Annie: We are utterings. We will discuss the performance we did yesterday, and our whole research and performance project that started in November 2019.

Curt: The title of this panel is, "Toward a Supra-Semiotic Telepresent Communication," and in the description, it was promised some reference to the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. He has the theory of the utterance that's central to all of his writing. Briefly, he says that the live utterance event is this crucial node in the evolution of language. Unlike semiotician Noam Chomsky, Bakhtin doesn't believe that language is solely a series of systems and grammars and words on a page. Bakhtin says language is at least two parts. One part is words on the page and all the grammar rules, but the other part is lived contextual utterances: people ordering coffee, people talking to each other at the grocery store, husbands and wives arguing, and even people reading. When I read a book, that reading event is an utterance. When the book merely sits on the shelf, it is not uttering. According to Bakhtin, as the utterance event occurs, language enters into lived human space time. But what also happens is, the language that's on the page (all the grammar rules, all the syntax) gets changed itself during the utterance event. Because every time I use the word love, I think differently about the word love, and as this word is used all over the world every day, that word changes in meaning every day. And so, in a sense, everyone in every language is evolving the language, based on lived contextual utterances, that without this utterance event language, doesn't change.

Bakhtin also says that there are certain technical accidents that get folded into language in the utterance. If I'm reading a book at a coffee house, and the coffee tastes particularly hot, then the words I'm reading change a little bit in meaning due to that. If the typography is in Helvetica rather than Times New Roman; if, as I'm talking, I'm waving my arms a lot; all of these live, affective, non-semiotic things color language and change it through the utterance event.

Bakhtin says the utterance is a very important node in communication and language. And so, with our own utterance project, we get together online where we're not smelling each other, we're in different time zones at different levels of tired, we're in different air-conditioned or non-air-conditioned environments, and then zoom is glitching and dropping and stuttering and breaking up, and all these things are part of the lived utterance event.

Yesterday, the context of the way in which our performance started was part of the event. We were part of the introduction of the conference, and then Ian said something, and there we were. At other performances, it doesn't start that way. We just drop straight into us all being on the frame. And then we try to listen to each other. Whether in real time or call and response. Sometimes we speak words (French words and Portuguese words and English words), and sometimes it sounds like Annie is speaking Japanese words. Sometimes it sounds like someone is speaking German words, but who knows? But the idea is: what would happen if we got together and attuned ourselves to each other and to the moment, and began a series of utterings that were not solely drawing on the history of our human spoken languages, but were responding bodily.

Someone else could perhaps talk about the triggers and the attunements. These are just tricks that we use to get ourselves prepared for this event, but it's always improvisational. This is maybe the eighth one we've done. We've done some conferences where other people have participated. It's a research project. Yesterday felt like a performance, because of the context of the conference, but sometimes it just feels like a private conversation. Sometimes it's very calm. Sometimes it's very musical. Sometimes it sounds more like speaking. Sometimes it sounds like room noises. But rather than coming with a predetermined idea of what it's going to be, we

come with a kind of readiness to see what will happen. So far, each one is more or less different, but there are similarities.

Daniel: I was going to speak about the attunements: the preparation that we make. We're all living in different places, and we're all connecting here, and already dealing with all the transformation that the digital space is doing to our own sounds, but we all come into it with the same frame of mind, because we all listen to a piece of work before each encounter. I call them "encounters," where we experience this way of communicating between us all. And yes, the context changes, but I think that the attunement plays a very important role. Maybe the attunement is what we choose to be the first trigger, where we put ourselves into sharing some sort of same predisposition to the utterings in which we engage. Does anyone want to add more?

Nerina: I can. When we get together, we are four to six people. This is what we call "the band." There is always something that leads the improvisation: it can be a theme, it can be the attunement. But then, once we get into the performance, we blindfold ourselves; and so, we only hear, we don't have the visual stimulus anymore. And pretty early on, we decided to introduce the idea of triggers. So, we decide, each for ourselves, "If this happens, then I do this." An example could be, "If I hear a high-pitched sound, I will lift my arms." Or, "If I hear something that to me sounds like a word, I will produce a growl." I'm just giving examples to give you ideas. We've created this with the idea that, to have these will always bring us back into a place where we can't just do what we want. It will give us material to improvise, be in relation with the others, and also go into places that are uncomfortable to us. So, the idea of trying to push ourselves a little beyond what feels comfortable.

And one important discovery that we made with the triggers was the idea of also introducing bodily triggers; not just vocal ones, but also physical ones. What is the relationship between listening and the body? So, it could be that you get up at a certain point, or that you turn around, that you do something with your hand, or that you cover your face, whatever it is. What does that physical movement bring you to do in relation with the others, and how does it leave you with the others, but also in connection with your body? Because listening is a physical action, and so staying connected to the body is rather important. So that's it for triggers. I don't know if anybody wants to add a little bit about that, or what triggers have brought?

Annie: For me, triggers, and the movements or the actions that go with them, are kind of functioning as rules. And those rules help me to liberate things, because I am convinced that having a few minor rules opens up all kinds of other things that are outside of those rules. But on the other side, I don't like rules. And so, these triggers, these rules that we have inside utterings makes for a situation that, for me, is really creative. Every time we do these utterings, it makes me very happy, because I can go somewhere in my life or in my body where I never go on normal days and in normal relationships with people. That's why I like them so much and why they are important.

And the blindfold is also important. Because if I look at you now, I'm aware of something that brings me into a social situation; and that social situation really triggers habits of being polite, or doing certain things and not other things. By blindfolding, I take that all away; and I'm just there with the sound they give me, and my own environment and my own body, and the machines in between.

Constança: I can add something. We seem to be establishing the paradoxes of utterings, so it's like we navigate everywhere between freedom and constraints, and we also navigate

everywhere in between courtesy and chaos. Both are necessary, and the balances between them are constantly shifting at each iteration. Indeed, sometimes we are very courteous, and we open up spaces. It's like we're eager to welcome something, more than to put forth something. Yesterday, for instance, I think all of us were proposing. There were, at some points, even too many propositions. And we never really know what's going to sound best, or what's going to satisfy us more. So, I think there's this paradoxical nature to it, which also involves the fact that, yes, we are aware that we're performing, but we don't want to be obliged to deliver a proper performance, or even a satisfying performance. So, again, yet another level of paradox. We're doing this publicly, and we're not abstaining from being a flop. It's a possibility; it needs to be a possibility. I think the three levels of paradox are sufficient for now.

Curt: Paradoxically, in the beginning, before we knew each other as well in this context and trusted each other as well in this context, we generally were more courteous. And the more we trust each other, the more we're willing or able to risk discourtesy. Because the point is not to be courteous or discourteous, or pretty or ugly, but to see where it leads. We're all stewarding where this thing leads, beyond where any individual one of us wants it to go. That's why it keeps working, because we keep caring about what is going to emerge. I think we're all curious to see how the sum becomes more than the parts. Because, individually, I would not be doing this. If this was my individual art practice, I wouldn't be on performance number eight. As a single performer, I have to blindfold myself and repeat the same phrase for hours on end to get anywhere new; but when you have a group of people, there's so much variability in that. Maybe that's because language is not a monologue; to learn something new about language, you need a community, or you're talking to yourself.

Daniel: I think it's important to mention that it is happening in a very specific context, which is through a video conferencing platform. And, how do you negotiate the things that you would negotiate normally in a conversation, or in some sort of verbal communication? Secondly, when we started doing this, because we are coming from different backgrounds and different experiences, it's also a way of exploring what this space allows us to do, and the particular articulation between humans within our group. How do we deal with the constraints that are already imposed by the medium itself, or how do we integrate those constraints? There were moments when we thought, "Maybe we should get better microphones. Maybe we should have a reliable sound system where we can hear each other properly." Somehow, to better communicate. But so far, we haven't done that. And so far, the fragility of the environment, and all the glitches, and the transformations it makes (like the ones that are happening now in the closed captions) -- how do you deal with that? It remains a question for me. And with each experience, I'm aware of it, because it's also part of my artistic practice; and I try to understand what it means. Also, I'm bringing it up in the context of this conference. I was reading, "post-pandemic," and our project started before the pandemic; so how do we continue? We didn't start the project online because this was the only way to do it; it started before that. That's also important to say.

Nerina: Since we've been speaking, I've been thinking about the question of why I do this. I work with words; that's my medium. I write and I work with words. So, why go in a space where there are no words anymore, and where, in theory, words are not allowed? In theory, because, in practice, sometimes they are there. Also, sometimes you make out words in something that isn't words, but our brains do put together things that are or aren't there. Our brains do things for us, and our bodies do too. So, how do you play with that? And I don't really have a definite answer; but I would like to add a paradox to what Constança said. Constança spoke about freedom and constraint, and courtesy and chaos. For me, maybe we can put it diagonally. It's the idea of the individual and the self: how do we use language to communicate and be with

others, even in a place of not understanding? Where is the importance of *not* understanding in *being* with one another? (*Being*. Not *talking* to one another, but *being*.) That's what we've been feeling our way through. And the tools that we have (the attunements, the triggers, the blindfold) are really tools to try to hone a sensitivity and a presence, somehow. So, how do we use the tools that are at our disposal to go towards something that makes sense to us?

This is even more important in the context in which we find ourselves. It's not that we have new tools. It's not that the world is different. The question for me remains, "What do I want to work on, and what tools can I use to go deeper into this direction?" This is an example of something where, by defining certain rules, you can go deeper into things, and stretch and see what comes of it, and keep building that material. In one of our early utterings, I spoke about "building," how do we *build* the utterings? And Annie looked at me like, "What do you mean by building? I'm not building anything." So, that opens up the conversation, how each of us actually imagines the space in which we work. And it is quite different. We all have very different triggers; we all have different bases; we all have different things that push us, and through which we articulate ourselves. And yet we're all in a common space. I think that's a very important thing to bring up and to recognize: the fact that we're here is more important than our differences, in a way.

Curt: It makes me think of Claude Shannon. He is useful because he challenges the myth of a pure signal. According to information theory, there's no such thing as a pure signal. The "signal to noise ratio" is what gives the signal its signal-ness. It is wrong to imagine that there is a way people could communicate without affective glitches and interruptions. Even in a coffee house across the table from a person, that never happens. There's some song playing that reminds you of the '80s and then you stop paying attention, or they're wearing a mask and you can't exactly see what the person is saying. The most "pure" communication anyone could have is still full of all these affective irruptions. Even if you try to keep communication "pure," the glitches will come. This is not an abnormal thing; this is the world. The same is true with digital communication; it's not so exceptional. This is the way human communication always is, it's just that the texture of the bodily affect is different online, but not impure or unhuman. The internet is in the real world; it's all part of the real. It's not "virtual." So, it's a real communication that we're doing, but in this particular online context.

Annie: Something that Nerina touched on, and you touched again on it: I think I know where my motivation comes from. My motivation comes from not speaking the language of most people around me. It comes from being in strange environments where people don't understand me, or somehow will act as if I'm a bit stupid because I don't pronounce the words rightly. That's all very frustrating, and it makes things very unequal if you are in a group of people, the one who speaks the best gets the most attention. So, people who come from another country and don't speak as well, their place is already, from the start, somewhere on the bottom of the ladder. And that makes my relation to language somehow difficult, and makes me very happy to go to an environment where we work with all kinds of other things, and not with the *meaning* of the words. So, for me, this is also a political project. And it's called, "Towards a Supra-Semiotic Telepresent Communication." And I thought, "What is that pretension? It's stupid. It's not possible." But at the same time (and that's also a paradox), I want to believe in it. And we are doing it, in a certain way.

Constança: I don't think we've ever really discussed the effects on each of us. And I would have to say that, no matter how distinct our meetings have been, I end up more energized and calmer than I was before. There is no objective, quantifiable reason for this. I mean, these are public instances of meeting, so there's a stressfulness of being seen; but at the same time (and this is, again, personal), there's the release from language in what it means, in its burden of

correction and surveillance. I can see how, for Annie, this would be political, in a sense. And for me, it would be political in another sense: As someone who also works with words and text, and who deals with people who are very skilled and learned speakers, my daily activities are filled with this sort of underlying surveillance and need to not be incorrect. And it's an unlivable situation, I have to say. So, utterings is somehow free, and also somehow ascetic. It comes near some sort of meditative practice where I purge some things and let go of a level of awareness of myself as an utterer, which is always there. And so, that ends up being very calming and very energizing. All of the rigidness, the constraints, and even the morals of language, I feel I am freed from; and in that sense, I am very happy in utterings. Things are easier. And, if indeed, someone treads on my toe or steps over my sound, they are free to do so; and I can strike back, and this can be the *Star Wars* of ugly sounds. That's why it's so different from most of my living experience. I don't know how best to explain this, but the release of the panopticon that I have in my head as a speaker is very important.

Daniel: Yesterday Curt said, "We created a baby monster." And there were moments in the past where we tried other visual configurations for utterings. One of them was using the overlay of all of our video feeds, and it, indeed, looked like a weird monster trying to communicate something. And I think it's interesting that Constança brings this experience which can free us from any impositions that we put on ourselves in other conditions. Sometimes when I'm doing an encounter of utterings, I always have this weird image of, "How does it look from the outside, here in my room when I'm doing it?" And then I picture all of us alone in different places, blindfolded. And, individually, I picture us as incomplete parts of this monster that is happening, an energetic monster. I keep using the word "monster" because that's also how I feel about it, and I think it comes tied with the ugliness that we allow ourselves here. So, there's something interesting to be said in this incomplete version of ourselves, in our physical instances of each one, when we come together here to do this. In answer to the question, "What is communication?" it's precisely that: it's a sum of all these incomplete bits and parts that we're all trying to make sense of as human beings, as humanity.

Nerina: I also have the same experiences as Annie of feeling inadequate in all languages. I always feel I'm not whole, that I'm always missing words, that I don't have a good grasp of language, whatever language that is. What utterings has contributed to me is the idea of, "How do you stay in that sensitive spot where you can just be here, and listen, and speak at the same time?" And whether it is *right* doesn't really matter, as long as it's "juste," as you say in French. As long as it feels it feels right. That's part of what is so touching. For me, it's not only about the utterings, per se; it's also about the relationship that weaves us together. The fact that I like all of you makes me want to come back. If I didn't like you, as people, I wouldn't want to come back. So, that's language as a way to weave people together, and to have conversations. I really think this is what's important, and what sometimes we forget, is that language is a tool to talk. And yes, it's messy; yes, we don't understand each other. Of course, because each of us has their own language. But how do we enter that sensitive, *right* spot? This experience has been helping me with that. I don't know how, but it has.

Curt: I like what you're saying, that language is just a tool to connect. This is related to my personal explorations theologically. The goal of having a relationship with God is not to come to some sort of knowledge of facts. It's not even to come to a communication where meaning is conveyed. The goal is to be known and to know, beyond language. And maybe the same thing is true between every human and every other human. With my wife, I don't want to know facts about her. I mean, if she wants me to take out the garbage, I need to know literally that's what she is conveying to me. But, in terms of humans being intimate with each other, the goal is not that you understand or know some facts. There's an end game beyond that. Knowing facts is

just a means to another end. There is a spiritual practice of speaking in tongues where you don't understand what you're saying. There's the practice of apophasis where you use words to undo words, so that you don't over-determine God, or rely so much on words. Any God worth worshiping is going to have to be beyond words, or you've got the wrong person.

Annie: I was thinking of something that we didn't touch on yet. Why is it a performance that we are doing? Why do we need the idea of an audience? Because somehow that's important in what we do. For me, it is important because, if there is an audience for what you do, you have a shared collaboration towards something else, and it's something that unites us.

Daniel: Yes. From the performance we did yesterday, there were a few written reactions that mentioned the power of presence that we were able to deliver with the performance. That seems related to what you are saying, Annie. An audience opens up a path for a shared experience, not just between us, but towards something else, which is also being communicated to someone else. What *meaning* does the audience make of that? I think it's another layer of this process where we're trying to go beyond this idea of an understandable language. Like we say, going above rationality, but leaving the door open for interpretation that might come through from the other end. of whoever is watching or doing it with us. Because we've had moments when we've done performance workshops with other people who join for one or two times. And I see those workshops, not as performance, per se, but we're opening up to other people; and there's this exchange beyond our own group of people who keep on practicing this.

Constança: I think this is yet another paradox. We're very intimate without having been friends.

Curt: You're not my friend?

Constança: I mean, I've not been with you. I've never even touched you. We don't smell each other. I'm a touchy, feely, 3D person. I demand that of my friends. Danny knows. And having an audience for these performances is important at this moment in history, when having a conversation is almost impossible, because everything is so polarized, or trial-arized, or just ossified: "I know this; I think this; and this is what I stand for." And here we are doing something outside of that. I think we've reasons to be hopeful. I didn't I didn't expect to be saying this about utterings, but what happens to us is evidence of that. What happened in the workshops is evidence of that. I'm going to quit because I'm going to start crying now. Of course, you've never seen me cry, because you're not my friend.

Nerina: I'm always wondering why anybody would want to see an utterings. I'm puzzled by it. But people come and watch this, and people want to be part of it. And I'm like, "Okay, I cannot decide whether this works or not." Intimately, with my partner, we call utterings "howlings," because he walks into the apartment, and I'm in there making the weirdest sounds with the cats looking at me like I'm insane. But we're there, and we *are* howling all together to the moon, somehow, in our own digital way. It's yet another paradox that gets added.

Daniel: Yes, literally yesterday we were howling at this full moon that is happening.

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