched the kids play on the playground, not allowing myself to join in until I had arrived at some satisfactory conclusion. The first time Jeff spoke, I felt a disorienting sensation. I had in fact watched the Batman episode the previous evening. I remember comparing his version to my own memories. A couple of times, I thought, that's not exactly what happened. But all in all, he was fairly accurate. Still, it did not explain why he had ventured to narrate the episode as his Show and Tell. He seemed to intend it equally for everyone in the classroom audience, whether they had viewed the television show or not. Did he think his telling would be as interesting as, if not more interesting than, the actual episode? That possibility had left me disoriented. Jeff, I wanted to implore him, why do you think you are more interesting than television? Then when he stood up a second time, I wondered whether he did not suspect we would shout him down. His performance had been engaging enough as a one-time event. Why push it? And then, when we did shut him down so mercilessly, why was he not at all upset? It was as if he intended to push against the rules of the game until somebody stopped him, and that was exactly what he had done. But anybody could see that Jeff was not an aggressive person. This rule-testing theory explained neither his motivation, nor his choice of subject matter. As the school year ground on, and we suffered through one dreary Show and Tell after another, I observed that Jeff's silence had become a pattern. He never took another turn.

One sunny morning in early spring, I watched the kids playing, spinning in a large circle holding hands, led by the teacher. Jeff spun happily among them. It even seemed to me that he could play with the group because of his Batman Show and Tell. Suddenly, an idea occurred to me that was so simple I instantly knew it must be true. Jeff did not own a single toy. He had nothing that he could bring in for Show and Tell, and no talents to mobilize other than memory. Batman was the newest, most exciting show for kids our age, but beyond that calculation, he was clearly obsessed with it. Thus he stood up and claimed ownership to an episode, something we all had equal claim to, but which only he had thought to adopt and present in a different mode, as if that shift in medium made the event entirely new, like an object of performance, and, when driven by the engine of his passion, worth sharing. And didn't it? To this day, it is the only Show and Tell that I recall. It seemed to me then that in that moment Jeff Kiester had introduced himself, not by name, but by demonstration. In doing so, he had exhibited a kind of uncelebrated courage I had never experienced before. In future years, I would learn to associate it with the quality that people called dignity, and think of it as an aspiration. I believe now, furthermore, that Jeff's Batman Show and Tell was the first experience I had of theater, the first instance of the performance that overflows its frame. I recalled it that way precisely because in playing itself out, it demonstrated as if by accident what dignity is, or courage, or maybe foolhardiness, or the refusal to be excluded because you cannot meet all the criteria of the community. But all of that would come later. At the time, what mattered was that I was at last able to join the playground circle, and even to make some small maneuvers toward asking Jeff if he might find it in himself to begin to think of me as a friend.

LH: At a certain point I realized that the idea of aesthetic had become an irritation. By aesthetic, I don't mean a style. I mean the classical notion of an approach to beauty. I like beauty, but I like sentimentality too. Mostly I trust the thing that feels wrong.

3. The beauty of the thing that feels wrong

LH: So when aesthetic irritated me, it bothered me that if something was to be said, it had to be said a certain way, through a filter. I recoiled from beauty becoming a ritual process. Maybe I simply grew tired of it. I wondered with a kind of craving about the possibility of absolute directness. What would that do? Direct address, and direct words, would introduce humor, the way explanations are funny, even while they contain information. Paradoxically, the lecture has the texture of an unpremeditated gesture, when performance appears at its most plain. It might be the way the speaker strives for introduction, as an intermediary and familiar. Second, it means the work can move on. After something direct, something else can happen. A door may open to some different and strange moment, some choreography, that can sit beside language and re-

sist absorption into what has been said, something to discomfort understanding according to the introduced terms. What I don't understand establishes a compass, a direction to move toward, but not arrive at, nor to bring into the understood.

A purpose so stated: to find a process of making a performance focusing on one subject rather than many. Persist, as I have described, and the many appear out of the one. Meaning is a flow of contexts. Context is an endless radiating of denotation into relation. The performance that is a kind of embodied essay says that everything you see over the course of the hour belongs together. Live with contradictions as contradictions of living. I have seen many things, some that I understood, others for which I still had no name. Yet I know that they are. Acknowledgement constitutes a sort of unknowing. To know that things are is not to know what they are. To know that without what is to know otherness.

MG: In the middle grades one year we had an adventurous student-teacher named Sally Leighton who initiated the staging of an adaptation of chapter 9 of Tom Sawyer.

4. Tragedy in the Graveyard

MG: We may have been reading the novel in class together, but it is only the dramatized version of this exciting chapter that I remember. Miss Leighton had us read for the parts in an audition: Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Injun Joe, Doc Robinson, and the drunk Muff Potter. To this cast, she made two adjustments. First, noting that all the roles were male, she said it would be allowed for girls to play some of the parts if they dressed like men. Second, she said that she would add a narrator, who would recite passages from the novel for clarity. As I recall, everybody wanted to play the drunk, including myself, except for my friend Dave Kohs, who suspected, correctly it turns out, that he was born to play the villainous Injun Joe. When my turn came, I volunteered to read for Muff Potter, only to discover, once in front of the class, that I had no clue how to act drunk. Miss Leighton gently suggested that I might try the narrator. My heart sank. It was the most boring role. Actually it wasn't even a role at all. But I consented, and the next day learned that that was the part I would play. I don't remember the rest of the casting, except for Dave, and that Muff Potter went to a pleasant girl who displayed a flair for translating her youthful, female easygoing nature into mature male drunkenness. I found it deeply unfair that the five other kids were permitted to take on colorful characters, wear costumes, and even carry props, while I had to stand on the stage as myself and talk to the audience. Why would they need to hear and see the same information? My presence would only serve to make them impatient for the actual play to begin. But I kept those thoughts to myself, and like the others dedicated myself to the production, even taping my rock hammer to a length of dowel to fashion a pick-ax for Dave to carry.

The point of view now shifts to that of my mother, who arrived to find the cafeteria/assembly-hall, already full to capacity. She had come with her friend and neighbor Joan, whose daughter attended the same school. They had to stand at the back, and to hear her tell it what happened next was as revelatory as it was surreal. The play began with me appearing on stage and delivering a speech that must have resembled the following.

LH: Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain, chapter 9. Tragedy in the Graveyard

In this chapter, Tom has crept out of bed and gone to the graveyard with Huck. They hide in a clump of elms a few feet from the fresh grave of Hoss Williams. They believe that devils will appear there tonight. Three figures approach. Could these be the devils? No. Tom and Huck are surprised to discover the young Dr. Robinson accompanied by two local outcasts, the drunken Muff Potter and Injun Joe.

Dr. Robinson orders the other two men to dig up Hoss Williams's corpse, for him to use in medical experiments. When Muff Potter demands extra payment, Robinson refuses. Injun Joe reminds the doctor that five years earlier, he came begging at the Robinsons' kitchen door and was turned away. Injun Joe now intends to have his revenge. They fight. Doc Robinson knocks Injun Joe down and then is attacked by Potter. He uses Hoss Williams's headstone to defend himself, knocking Potter unconscious. Injun Joe stabs Dr. Robinson with Potter's knife.

MG: As I exited, my mother turned to Joan, who acknowledged that even at the back, they could follow every word. Then the actors crept onto the stage, and commenced a tentative sequence of mumbling, play fighting, and falling down around a spot on the floor. One of them appeared to be a cross-dressed girl. The tallest boy seemed momentarily paralyzed by the sight of the audience. "What are they saying?" my mom asked Joan. "No idea," she replied. In any event, it seemed incumbent on the viewers to make some connection, however tenuous, between a lucid tale told by a narrator and the group's enactment of an opaque ritual. They left, and I re-appeared.

LH: The terrified boys, Tom and Huck, flee without being detected. When Potter awakens, Injun Joe convinces him that he, Potter, murdered the doctor in a drunken fury. Look – Potter's knife remains stuck in Doc Robinson's corpse.

MG: Learning that without my interventions the audience would have been completely at sea did nothing to assuage my acute dejection. My mother's praise made matters worse. There is a difference after all between talent and audibility, a difference starkly apparent to any audience member who was not my mother. Performing the most boring role successfully had sealed my fate. Henceforth, from the age of nine, such roles would be my artistic prison cell. Immediately after the performance, Dave rushed up to me. He seemed distraught, but also somehow relieved. In future years I would grow familiar with this condition: the post-performance semi-hysterical need to replay every moment's micro-decision, coupled with the joy of release from the pressures of the audience. He told me that once onstage he realized he had forgotten the pick-ax, and did not know whether to go back for it. He opted to go on with the scene, but now felt that had been the wrong decision. He had confused the audience. Plus I had worked so hard to make the pick-ax for him, and now nobody had seen it. He had come to me not only because I had constructed the pick-ax for him, but also because the narrator role allowed me to watch the play while still being a part of it. I told him nobody, not even I, had noticed his error, and that the five of them had just performed the greatest thing I had ever seen. I meant every word.

LH: Mr. Morgan taught Latin in my high school. I do not know why I was in Latin class.

5. magno restat Achille

LH: Somehow I assumed from my parents and my future college administrators that it was required although this was not the case. I knew it was connected to scholars, highbrows, and academics; to knowledge, learning, and the intellect. But the daily activity of learning Latin was like plowing. We seemed to lumber along with vocabulary, grammar, reading, translating, and memorizing.

There was a day when this plodding turned. Mr. Morgan's classroom was in the tiniest room in the school and you had to travel far to get there. In order to 'make the bell', we could not linger. The journey to Mr. Morgan's class felt like traveling to the servant's quarters and we traveled fast. As the semester wore on, this distance served the class well. It increased our anticipation.

The first time I walked into the classroom and saw Mr. Morgan in his tunic and toga with a crown of grape leaves on this head, I was confused. I didn't know if this meant we would all wear togas and I was concerned. But this quickly faded as Mr. Morgan stood up from his desk and paced around the room reciting Latin passages from The Illiad. Of course we thought this was funny. But he then stopped and asked us to follow along and translate his words into English. This forced us to pay attention. And so the ritual began, Mr. Morgan striding through the room, pausing at intervals, where we would take turns translating out loud in English.

But here's the thing. Periodically, he stopped to tell us anecdotes from the Trojan War and stories of Viet Nam. He compared the warrior Achilles to James Dean in Rebel Without a Cause and the kidnapped Chryseis to Patty Hearst. Drama was born out of the march of the ordinary, what we knew as the drudgery of translation, into the extra-ordinary.

The writer and editor John D'Agata begins his anthology The Lost Origins of the Essay with a quote from Plutarch, a question: What word is there to describe that kind of logic that sings? It is that kind of

logic that interests me – that meeting place between reason and song, that and why the stage might be the place for it. By theater I mean the place of audibility, where we hear one another and are heard, where we see and are seen, the forum for a fleeting communal intimacy not found elsewhere, that can gather and dissipate in the space of one hour.

iam cinis est, et de tam magno restat Achille
nescio quid parvum, quod non bene conpleat urnam

now he's ash
from huge Achilles
some small remains –
what barely fills an urn

MG: From my first year at college I made a habit of attending the Friday night screenings of The Film Society.

6. Welcome to The Film Society

The tiny forty-seat cinema shared a lobby with the auditorium where the student orchestra rehearsed and played. I would claim my seat in it near the back. When an audience of maybe twenty-three had assembled, a slightly unkempt upperclassman in a button-down shirt edged into view in front of the white screen.

LH: Hello and welcome to The Film Society's screening of Black Orpheus. It's great to see so many people here. Next week we have The Great Dictator, Charlie Chaplin's 1940 epic. Later in the quarter we'll be showing a couple of films by Luis Buñuel, the Spanish surrealist director. We usually show one Hitchcock film a term, close to final's week. This time it'll be North by, sorry, Vertigo. Anyway. Be sure to pick up the schedule at the door with all the movies on it. If you want to become a member of The Film Society, just sign this clipboard, then you can vote on the films to bring, and see them for free. If you're not a member, all screenings cost two dollars. Black Orpheus is by the French director Marcel Camus from 1959. It tells the story of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, set in Rio de Janeiro, during the carnival. It's in Portuguese, with English subtitles, and it lasts one hour and 47 minutes. We'll show it again tomorrow at 7.00. Tell your friends. Thanks again. Oh, one more thing. Next week it's Halloween, and we're showing George Romero's original Night of the Living Dead at midnight. Enjoy.

MG: The year was 1978. The cinema felt like a dark little laboratory, for the stress-free study of subtitled images in languages from around the world. Sometimes, if I had to come to the Fine Arts Building on Sunday morning, I would even see the films in their big octagonal metal cases sitting on the floor outside of the projection room, the title written on the side, waiting to be picked up and shipped to the next cinema, who knows where. Eventually I returned to a regular movie theater, and the experience seemed too big and impersonal, with nobody standing up before the film to talk to me. The Film Society representative could be counted on to have absolutely no stage presence or affect. His task was simply to tell me what I needed to know. He was in service on the film, without seeming to know it or understand it that way. Yet as important as the Film Society became to me, I was never tempted to join. I had no interest in deciding the films. Whatever they brought was fine with me. I just wanted my seat in the dark, where I could spend some time with my thoughts and with the film. I needed the experience as it was: not anonymous, but claimed as a responsibility of some actual set of people whom I might see later walking on campus, trying like the rest of us not to fall behind in their studies. Was it a kind of community? Or was it a structure for introduction, for some aspect of personality, maybe even of being, to make its unintended appearance, in that slim margin of time before the house lights dim and the shadow play of film begins?

LH: The lecture performance that interest me might not be the hybrid or fused event suggested by that label; a lecture that aspires to performance, that imports something of performance, or the performance that confines itself to direct address. For me the two terms resist one another, even refuse to join, and I prefer not to force them together. I like the question: when and how did the one flip over into the other? We began with a lecture, but by the end we were in a performance. Maybe we experienced an abrupt leap, a terraced dynamic. I say it this way. Let's call theater a container, and put a lecture into it, and that is writing and speaking, and then let's put a performance into it, dance perhaps. Let the two remain distinct, but do not give more to one than to another. Let the audience assemble the parts after the fact. Theater lends us the vernacular tools for the experience.

7. The problem of the sufficiently powerful subject

LH: The artist Martin Creed brought me to attention with his performance Ballet (Work No. 1020). Working with dancers that restrict themselves to the five basic positions of classical ballet, Ballet (Work No. 1020) seems to lecture and demonstrate the elements of ballet with mathematical precision. But this demonstration quickly enlarges as the performance stops and starts again, punctuated by Creed and an accompanying band singing songs with pessimistic lyrics. Bashful explanations by Creed, film clips of an erection in profile going up and down and dogs crossing a space in different directions all contribute to this swell. This snowball winding through the theater with its explanations, displays, and precisions recomposes and flattens its material as it goes, taking away weight and power. In its place, a path is uncovered that re-values how these parts are positioned, how they relate to one another and how, in their nonhierarchical insignificance, attention is born.

In his essay on Robert Bresson, Dennis Cooper speaks of "the sufficiently powerful subject."

On a practical level, [Bresson's] work offered up the idea that it was possible for an artwork's style to embody a kind of pragmatism that, if sufficiently rigorous and devoted to a sufficiently powerful subject, would eliminate the need within the work for an overt philosophical or moral standpoint. His work communicates an unyielding, peculiarly personal vision of the world in a voice so sterilized as to achieve an almost inhuman efficiency and logic.

I have tried to think about that sufficiency. Bresson's films have had a similar effect on me as on Dennis. I lived with Lancelot for the last two years of Goat Island. The film brought us The Lastmaker in many ways. We needed that unforgiving clarity and sense of conclusion. The "sufficiently powerful subject" involves the suffering of the human and the world, the grim trajectories of injustice. The purpose we take, as Fanny Howe reminds us, concerns not simply the demand that we remember, but more than that, the demand that we rescue meaning "(what is just possible, about to be born)"

But now there is a problem. It is a problem of reason, borne out by experience. Take Martin Creed's ballet performance as a case study. My experience told me it was the most enjoyable and perhaps the clearest and most resonant of performances. The experience endured. Through enjoyment I acknowledged the kind of truth that joy confers on its subject. But what was its subject? It could not be said to have one, other than ballet itself, or the self-reflexive elucidation of its own mode of performance; simple, then complex, and then simple again. It had purity and rigor. So if my experience tells me the surprises, the twists and turns and overflows of intentionality are of great value, what does my reason do with the question of the sufficiently powerful subject? Is it possible that what is written on the page matters less at times than the page on which it is written? Or must it have been ballet, and nothing else? That is to say, if the purpose is the rescue of meaning, meaning is rescuable from the ordinary as well as from the extraordinary. Is the rescue of meaning another way to talk about learning? About changing the signs as we read them? What is an essay? Is it a meticulous retracing of the journey a mind makes through a subject or question? At what point can that retracing allow an experience of performance to overtake an exercise of intellect? A subject must be a thing that is always double. The subject is the question through which the mind makes its journey, and the subject is also the journey, as a trace, distinct from the question. Martin Creed upset many people by winning a big prize for turning lights on and off in a gallery. Was it the lights or the prize that upset them? Illumination and darkness were strictly timed; the mechanics present in all galleries. Some would say deconstruction. Creed simply said an unbreakable gesture that outlives its author. A diamond in the soup, he said, when the soup is any sort of life. He says he wants to make "a work that has the world in it." Some people say it is not enough. I disagree with them. Here's why. Instead of intent, we will say attempt, as if to test or to try.

Some works try to be in the world. Other works try to have the world in them.

MG: We saw the last performance at Edinburgh's Traverse Theatre in 2010. Creed and his crew took to the stage before the house lights had dimmed. I remember his entrance as he rattled across the stage in tap shoes. Why was he wearing them? Apparently, it would become clear later, so his band could hear him stomping out a beat over the amplified music. As he slung on an electric guitar, he seemed anxious to begin, and in fact he did begin, with an impromptu soliloquy that imprinted itself so indelibly on my mind that the next morning I transcribed it as accurately as possible from memory. But we'll save my version of that speech for our epilogue. Before we get to that, I need to explain the Commonplace Book.

8. The word butterfly

MG: This is a somewhat archaic form that was once practiced widely. It is simply a collection of quotations or extracts, often copied out of various books. The copied passage might be followed by a gloss written by the person keeping the Commonplace Book. A gloss is a response, or a reaction, to the copied passage. It may explain the selection of that particular passage, or amplify or even disagree with some aspect of it. Here is an example from 1939, a quote and a gloss, from the Commonplace Book of the poet Wallace Stevens.

In a perfect community where no one suffers or is afraid, there are no great voices crying out for the pity of things.

Life & Letters ToDay, March 1939, Winifred Holmes
But this is often true of a community where many suffer and many or all are afraid.

A Commonplace Book is a middle ground between reading and writing, that lends itself well to collaboration. We began working with it as a loose form, and we had in the back of our minds the possibility that it might lead us from writing back to the stage, and to the question of the essay as performative – a structure that is something, and also does something.

LH: Sometimes one of us would select a passage, and give it to the other to write the gloss. It was a kind of research with no particular direction other than the direction of one's daily interest. We tried it with photographs. I took a picture and wrote a caption for it. This was in response to an invitation for a collection of such photos and captions concerning dance. Then Matthew took a picture that responded to my picture, and he gave it to me to write a caption. A series grew. We worked on it during our August vacation in Seattle.

MG: The commonplace book has a dialogic, or dialectic, structure, a call and response. It is in one sense the simplest and smallest iteration of collaboration: first one voice, then another. A copied passage, a gloss commentary. The gloss takes the form of an image. Or the image takes the place of the found text, followed by a written gloss. In any case it is a back and forth, and the foreground and background might destabilize. Which is the call and which the response? Then the image might start to move. It could be a video, a studio performance for the camera. We were entertaining these notions when we received an invitation, from the Birmingham-based writer Richard House. He asked us to contribute to an issue of his online journal Fatboy, with the theme What you wanted/What you got. He was thinking about the Cameron government. Lin immediately had an image in mind in response to that theme: a man in a room with skis on, repeatedly trying to leap into the air. She had devised this choreography in response to an anonymous photo from the Thomas Walther collection. She cast me in the role of the man, and directed the performance as an unedited video.

LH: After some rehearsal, I asked Matthew to walk in to the frame, jump five times, then rest, then three times, then rest, then twelve times, and stop. I said the picture would fade to black during the last twelve jumps, and we would only hear the sound. But then when I saw the subtle change in how he performed the jumps when he thought he would be heard and not seen, I decided to let the picture run through to the end.

MG: Afterwards I proposed that we retrofit a quotation to the beginning of it, to give it the commonplace book structure. This was a line from Lyn Hejinian's book length poem My Life. I used to teach this book in my Systems of Writing class, and this particular line had stayed with me. Now the verb get echoed the thematic statement in Richard's invitation.

I couldn't get the word butterfly so I tried to get the word moth.

LH: Now we are asking ourselves this question: can the essay propose a theatrical form? The performance work we have begun to make for the stage concerns itself with reality. I mean, we stage, or restage, or re-enact, some actual historical moment, and we do so in a quasi-documentary mode, engaging direct address to the audience. Yet at some point a truly theatrical experience seems to take over and derail the discourse. Can that experience in fact simply continue the discourse in a more embodied and less verbal mode?

9. That kind of logic that sings

MG: Our recent performance They're Mending the Great Forest Highway begins with a fifteen-minute monologue performed by Hannah Geil-Neufeld. She plays the part of the director, Lin Hixson, and recites a carefully crafted introduction that Lin and I composed collaboratively – part lecture, part autobiography, part director's notes, part poetry in quotation, and part pure fiction. She sets the stage for the twenty-four-minute dance that follows, performed by myself, John Rich, and Jeff Harms, with Charissa Tolentino as live DJ. In one sense, these two juxtaposed parts suggest an exploded commonplace book, a long text in dialogue with a long image, or anyway nonverbal sequence. The performance concludes with a twenty-minute epilogue. Hannah returns, speaking again as the director, but this time with performative interjections, or illustrations, by the other four performers. Now the three parts of the performance start to resemble the classic Hegelian essay form so familiar to undergrads, of thesis-antithesis-synthesis.

LH: These 'works of essay' are inquiries, a thinking on.

These inquiries present pathways of thinking, patterns of coherence. There are logics to these arrangements and trails propelled not by information but by wonder and doubt. In performing the essay, the emphasis is on the moving rather than the stopping.

And the movement of thought is not the identity but the movement itself.

The form is hustling and bustling, toing and froing, coming and going.
Can the essay as a form become experiencing the experience? An experience that heeds the time of its making while keeping distance in order to see it?

Experiencing the experience puts into play the widest possible array of logics. With the essay as theatrical form, discrete shapes travel alongside one another with their gaps in place, their limitations acknowledged.

This produces a temporary encounter, a temporary logic between the society of the essay and the society of theater that demands the logic of flight.

What word is there to describe that kind of logic that sings?

Epilogue: The theater doesn't have a brain.

(Martin Creed from memory.)
We haven't started yet.
We're just waiting for the word from the theater to start.
Well, not from the theater.
From the man who works for the theater.
The theater can't speak.
The theater doesn't have a brain.
Anyway you can tell we haven't started yet because the lights on you are still on.
If we had started those lights would be off.
I get a bit eager I think because I find it quite difficult to start.
I find it difficult I think to start in the theater.
Because I like to feel free, and I don't feel free in the theater.
When I go to the theater I feel quite stuck in my seat.
So I want you to feel free while you're here if you can.
I don't mind if you leave you cell-phones on.
I don't mind if you're naked.
I don't mind if you've got an adult nature.
The theater has a sign at the entrance that says our show contains scenes of an adult nature, when I actually think most of it is quite childish.
I don't mind if you use a strobe.
It's our last night tonight, so I thought we would do all the bits and pieces.
We've been working on the show, and we've made a lot of bits and pieces, but we've only been doing bits of the bits and pieces, so tonight I thought we'd do all the bits and pieces.
But as I say, we haven't started yet.
When we do start, I thought we'd start with the end.
We've been doing the bits and pieces in a certain order, and I thought we'd mix that up tonight to keep it fresh and because it's our last night.
And I quite like the end, but we're usually tired when we do it, because we do it last.
So I thought we'd do it first tonight, while we're still fresh.
And also because as I say I find it quite difficult to start.
I also find it quite difficult to end.
But we have to start before we end.
We can't end if we haven't started.
Anyway, that's not – (The house lights fade.) – Ah!
Now we can start.

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So much to disconnect.
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To know that things are is not to know what they are, and to know that without what is to know otherness.
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(what is just possible, about to be born)
Fanny Howe, Come and See, page 87.
Sur Plusieurs Beaux Sujects, Wallace Stevens' Commonplace Book, Milton J. Banes ed., Stanford University Press, Stanford CA, and Huntington Library, San Marino, CA, 1989, page 65.
I couldn't get the word butterfly so I tried to get the word moth.
Lyn Hejinian, My Life, Green Integer volume 39, 2002, page 26.

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3. They're Mending the Great Forest Highway, *in performance at Holstein Park Field House, Chicago, Every house has a door, 2011, photos by John Sisson.*