

Script for a Performance
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"Hi, hi, thank you, it's really been a pleasure to hear your talk. I was really impressed by the way you moved through so many ideas, and it made me think a lot about what you were saying, and I thank you for that. Your approach has really made me examine my own approach, which crosses over yours at points, and shares a certain similarity that I think is really important, and I thank you for that, as well. And I apologize in advance if what I am going to say isn't all that clear, or if it doesn't relate directly to your interests, but I think it's something that can really help me to understand what you were talking about, because, and please forgive me for saying this, there were some points in your analysis that I was left a little curious about. That kind of goes without saying; I mean, ideas are never finished in these kinds of presentations, nor should they be. That's what these forums are about, I guess, the exchange of ideas and the development of those ideas. And that's not to say that your ideas were underdeveloped, certainly not, but it's impossible to speak for the amount of time you did, and use the lexicon that you did, without some ambiguities arising from the language. That's how language works, I guess, otherwise it would be math, and a rudimentary form of math at that. And that's what makes what we're all doing here so interesting, and I imagine that's why we're all here, because we're searching for something that we can't always find, but we're drawn to the search, however frustrating we find it at times. And it's that frustration that I find so valuable, and which I think comes out in what you were saying... that kind of sounds bad, that I found your talk frustrating. That's not what I mean. Or if that is what I mean, I don't mean it in the way that it sounds. Let's remove the pejorative sense attached to frustration, is what I'm trying to say, and let's find something energizing in it. I guess that's struggle, too... people talk about struggle as having some sort of socially positive, progressive character. Of course the people who valorize struggle are often the ones who don't suffer the misery of struggle. But maybe struggle and frustration are the wrong words. They might have a little too much baggage. I'm not sure if engagement is any better; curiosity seems a little too weak.

But getting back on track – sorry, that was a bit of a tangent – I guess what I'm interested in talking more about is about more talking – that sounds a little mystical, maybe, or just cryptic – it's palindromic, at least – but I'm interested in this idea of talking – not really palaver, or conversation, but not really just speech or prayer, either. Although I think that could be really interesting, the idea of talking, even in these kinds of situations, as a type of prayer, which would relate to the kind of popular prejudice against speech and the reciprocal preference for action. You know, the valorization of the man of action, versus the negative view of the egghead academic, talking head, or the phrase "she or he is just all talk." And of course talking is an action, an activity that can have pretty grand effects, not just in the idea of speech acts, but in the idea of rhetoric and manipulation. And then, of course, we get into the realm of who is able to talk, who has the power to talk, what are the political implications of holding a talk or going to a talk, in which languages can we talk, of the marketing of what used to be called a lecture as a talk, and how right now I'm talking way too much. And that, of course, brings up the idea of the interrogator, the person in the audience of a talk that kind of wrestles attention away from the presenter and her or his ideas, and turns the conversation – if it can be called a conversation, or a dialogue – towards his or her own interests, usually with a question that comes out of their most recent research, and which is usually prepared in advance, you suspect – so that it's not really a response to the talk but the performance of a response. And then there is the reaction of the presenter to be accounted for as well – how free they are to respond with just a simple "no" or "that's not really an interesting question," or how willing they are to contort their ideas in order to satisfy the person asking the question, and how that willingness is wrapped up in who the person asking the question is: if it's somebody from your field, or if it's somebody that might be able to give you a job or a publication or an exhibition, or to help you advance your thinking in a specific way.

But if you could maybe talk a little about talking: how you feel about talks, and how talking functions in your practice or methodology, I'd be more than happy to listen."