Every house has a door

Newsletter #1: The heightened impossibilization of performance
March 2020

Dear friends and supporters,

Performance as we know it and as we need it has always had an element of the impossible. That element has become more prominent.

Like many people, we had grand plans a few days ago. We planned to fly to Rijeka, Croatia, in May to continue work on Aquarium, our large-scale performance project in collaboration with Helsinki-based artist Essi Kausalainen. We have nearly completed its composition, in advance of its scheduled premier in November. We planned to present a lecture/performance in August in Turku, Finland – a version of the event pictured below that we held in Fullerton Hall at the Art Institute of Chicago on February 14th – featuring guest reader Sherae Rimpsey, and Essi’s costumes, that transform performers into particular sea creatures, endangered and charismatic: Elise Cowin as Eyelash Seaweed and Bryan Saner as Lesser Electric Ray.

Photo Credit: Hadley Austin and Yoni Goldstein
We planned to perform *Scarecrow* at the University of Surrey in London in September. Now, like so many people, as we wait to learn the future of all of our plans, we turn our attention to matters of care, of service in whatever way we can, and of health, physical and mental.

Our work has always adhered to certain guiding creative principles. One of these proposes that every stage as we find it, no matter how small, requires a smaller stage within it. Reduce the field in order to claim it as your own, to specify and situate yourself as a figure within it, to make the resistive terrain more manageable. If the setting strikes you as too small for your work, shrink it even more. In this way we have always considered the impossibilization of performance a necessity, a tactic of escape to the inside. As a practicality, the impossible reveals how even the most intractable problem arrives with its own set of strange, renewing possibilities.

In one generative case, back in May 2019, we made a performance called *—recline somberly like fallen heroes—*. We created it with and for Millie Kapp and Matt Shalzi, and presented it at Regards, the Chicago gallery, in response to a suite of paintings by Matthew Metzger. We built a raised platform, the largest the gallery could hold, with a surface of 5.5 feet by 11 feet. As preparation for that work, Lin Hixson, *Every house* director, composed a poem titled *12 Choreographic Couplets*, a list of impossible directives for the dancers to actualize on that tiny stage. Here is an excerpt.

Remove a tear from my face.
Put it back.

Flee and let out a yelp.
Come back home.

A swallow lands on the bridge of your nose
Then sets sail.

Now the principle of impossibility takes on more urgency, and brings to mind once again Gilles Deleuze’s famous phrase about ethics: that we may find ourselves not “unworthy of what happens to us.” What creative channels reveal themselves now in this season of the new impossible? In this time and space of hyperimpossibilization, where do we locate the live? Back in January, in a different world, we promised to withdraw from social media platforms and to begin to communicate through newsletters. We had always planned for the first of these to arrive in mid-March, that is, now, and here it is, coincident with the disaster. Can we compose a performance that sails to you across a virtual arc, like this newsletter, with the clicking of a telegraph, and no risk of contagion? How do we shrink this microscopic stage?

If distancing always affirms that which it distances, then social distancing affirms the social – my bond to my nearest neighbor, across the divide. In this zone of isolation, how do we gather? We find our way as we find ourselves, flung apart, groping in the new twilight, signaling across the expanse. How do we prepare for the day when we will re-enter, dancing through the eye of a needle, the vast evacuated theater?
Matthew Goulish, dramaturg and writer

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